Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance

Paul L. Gavrilyuk

CHANGING PARADIGMS IN HISTORICAL AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
This series sets out to reconsider the modern distinction between ‘historical’ and ‘systematic’ theology. The scholarship represented in the series is marked by attention to the way in which historiographic and theological presumptions (‘paradigms’) necessarily inform the work of historians of Christian thought, and thus affect their application to contemporary concerns. At certain key junctures such paradigms are recast, causing a reconsideration of the methods, hermeneutics, geographical boundaries, or chronological caesuras which have previously guided the theological narrative. The beginning of the twenty-first century marks a period of such notable reassessment of the Christian doctrinal heritage, and involves a questioning of the paradigms that have sustained the classic ‘history-of-ideas’ textbook accounts of the modern era. Each of the volumes in this series brings such contemporary methodological and historiographical concerns to conscious consideration. Each tackles a period or key figure whose significance is ripe for reconsideration, and each analyses the implicit historiography that has sustained existing scholarship on the topic. A variety of fresh methodological concerns are considered, without reducing the theological to other categories. The emphasis is on an awareness of the history of ‘reception’: the possibilities for contemporary theology are bound up with a careful rewriting of the historical narrative. In this sense, ‘historical’ and ‘systematic’ theology are necessarily conjoined, yet also closely connected to a discerning interdisciplinary engagement.

This monograph series accompanies the project of *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Christian Theology* (OUP, in progress), also edited by Sarah Coakley and Richard Cross.
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Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance

PAUL L. GAVRILYUK
For my parents, Leonid and Irina Gavrilyuk
(Proverbs 1: 8–9)
Foreword

My original plan was to write a book on “the ways of Russian theology” in the twentieth century. However, it soon became clear to me that before such a project could be undertaken, a fresh perspective needed to be established. Twentieth-century Russian religious thought is commonly represented in terms of a sharp dichotomy between the modernism of Russian religious philosophers, epitomized in Sergius Bulgakov’s work, and the neopatristic direction of Georges Florovsky and his followers. In this study, I propose to re-evaluate this dichotomy by demonstrating how the neopatristic revival emerged out of the spiritual renaissance of Russian culture at the turn of the twentieth century.

My study of Florovsky has biographic elements, but it is not a biography. This is a book about the genesis of Florovsky’s thought and about the reception of his neopatristic vision. I have attempted to connect Florovsky the critic of the western pseudomorphosis of Russian theology with Florovsky the patristic theologian. I maintain that this connection represents his theological signature.

In addition to Florovsky’s published works and correspondence, my research builds on several new archival findings. At St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary Library, I stumbled upon a miscataloged manuscript of Florovsky’s four lectures on Vladimir Solovyov’s philosophy delivered at the Russian Institute in Prague in 1923. The very existence of these lectures in a written form was previously unknown in scholarship. Using new finds from the same archive I have reconstructed Florovsky’s dissertation “Herzen’s Philosophy of History,” the complete text of which was previously considered lost. In addition, my study relies on the correspondence between Florovsky and prominent Russian theologians, such as Pavel Florensky, Nikolai Glubokovskiy, Nicholas Berdyaev, Vladimir Lossky, and Alexander Schmemann. These sources provide a more complete picture of Florovsky’s intellectual development.

Writing this book was a bit like composing a concerto. Florovsky is the soloist, while the orchestra’s part is given to his Russian contemporaries. In writing my “concerto” I was thinking less of Chopin than of Beethoven and Brahms. Beethoven’s third concerto sustained me, especially on those days when I labored well after midnight at my desk. In that immortal piece of music there is a sublime dialogue, at times tranquil, at other times tempestuous, between the soloist and the orchestra. Taking my cue from Beethoven, I have given considerable space to the views of those with whom Florovsky
clashed, often quite dramatically. In my judgment, a narrative designed to show how the “great old man” dwarfed his contemporaries has little historical value. Anybody wishing to read a piece of hagiography about Florovsky should look elsewhere.

If I had been asked twenty years ago who was likely to become a protagonist of my first book on Russian theology, the answer would have been Fyodor Dostoevsky, Vladimir Solovyov, Nicholas Berdyaev, Sergius Bulgakov, and Vladimir Lossky (in this order of priority). Florovsky would not have made it to the list of the top five Russian theologians. But the more I read his works over the years, the more I realized how pivotal he had been for the direction that Orthodox theology was to take in the second part of the twentieth century. Wherever I turned, Florovsky’s neopatristic synthesis was an inescapable point of reference.

The impetus for writing this book came from several friends. I gave my first sustained attention to the subject of this study in 2009, when George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, the co-founders of the Orthodox Studies Program at Fordham University, invited me to a conference provocatively entitled “Neo-patristic Synthesis or Post-patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology be Contextual?” organized by the Volos Theological Academy in Greece. The initial ideas were subsequently offered as a talk at St Tikhon’s Orthodox Theological University in Moscow, Russia. A spirited discussion that followed my lecture revealed that Florovsky’s ideas were very much alive in a country that had little use for him during his lifetime. Florovsky was also prominently featured at other events in which I have taken part over the years, including a conference on Orthodox constructions of the West at Fordham University and a conference on Orthodoxy and Hellenism at St Vladimir’s Theological Seminary, both of which took place in summer 2010. These events provided excellent opportunities for memorable conversations with Andrew Louth, John McGuckin, metropolitan Kallistos Ware, and metropolitan John Zizioulas, all in one way or another connected with the “ways of Orthodox theology” in the twentieth century and Florovsky. The conferences at Kiev Summer Institute (Ukraine) in July 2011, Ohio State University (US) in October 2011, Durham University (UK) in July 2012, University of Belgrade (Serbia) in October 2012, the Romanian Institute for Inter-Orthodox, Inter-Confessional and Inter-Religious Studies (Cluj-Napoca, Romania) in May 2013, and Russian Academy of Science (Moscow, Russia) in November 2013 presented additional opportunities for sharing the results of my research. Throughout the years, I have benefited from valuable exchange with scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, including Iuriy Chernomorets, Sarah Coakley, Inna Golubovich, Alexis Klimoff, Matthew Miller, Michael Plekon, Irina Valiavko, Paul Valliere, as well as e-mail exchanges with Georgy Zakharov and Anatoly Cherniaev.
I am grateful to the Friends of Princeton University Library for funding my archival research at the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections of the Firestone Library. My access to the archival material was facilitated by several members of the library staff, including Linda Oliveira, Charles Greene, and AnnaLee Pauls. The director of St Vladimir’s Seminary Library, Eleanna Silk, and her assistant, Matthew Garklavs, went the extra mile to make my stay as productive as possible. My research at St Vladimir’s was partially funded by a grant from the University of St Thomas.

A special word of thanks goes to Matthew Baker, who generously shared the material from the private collection of Andrew Blane and provided other valuable resources. The exchange with Brandon Gallaher has also helped me to stay on top of Florovsky studies over the years. My understanding of Florovsky’s relations with his peers, especially Alexander Schmemann, was enriched by the personal recollections of Edward Kasinec and Thomas Bird, who were most generous with their time.

Several colleagues at the University of St Thomas read considerable parts of the book. In addition to improving content, Philip Rolnick saved me from innumerable stylistic infelicities. Michael Hollerich, Massimo Faggioli, and Terence Nichols offered comments on the overall shape of my historical argument. A version of chapter 12 was discussed at the meeting of the Minnesota Association for Patristic Studies. My graduate student assistants, Matthew Kuettel, Matthew Selby, Kyle Sellnow, and Erika Zabinski helped with library research and proofreading at different stages. A grant from the Faculty Development Center at the University of St Thomas provided much-needed time for research and writing.

I am profoundly indebted to William Abraham, John Behr, and Rowan Williams for reviewing the typescript and offering invaluable recommendations.

I am also grateful to Sarah Coakley and Richard Cross, the editors of the New Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology series, for inviting me to submit this work to Oxford University Press. Tom Perridge and his editorial team at the Press helped to move the project along admirably.

**A NOTE ON RHETORIC AND THE PRESENTATION OF SLAVIC NAMES**

Russian academic prose in general and Florovsky’s work in particular requires from western scholars a certain amount of rhetorical adjustment. Like many of his Russian contemporaries, Florovsky often erred on the side of harsh criticism, rather than faint praise. Perhaps, to some western readers, Florovsky’s judgments about his peers would sound too severe and off-putting.
Conversely, the ritualistic irenicism of Anglo-American scholarship strikes Slavic readers as somewhat lifeless and sanitized. In Russia, both a century ago and today, frank criticism was not so much a sign of disrespect (as it sometimes strikes western readers), as an indicator of serious engagement. It is vital to grasp this rhetorical difference in order to do justice both to Florovsky and to his contemporaries.

As a rule, I omitted the patronymics, except in cases when those served as helpful markers of kinship. In most cases, I followed the life-time western spelling of the author’s name on the assumption that such a spelling accorded with the author’s own intention. Such a spelling usually also has the advantage of being more aesthetically pleasing than rather awkward phonetic transliteration. Thus, “Florovsky,” not “Florovskii;” Solovyov, not “Solov’iov;” Lossky, not “Losskii;” “Dostoevsky,” not “Dostoevskii;” “Sergius Bulgakov,” not “Sergii Bulgakov;” “Hippius,” not “Gippius;” “Merezhkovsky,” not “Merezhkovskii;” “Berdyaev,” not “Berdiaev;” “Herzen,” not “Gertsen,” and so on. The titles of all works in Slavic languages were transliterated in accordance with the guidelines of the Library of Congress.

Paul Gavrilyuk
Easter, 2013
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**List of Abbreviations**

**ATR** Anglican Theological Review

**ER** The Ecumenical Review


**GFP PUL, Box, f.** Georges Florovsky Papers, 1916–1979, Princeton University Library, C0586, Box number, folder number.

**GFP SVSL, Box, f.** Georges Florovsky Papers, 1916–1979, St Vladimir’s Seminary Library, Box number, folder number.

**GOTR** Greek Orthodox Theological Review

**IBS** *Izbrannye bogoslovskie stati’* (Moscow: Probel, 2000).

**Issledovaniia** Kolerov, Modest, ed., *Issledovaniia po istorii russkoi mysli* (Moscow/ St Petersburg: different publishers, 1997–).


**PRM** *Iz proshlogo russkoi mysli* (Moscow: Agraf, 1998).


**Sosud izbrannyi** Skliarova, Marina, ed., *Sosud izbrannyi: Istoriia Rossiiskikh dukhovnykh shkol* (St Petersburg: Borei, 1994).

**SJT** Scottish Journal of Theology

**SR** The Slavonic Review

**SVSQ** St Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly, 1952–1968

**SVTQ** St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly, 1969–present

**Vestnik RKhD** *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizheniia*, 1925–present¹

**VK** *Vera i kul’tura* (St Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2002).

Introduction

Even if [Georges Florovsky] himself failed to clarify and to explain what he meant by the “neopatristic synthesis” as the goal of the Orthodox theological task; if, in the last analysis, the historian in him seems to have been more articulate than the theologian, his work will remain an essential milestone, indeed an inescapable and decisive term of reference for all future developments of Orthodox theology.¹

Archpriest Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) is commonly regarded as the mastermind of a “return to the Church Fathers” in twentieth-century Orthodox theology. For him, patristic theology offered the single norm by which all theological proposals were to be judged. He maintained that Catholic and Protestant theological influences had led Russian Orthodox theology since the seventeenth century into a “western captivity,” which resulted in a distortion of Orthodoxy’s true theological identity. Consequently, he advanced his neopatristic synthesis as a reform program for Russian Orthodox theology in the Diaspora and as a foundation for ecumenical dialogue. He envisioned that such a synthesis would become the only authentic direction of future Orthodox theology. Florovsky also believed that divisions among Christians “can be overcome only by a return to the common mind of the early Church.”²

The emphasis on the foundational character of the Greek patristic tradition runs as a golden thread through all aspects of Florovsky’s scholarship and is brought out most forcefully in his reflections on the state of twentieth-century Orthodox theology and its future.³ A master of lapidary characterizations, Fr Georges preferred to express his key insights with a tantalizing economy of words. As a result, many of his theological insights remained underdeveloped.

¹ Alexander Schmemann, “In Memoriam Fr. Georges Florovsky,” SVSQ, 23 (1979), 133.
Besides, he was too much of a historian ever to produce a theological system. Most of his theological works were historically structured; his historical expositions, in turn, were theologically driven. Florovsky became a historical theologian before historical theology would be generally recognized as a theological subdiscipline.

REVISING THE STANDARD NARRATIVE

Florovsky’s program of a “return to the Fathers” is usually contrasted with the modernism⁴ of his older contemporaries, an extraordinary constellation of thinkers who had ushered in the Russian Religious Renaissance of the first half of the twentieth century. A complex and variegated phenomenon, the Russian Religious Renaissance was a spiritual ferment among Russian-speaking intellectuals, whose philosophical, literary, and artistic works placed religious questions and values at the heart of culture. The acknowledged leaders of the Renaissance included Nicholas Berdyaev (1874–1948), Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944), Vladimir Ern (1882–1917), George Fedotov (1886–1951), Pavel Florensky (1882–1937), Semen Frank (1877–1950), Mikhail Gershenson (1869–1925), Zinaida Hippius (1869–1945), Viacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949), Lev Karsavin (1882–1952), Anton Kartashev (1875–1966), Nikolai Lossky (1870–1965), Dmitry Merezhkovsky (1865–1941), Pavel Novgorodtsev (1866–1924), Vasily Rozanov (1856–1919), Lev Shestov (1866–1938), Fedor Stepin (1884–1965), Petr Struve (1870–1944), Boris Vysheslavtsev (1877–1954), and Vasily Zenkovsky (1881–1962). My admittedly incomplete list includes primarily the figures whom Florovsky knew personally.⁵

Initially fascinated and awakened by the Russian Religious Renaissance, over time Florovsky became increasingly critical of its achievements. Because of this changed attitude, Florovsky’s retrieval of patristic theology is

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⁴ In the context of the twentieth-century intra-Orthodox debates, the terms “modernism” and “modernists” were often used by the opposition as a polemical tag. Being well aware of such a use of the term, Bulgakov fully owned it in his address on the occasion of the decade since the establishment of the St Sergius Institute in Paris: “The imprint of our time is stamped vividly on our theological creativity. Since new is the synonym of creativity, we are scolded for our modernism by people, who are trying to no avail to stop the sun and cancel history. But our modernism is and desires to be a living tradition, which we serve in faithfulness to the Church,” “Pri reke Khovare,” Put’ parizhskogo bogosloviia (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo khrama svatoi muchenitsy Tatiany, 2007), 430. Berdyaev also used the term “Orthodox modernism” neutrally in his essay “Tipy religioznoi mysli v Rossii. Novoe khristianstvo” [“Types of Religious Consciousness in Russia”], Sobranie sochinenii (Paris: YMCA Press, 1989; originally published in 1916), 441–62.

⁵ For the discussion of the figures that participated in a broader cultural revival, known as the Silver Age, see Bernice Glazter Rosenthal and Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, A Revolution of the Spirit: Crisis of Value in Russia, 1890–1924 (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), vii–xiv, 1–40.
commonly viewed in terms of opposition to the modernist and the pro-western character of the Renaissance. This polarizing narrative is accepted both by scholars who favor the neopatristic turn and by those amenable to other theological paradigms.\textsuperscript{6} For example, such leading Orthodox theologians as Alexander Schmemann (1921–1983), John Meyendorff (1926–1992), and Christos Yannaras (b. 1935) have endorsed the standard narrative and passed it on to their students, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox.

A closer look at the theological background of neopatristic synthesis, undertaken in this study, will show that the standard narrative requires a revision. Admittedly, it took the polemical force of Florovsky’s and Vladimir Lossky’s writings to make the patristic paradigm dominant in post-war Orthodox theology. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to cast the interaction between the modernists (the generation of Bulgakov and Berdyaev) and the neopatristic theologians (Florovsky, V. Lossky, and their followers) solely in terms of opposition—a facile dichotomy that some of Florovsky’s own overly polemical statements did much to perpetuate. This exaggerated opposition is premised on a dubious claim, marshaled by Florovsky and his followers, that the “modernist” theologians have altogether abandoned the Church Fathers by selling out to the West intellectually. In such a lamentable state, Orthodox theology then required a major rescue operation undertaken by the neopatristic theologians. It will be demonstrated that such a juxtaposition of the two trends—modernist and neopatristic—is inaccurate.

I show instead that the foreshadowings of Florovsky’s theological program are already discernable in the Russian Religious Renaissance. It could be said that the “modernists” among the Renaissance leaders in their own ways also rediscovered the Church Fathers, albeit in a manner that did not satisfy Florovsky philosophically and theologically. Hence, the debate between the generation of Bulgakov on the one hand and the generation of Florovsky on the other was not \textit{whether} patristic theology was foundational—for both sides accepted that it was—but rather \textit{how} to engage the patristic tradition this side of modernity.

My central thesis is that Florovsky’s program of neopatristic revival cannot be divorced from the Russian Religious Renaissance or from certain strands of historical scholarship of his time. To this end, in this book I explore how Florovsky appropriated many of the guiding themes and questions of the

Renaissance, despite the fact that his answers often clashed with those given by his older Russian contemporaries. After his emigration to Europe in 1920, Florovsky came to know personally, as well as to engage in extensive intellectual exchange and joint publication projects with many leaders of the Renaissance, including Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Fedotov, Kartashev, N. Lossky, Struve, and Zenkovsky. Since these encounters reached their greatest intensity in the 1920s and 1930s, my monograph focuses on the European period (1920–1948) in Florovsky’s career, while also taking into consideration his earlier Russian period (1893–1920) and later American period (1948–1979).

SOPHIOLOGY: A POLEMICAL SUBTEXT OF NEOPATRISTICS

Florovsky advanced his neopatristic synthesis with a view to questioning and ultimately undermining the panentheistic ontology of Russian sophiology, epitomized in Solovyov’s and Bulgakov’s work. It is generally accepted, but rarely analyzed in detail, that a conversation with Solovyov and Bulgakov forms a polemical subtext of Florovsky’s neopatristics. This study investigates the less-known theological dimensions of Florovsky’s response to Solovyov’s religious philosophy and to Bulgakov’s sophiology. I will emphasize that far from being a result of disengaged historical inquiry, Florovsky’s neopatristic theology was first of all an exercise in Orthodox apologetics with a sharp polemical edge. Indeed, the very notion of a “return to the Fathers” implies that patristic heritage was somehow forgotten or distorted in modern Orthodox theology. Such a charge cannot be accepted without careful consideration of the work of Florovsky’s predecessors.

Partly owing to V. Lossky’s and Florovsky’s critique, the sophiological trend in Russian theology began to fade after Bulgakov’s death in 1944. As Florovsky put the matter in 1968: “I do not see anyone following the ‘sophianic way.’ Fr Sergius [Bulgakov] has been nearly forgotten. Only a few follow Berdyaev. This is understandable, for there is nowhere to go.” In the

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9 Bulgakov’s most important follower was Lev Zander (1893–1965). See especially Zander’s Bog i mir: mirosozertsanie ottsa Sergiia Bulgakova, 2 vols (Paris: YMCA, 1948), which is a reliable, lucid, but unoriginal compendium of Bulgakov’s work.
intergenerational disputes, the younger generation often has the upper hand, not because it necessarily has more profound things to say, but simply by virtue of outlasting the older generation. It is, of course, always possible for subsequent generations to modify this negative judgment in light of a broader historical perspective. In a formidable reversal of fortune, sophiology was rediscovered in the 1990s in Russia and simultaneously in the West. Twenty years later, the reception of the sophiological trend continues and the controversy surrounding it shows no signs of abating. More generally, it does not seem fair to the thinkers of the Russian Religious Renaissance simply to accept Florovsky’s resolute condemnation of their work at its face value. Historical justice requires hearing out their case against Florovsky and, more importantly, appreciating the extent to which Florovsky was intellectually indebted to the Renaissance.

11 The Russian studies of Solovyov, Florensky, Bulgakov, and Frank are too numerous to be listed here. A growing number of studies in the West include Paul Valliere, *Modern Orthodox Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Rowan Williams, Sergii Bulgakov: *Towards a Russian Political Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999); Patrick de Laubier, ed., *Vladimir Soloviev, Jacques Maritain et le personnalisme chrétien* (Paris: Parole et silence, 2008).


13 See Emile Brehier, “Y a-t-il une philosophie chrétienne,” *Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale,* 2 (1931), 133–62; Bernardus Baudoux, O.F.M., “Questio de Philosophia Christiana,” in

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**THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN HELLENISM**

One core aspect of Florovsky’s neopatristics was what he called “Christian Hellenism” or “sacred Hellenism.” For the Russian theologian, Christian Hellenism was *philosophia perennis*, the unique transcultural form of Christian philosophy on which the edifice of modern Orthodox theology was to be rebuilt. Florovsky’s tendency to idealize Christian Hellenism raises the question of the extent to which late antique culture was successfully Christianized. While this question continues to fascinate and divide scholars, the deep irony of Florovsky’s approach, its anti-western rhetoric notwithstanding, is that western Christian thought could lay as strong a claim to the creative appropriation of Christian Hellenism as could the Christian East. In this regard, Florovsky’s characterization of Christian Hellenism as perennial philosophy should be read against the background of the discussion of the possibility and nature of “Christian philosophy” among French Catholic theologians in the 1930s–1940s.

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Florovsky’s account of Christian Hellenism was formulated in opposition to Adolf von Harnack’s theory of Hellenization. The German and Russian scholars each had their own theological agenda: Harnack advocated the liberation of Lutheran theology from dogma by means of its de-Hellenization; Florovsky, in stark contrast, sought to renew Orthodox theology by re-Hellenization. Despite their profound differences, both Harnack and Florovsky advocated a historiography of corruption. For Harnack, the original gospel was corrupted by Greek philosophy; for Florovsky, Russian Orthodox theology was compromised by western philosophical influences.

NOBODY’S MAN

Given his complex relationship to the Russian Religious Renaissance, Florovsky’s intellectual universe does not fit easily into the categories of Orthodox “modernism” and “traditionalism.” In the course of his nomadic scholarly career he joined different groups and movements only to prove an unbending dissenter. Looking back at his own place among the theologians of the Russian Diaspora, Florovsky observed: “I do not belong to any clan or faction.”

A decided nonconformist, he conformed his thought to the patristic paradigm not only because he believed this paradigm to be true, but also in order to gain a polemical high ground against the “modernists.” He often appealed to the authority of the Church Fathers in order to trump the theological capital of the “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance.

One cannot ignore an important psychological dimension of this posture of confrontation, especially vis-à-vis his Russian peers in the Diaspora. Florovsky was often haunted by a sense of alienation from his Parisian colleagues at the St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute, a sense that became particularly acute in ecumenical settings.

Truth be told, Florovsky was hardly a paragon of collegiality. Both emotionally and intellectually he thrived on conflict: “I am
a born protestor,” as he once put in an interview.\textsuperscript{16} He was at his intellectual best in a reactive, rather than constructive mode. While lecturing on patristics, he was fond of repeating that the Church Fathers theologized primarily in response to heretical provocation, the mode of theological engagement that he thoroughly internalized.

In moments of critical introspection, Florovsky admitted that a “certain harshness and impetuousness are my qualities; whether good or bad, they are certainly insurmountable.”\textsuperscript{17} In letters to his wife and friends he spoke of his “bad temper,” at times with a touch of irony, at other times with signs of regret.\textsuperscript{18} Lesser minds were intimidated by his encyclopedic erudition; and he certainly did not suffer fools gladly. A poor diplomat and an authoritarian administrator, he frequently drove tensions in professional relations to the point of painful divisions, leaving the delicate task of reconciliation to his colleagues.

Although he was no saint, Florovsky maintained life-long cordial relations with Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958), Dmitry Chizhevsky (1894–1977), Fr John Meyendorff (1926–1992), and Bishop Basil Krivocheine (1900–1985). His company was sought by such luminaries of the twentieth century as metropolitan Antony Bloom (1914–2003) and archimandrite Sofrony Sakharov (1896–1993). He also had his share of devoted students, whom he inspired to study patristics or Russian intellectual history.\textsuperscript{19}

Shortly after he left Russia in 1920, Florovsky joined the Eurasian Group in Sofia; became one of the founding members of Bulgakov’s Brotherhood of St Sophia in 1923; taught at the St Sergius Institute in Paris (1926–1939 and 1946–1948); collaborated in Berdyaev’s and Vysheslavtsev’s Parisian journal The Way (Put’, 1925–1939); served as the dean of St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York for several formative years (1949–1955); and taught at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts (1955–1959 and 1963–1965). Due to the antagonism that his presence eventually generated, he broke with all of the above-mentioned groups and institutions, in some cases in a rather dramatic manner. It is remarkable that a figure whose theological direction was recognized by many as the golden standard of Eastern Orthodoxy had managed to become estranged from most émigré ventures with which he had ever been associated.

In 1965, Florovsky’s Harvard colleague, Protestant historian George H. Williams, published a one-hundred-page account of the Russian scholar’s

\textsuperscript{17} Florovsky, Letter to P. Florensky, September 12, 1912, Issledovaniia (2003), 60.
\textsuperscript{18} Florovsky, Letter to K. I. Florovskaia, August 28, 1937, GFP PUL, Box 55, f. 7, in which Florovsky made a birthday wish of his own “character improvement;” Florovsky, Letter to A. Schmemann, April 2, 1950, Alexander Schmemann Papers, SVSL (no box number).
\textsuperscript{19} Florovsky’s students include John Zizioulas, John Romanides, George S. Bebis, and John V. A. Fine.
American career in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*.

The article provoked Florovsky’s bitter remark: “Russians, especially those in Paris, would not write ten lines about me, because I am ‘not one of their own.’”

Both his personal qualities and the social dynamic of the Diaspora were responsible for this pattern of association and leadership followed by confrontation and estrangement.

In defense of Florovsky, one could argue that the world of émigré Orthodoxy ultimately proved too limited for his intellectual ambitions. As he observed upon resigning from the deanship of St Vladimir’s Seminary:

> The Vineyard of the Lord is wider than St Vladimir’s, and I hope, with God’s help, to continue my modest work in it, as long as my capacity endures, and I bless God for the opportunity I was given to lay foundations of a graduate school of Orthodox Theology in this country [the United States], and I am fully confident that the Lord of the Vineyard will find competent and reliable labourers for His own cause. For myself, I am convinced I am now called to work in another corner of the same, and I want peace and freedom for this work.

Only a year after his resignation, Florovsky was invited to teach at Harvard Divinity School. He later recalled his teaching at Harvard (1956–1964) and retirement at Princeton (1964–1972) as his happiest years, although not entirely conflict-free. Thus, at the very points in his career when his fellow Orthodox showed him the door, new doors opened for him in a larger Christian world.

His American colleagues diplomatically characterized him as “frank,” “direct,” and “sharp on the edges.” Tall and gaunt, he would appear in the long black cassock of an Orthodox priest on the Princeton campus. The erudite...

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21 Florovsky, Letter to Fr Igor Vernik and his wife Zina, March 28, 1966, *Vestnik RKhD*, 196 (2010), 87. Later this year, Florovsky complained: “Russians in America did not notice this work. [. . .] I am not being disappointed or engaging in self-advertisement. But it is strange that I am ‘recognized’ in America, Britain, and Greece, whereas my compatriots keep determined silence, as if bewitched, silent even about the fact that I am ‘recognized’ by others,” Letter to Fr Igor Vernik and his wife Zina, September 17 (30), 1966, *Vestnik RKhD*, 196 (2010), 87.

22 Florovsky, “Letter to the President and Trustees of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary & Academy in the City of New York,” September (?) 1955, p. 3, GFP PUL, Box 12, f.1. Its solemn rhetoric notwithstanding, the primary purpose of the letter was to confirm the arrangements for the severance package in the amount of one year’s salary. For the next year Florovsky continued to receive one half of his salary from the St Vladimir’s Seminary, with which he broke ties completely, and the other half from Union Theological Seminary, at which he continued his teaching.

23 As he told his biographer, Andrew Blane, he was three times “rescued by Anglo-Saxons” from his fellow Russians. See A. Blane, ed., *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual, Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 188, n. 111. This volume includes three biographic essays by Blane, Marc Raeff, and George H. Williams.

undergraduates, considerably more flexible in their dress, styled him “the Grand Inquisitor”—a fitting title, given his tendency to project a sense of doctrinal authority. At Princeton, the staff of the Firestone Library christened Florovsky a “patron saint of photocopying” for the countless hours he spent at the copy machine. Apparently his photocopying talent was so well known that he even became an inspiration for the 1976 Super Bowl commercial of the Xerox Corporation, featuring a monk busily copying medieval manuscripts. In this way, unawares, Florovsky contributed to raising the American advertising industry to a higher level of intellectual sophistication.

AN INNOVATING TRADITIONALIST AND A TRADITIONALIST INNOVATOR

Florovsky was a staunch critic of anti-intellectualism and isolationism, the two vices which less academically inclined members of the Orthodox Church sometimes mistook for virtues. He was frustrated with the theological indifference of his contemporaries in the Orthodox Diaspora, on occasion raising his voice against such an attitude, but to no avail. In the spirit of the Russian Religious Renaissance, Florovsky insisted that the Church should not turn away from intellectual culture, but should show the courage to transform and Christianize it. For him, Christian Hellenism was a time-transcending paradigm of the successful Christianization of culture.

Although Orthodox traditionalists lay claim to Florovsky’s heritage more readily than the modernists do, the former group did not escape his

26 James Billington, “A Memoir of the Reverend Georges Florovsky,” in Twenty-Five Year Commemoration, 11–14, at 13. Florovsky’s visits to the library were so frequent that the library staff actually put his picture above the copy machine, see A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 162. The Florovsky Archive at the St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary contains sixty-two boxes (!) filled with books Florovsky copied in toto (A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 434).
28 “Opravdanie znaniia,” Vestnik RKhD, 7 (1928), 1–6; “Vessels of Clay,” SVSQ, 3 (1955), 2–4; Letter to S. Sakharov, March 10, 1958, Perepiska, 47: “We all have to bear the cross of solitude. I am more consoled by my teaching among the non-Orthodox than among the Orthodox, who are, unfortunately, indifferent not only to theology in a technical sense but also to the teaching of the faith, which they customarily exclude from the horizon while preparing for pastoral work and priesthood.”
29 Constantine Cavarnos, Father Georges Florovsky on Ecumenism (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1996), 13, includes Florovsky in the list of “first rate traditionalist theologians.” For a similar reading, see the Old Calendarist Greek Archbishop Chrysostomos
trenchant criticism either. For example, he took pains to distance his neopatristic synthesis from the “theology of repetition” commonly associated with traditionalism. The publication of his lectures on patristics caused one traditionalist Orthodox cleric to exclaim: “This book is useless and even dangerous! You remind the readers of the tumultuous times of church history! Familiarity with the Fathers will reveal the incompetence of the current manuals and will only inculcate distrust. It is better for the Fathers to be forgotten. There is no point reminding people about them.”

Even if the exact words spoken on this occasion were perhaps less grotesque than Florovsky reported them, it is clear that the historical approach to doctrine could generate a fair amount of consternation among those who had been raised on the “school theology” of the pre-revolutionary manuals. Not only among the Russian Orthodox, but also in the international forum, his program of a “return to the Fathers” met considerable resistance from the “zealots of traditionalism,” as he called them. Florovsky maintained that traditionalists, who approached church dogmatics ahistorically, failed to take the full measure of patristic tradition.

Florovsky repudiated the “theology of repetition” on several occasions, most pointedly in his programmatic essay “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church.” For him a “return to the Church Fathers” was a means of re-establishing the contemporary Orthodox Church’s continuity with the early Church and the main way of moving forward theologically.

Florovsky’s neopatristic synthesis was no mere restoration of venerable antiquity. Somewhat oversimplifying, one could say that he sought to make patristic theology modern and modernity outdated. While any label has its limitations, Florovsky could be called an innovating traditionalist and a traditionalist innovator. The term of Etna, “Protopresbyter Georges Florovsky,” Orthodoxy Tradition, 11/2 (1994), 28–9. It is telling, however, that for some Russian traditionalists, Florovsky is not sufficiently conservative. For example, Roman Vershillo, the editor of a marginal anti-modernist Russian website (an undertaking with no academic credentials), includes Florovsky among the modernist theologians: <http://www.antimodern.wordpress.com> (accessed February 28, 2012).

30 Florovsky, Letter to S. Sakharov, September 26, 1958, Perepiska, 121.
32 Florovsky, “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” 190–1.
33 Florovsky, Púti russkogo bogoslovia, 506.
34 Cf. Florovsky, “The Lost Scriptural Mind,” CW I: 16: “I have often a strange feeling. When I read the ancient classics of Christian theology, the fathers of the church, I find them more relevant to the troubles and problems of my own time than the production of modern theologians. The fathers were wrestling with existential problems, with those revelations of the eternal issues which were described and recorded in Holy Scripture. I would risk a suggestion that St. Athanasius and St. Augustine are much more up to date than many of our theological contemporaries.” Florovsky’s view is not without its postmodern sympathizers.
“neopatristics” captures both aspects of his thought: “neo” for innovation and creativity, “patristics” for the tradition of the Church Fathers and continuity. Florovsky insisted that the thought of the Fathers was ever relevant; in contrast, he considered the major intellectual currents birthed at the Enlightenment as passing cultural fads. The philosophical framework of modernity was too narrow for Florovsky. His retrieval of the Church Fathers was driven by the desire to expand an intellectual horizon within which contemporary theological questions could be addressed.

**A HISTORIAN WHO CHANGED HISTORY**

This is a book about a historian who changed the history of Orthodox theology in the twentieth century. Florovsky’s historical works, including his magnum opus, *The Ways of Russian Theology* (1937), were thinly disguised theological manifestoes. By criticizing the historical ways of Russian theology he set modern Orthodox theology on a new course. Under his influence, neopatristic theology became a universal marker of twentieth-century Orthodox theological identity. Remarkably, he achieved this change of theological course by producing a number of powerful, inspiring variations on patristic themes, rather than a comprehensive theological system.

To draw on Schmemann’s image, quoted in the epigraph, Florovsky’s work was a veritable “milestone.” While marking a change of direction, this milestone also lies on the path travelled by other twentieth-century Orthodox theologians. This study retraces this path in order to appreciate Florovsky not only as a critic of the Russian Religious Renaissance, but also as one of its participants.
The Russian Religious Renaissance
Before the Revolution

In those years Russia received many gifts. This was the period of an awakening of original philosophical thought, a flowering of poetry, a deepening of aesthetic appreciation, a revival of interest in religion, mysticism, and the occult. The new souls appeared and the new sources of creativity were discovered. People saw new horizons, the glow of a glorious dawn, and the end of an old age coinciding with a new era, which would bring about a complete transfiguration of life.¹

The final decade of the nineteenth century, the very decade in which Florovsky was born, saw an emergence of new religious sensibility among the Russian literati. Florovsky frequently returned to this period in his historical imagination, observing that “the 1890s were a critical period in all European countries, Russia included. It was an epoch of a renascent ‘Romanticism,’ in which the motives of hope and resignation, of expectation and despair, were paradoxically amalgamated. In any case, it [the epoch] was a manifold psychological and personal reaction against ‘positivism,’ on various levels of art, poetry, literature, and philosophy.”² In Russia, the amount and force of ensuing literary and artistic activity were quite unprecedented. The explosion of creative energy was on a par with the Italian Renaissance and German Sturm und Drang.³ Those observing the scale of the Russian cultural revival hailed it as a “religious-philosophical,” “poetic,” “cultural,” or “spiritual” renaissance of the twentieth century.⁴ The expression “Russian Religious Renaissance,” adopted in this study, became generally accepted in the

¹ N. Berdyaev, Samopoznanie (Moscow: DEM, 1990; first published in 1949), 129.
³ Berdyaev applied the image of Sturm und Drang period to his own pre-revolutionary work. See his Smysh tvorchestva (Paris: YMCA Press, 1985), 7.
English-language scholarship after the publication of Nicolas Zernov’s firsthand account, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (1963).\(^5\) With initial approbation, but later often with biting sarcasm, Florovsky also resorted to the term “renaissance,” most often adding “religious-philosophical” to describe the phenomenon in question.

The Russian Religious Renaissance involved writers, poets, literary critics, journalists, artists, philosophers, theologians, economists, political scientists, legal scholars, and historians, who drew in one way or another on the resources of Christianity. The Renaissance leaders did not have a common political, academic, or ecclesiastical platform. Their primary moorings were neither in the academy, nor in the Church, although many of them belonged to both. Instead these thinkers chose to disseminate their ideas by creating informal artistic and literary circles (*kruzhki*),\(^6\) establishing new periodicals, publishing houses, and religious-philosophical societies. Their main setting and common point of reference were the world of literature, art, and philosophy. What united the leaders of the Russian Religious Renaissance was their common spiritual quest and a mutual pursuit of religious questions as affecting all aspects of human existence. They turned to the Russian literature and the social thought of the nineteenth century to rediscover the truth and power of Christianity.

The leaders of the Renaissance are best understood as belonging to the two major interconnected circles. The first circle included the philosophers, who in the 1890s began to turn from materialism and positivism to religiously colored idealism. The second circle included writers, poets, artists, and literary critics who engaged religious themes during the cultural revival commonly known as the Silver Age. Together these two interlocking circles brought about the most powerful wave of spiritual awakening among intellectuals that Russia had ever known.

As a young man, studying in Russia, Florovsky was riding this wave. As his own philosophical and religious outlook matured, he would begin to swim against the mainstream of the Renaissance, even attempting to redirect its creative energies. It is crucial to understand the spiritual impulses that brought

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about the Renaissance in order to appreciate the polemical subtext of Florovsky’s thought, especially of his neopatristic theology.

**THE RELIGIOUS TURN IN PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE, AND ARTS**

At the turn of the twentieth century, Russian universities were centers of political unrest and the breeding ground of anti-religious ideas. The Russian Orthodox Church was commonly perceived as an arm of the state. The disaffection with the backward social policies of the state caused many intellectuals to abandon the Church. The formality, generally low quality, and dry dogmatism of the religious education offered at the state-run gymnasia only made things worse. Under these circumstances, many Russian intellectuals lost their faith in young adulthood. Following this general trend, and captivated by the transformative potential of the socialist ideas, the future leaders of the Russian Religious Renaissance—notably, Nicholas Berdyaev, Sergius Bulgakov, Petr Struve, and Semen Frank—abandoned the faith of their childhood and joined a growing Marxist movement. Towards the end of the 1890s, they became dissatisfied with the generally accepted philosophical foundations of Marxist theory—materialism, positivism, scientism, and economic determinism. In search of alternatives, most of them turned to religiously colored philosophical idealism.

The emerging Russian religious philosophers advanced their changed philosophical stance in a programmatic collection of essays entitled *The Problems of Idealism* (1902). In this landmark symposium, the social philosophers with the Marxist background, such as Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Frank, and Struve, were joined by the philosopher of law, Pavel Novgorodtsev (1866–1924) and the idealist philosophers, princely brothers Sergei (1862–1905) and Evgeny Trubetskoy (1863–1920). In his contribution to *The Problems of Idealism*, Bulgakov defined positivism broadly as “all trends of thought that reject metaphysics and the autonomous rights of religious faith.” He criticized the positivist theory of progress for its devaluation of individual human existence and its tendency to deify human collectivity. Bulgakov warned that in the

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7 Other leaders of the Renaissance who experienced a crisis of faith and subsequently returned to the Church under a different set of circumstances include Viacheslav Ivanov, George Fedotov, and Nikolai Lossky.


absence of a proper metaphysical foundation, such a theory could become a
dangerous surrogate religion. Berdyaev concurred with Bulgakov that ma-
terialism and social positivism would bring about a form of collectivism which
cheapened the value of individual human life. As an alternative, they advoc-
cated religiously colored idealism as a philosophical framework for the liber-
alization of Russian society. The Problems of Idealism was much discussed
and precipitated a “rebellion against positivism” among the Russian intellectu-
als of the cultural capitals. The symposium did not have an equally strong
impact on the academic life of Florovsky’s hometown Odessa, where the
hegemony of positivism remained largely unquestioned. But Florovsky ac-
knowledge that The Problems of Idealism marked a religious turn in Russian
philosophy.

The idealist philosophers and political economists were joined in their
rebellion against materialism, positivism, rationalism, and utilitarianism by
the leading writers, poets, and literary critics. The emerging alternative was
called “symbolism,” matching a parallel development in the French artistic
world. The symbolist trend was spearheaded by the writers and artists loosely
clustered around the writer Dmitry Merezhkovsky and his wife, poet and
memoirist Zinaida Hippius. The Merezhkovsky circle included literary critic
Dmitry Filosofov and writer Vasily Rozanov, as well as poets Aleksandr Blok,
Andrei Bely, Georgy Chulkov (1879–1939), Viacheslav Ivanov, and Nikolai
Minsky (1855–1937).

Most Silver Age literati lived in Moscow and St Petersburg, frequently
gathering at each other’s homes. For example, Ivanov’s apartment in a St
Petersburg high-rise, known as the “Tower” (Bashnia), was a place where the
crème de la crème of the Russian literary world assembled on Wednesday
evenings. These informal exchanges over a cup of tea were full of passionate
intensity, with the conversations lasting, in a typical Russian fashion, an
untold number of hours. Berdyaev, who was invited to preside over these
informal gatherings in the revolutionary year of 1905 recalled: “The Revolu-
tion and political passions were raging downstairs. But upstairs, in the ‘Tower,’
there took place the most refined conversations on the themes of the highest

11 M. A. Kolerov, Sbornik “Problemy idealizma” (1902): istoria i kontekst (Moscow: Tri
dkvadra, 2002), 161.
12 Kolerov, Sbornik “Problemy idealizma,” 164.
14 For Merezhkovsky’s role in the cultural renaissance, see Bernice G. Rosenthal, Dmitri
Sergeevich Merezhkovsky: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality (The Hague: Martinus
Nijhoff, 1975).
15 The Berdyaevs themselves opened the doors of their flat in Moscow for a similar purpose.
Andrei Bely left a grotesque account of these meetings in “Tsentral’naja stantsija,” in
A. A. Ermichev (ed.), N. A. Berdiaev: Pro et Contra (St Petersburg: Russkii Khristianskii
spiritual culture, aesthetics, and mysticism.” As a philosopher, who had one foot in social philosophy and the other in literature, Berdyaev acutely felt the disconnection between those who made the Revolution and those who made the Renaissance.

Having rediscovered Christianity, the Russian literati could not remain content with merely holding a candle at the Easter vigils or quietly praying in the back of the church. They brought with them burning questions of their own. The Church’s subservience to the state, its political quietism, repressive spirit, siege mentality, and social indifferentism made the ecclesiastical culture of Russian Orthodoxy foreign to the literati, who continued to share the attitudes of the Russian intelligentsia. The official “school” theology of the Orthodox Church, steeped as it was in the rationalistic moralism and lingering positivism of the nineteenth century, could not satisfy their spiritual hunger. Under these circumstances, the Slavophiles, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Lev Tolstoy, and Vladimir Solovyov became their literary guides to Christ.

Merezhkovsky’s study of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, published in The World of Art (Mir iskusstva) journal from 1900 to 1902, marked a religious turn in Russian literary criticism. Previously, the two giants of Russian literature were appreciated primarily as critics of social injustice. Merezhkovsky, for the first time, contrasted Dostoevsky and Tolstoy as two different religious types. The Christianity of Dostoevsky, with its Christocentric mysticism, tragic pathos, shattering of all rationalistic explanations of the problem of evil, testing of the limits of human rebellion against God, prophetic predictions of violence in future Russian revolutions, was opposed to the Christianity of Tolstoy, with its denial of miracles and the divinity of Christ, corroding cultural nihilism, rationalistic moralism, and the message of non-violent resistance. The literary battle between these two Christianities, from which Dostoevsky usually emerged victorious, became an emblematic feature of the Renaissance. Florovsky’s readings of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Gogol followed the studies of Merezhkovsky, Berdyaev, Ivanov, and Gershenzon.

Among the Slavophiles, Aleksei Khomiakov (1804–1860) was recognized as the first original Russian Orthodox theologian. Khomiakov was able to capture the unique spirit of the Orthodox Church, expressed in the ideal of sobornost’: church unity based on freedom and love, rather than external authority. Khomiakov’s ecclesiology and associated epistemological insights influenced Florovsky’s social epistemology of ecclesial incorporation. As a critic of

16 Berdyaev, Samopozenanie, 145; cf. “Russkii dushovnyi renessans nachala XX v. i zhurnal ‘Put’ (K desiatletiiu ‘Puti’).”
western rationalism, and individualism, Khomiakov was also seen as a predecessor of Vladimir Solovyov.

The rich literary patrimony of Vladimir Solovyov served as a common source of creative inspiration for both circles of the Renaissance, the philosophers and the literary elite. The philosophers read Solovyov as a critic of reductionism, secularism, and positivism. Solovyov believed that instead of engaging in intellectual retreat from modernity, Christian thinkers could take the offensive by recasting all aspects of modern life in religious categories. Thus, he put forth religiously grounded epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and even “Christian politics.” In epistemology, building on the insights of Ivan Kireevsky and Aleksei Khomiakov, Solovyov developed a comprehensive theory of integral knowledge, which combined the mystical mode of knowing with rational and empirical modes.

The theory of integral knowledge was matched by what Solovyov called the “metaphysics of all-unity” (metafizika vseedinstva). Just as religious knowledge provides a horizon for all knowledge, divine reality provides an ontological basis for creaturely existence. The proposal sought to avoid the pitfalls of monism on the one hand and dualism on the other hand. By postulating that the world is intrinsically connected to God, the metaphysics of all-unity provided an appealing alternative to the regnant secularism, rationalism, and materialism. On a level of interpretation, Solovyov’s approach may be called “panreligious.”

Solovyov’s panreligious approach stimulated an ontological turn in Russian religious thought—a joint effort of the idealist philosophers to ground their epistemological, ethical, and social theories in metaphysics. S. N. Bulgakov, S. L. Frank, L. P. Karsavin, N. O. Lossky, and S. N. Trubetskoy and E. N. Trubetskoy engaged and developed Solovyov’s metaphysics of all-unity. The champions of the ontology of all-unity held that the metaphysical principle of Godmanhood was an extension of Chalcedonian Christology, according to which the divine and human natures were permanently united in the second person of the trinity. They also contended that the idea of all-unity provided an especially fitting framework for the ideas of immanence, omnipresence, and deification. For early Bulgakov, “Solovyov’s philosophy was the last word of world philosophical thought, its highest synthesis.” Following Solovyov, Bulgakov postulated an eternal ground of the world in God in order for all creation to be deified and for God to be “all in all.”

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The detractors of the ontology of all-unity objected that Solovyov’s position amounted to thinly disguised pantheism. They had a point, since the philosopher’s conception of Godmanhood was informed not only by Christology, but also by nature mysticism and sophiology. When Solovyov interpreted the mysterious figure of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, biblically and Christologically, the critics had little objections. But when he proceeded to identify her with the “eternal feminine” of the German Romantics and with the transfigured creation, inherent in the divine being, critics became suspicious of Solovyov’s doctrinal orthodoxy. In his youth, Florovsky joined the champions of Solovyov’s philosophy, but later in life he threw in his lot with the detractors.

Along with some religious philosophers, the writers and poets of the Silver Age were attracted by Solovyov’s enigmatic personality, particularly by his mystical side. In the realm of the spirit, Solovyov was a profound enigma: behind the rationalistic transparency of his philosophy of all-unity, his compelling critique of the epistemological “abstract principles” of the Enlightenment, his staunch disavowal of Russian chauvinism, his full-hearted acceptance of the central teachings of the Orthodox Church, there hovered an elusive shadow of a Gnostic, of a life-long student of the Cabbala and Jacob Boehme, of a man who attended, as was then fashionable, the spiritualist séances and was strangely familiar with the realm of the demonic. It is not the rationalistic façade of Solovyov’s philosophical system, but rather his wide-ranging mystical appetite that captivated such figures of the Silver Age as Blok, Bely, Merezhkovsky, and Ivanov.

The mystical overtones in Solovyov’s poetry resonated with the Symbolists. For example, in Blok’s poetry, Sophia became a symbol of earthly and heavenly humanity, a being at once fallen and redeemed, an unapproachable “eternal feminine” and a prostitute. The Symbolists took poetic license with Sophia, emphasizing her ambiguous and esoteric aspects, at times even treating her as a female deity in her own right. Some of them sought their inspiration outside Christianity, anticipating the revival of neopaganism. For example, Ivanov came to Christianity through ancient mystery religions, Near Eastern orgiastic cults, and theatre. Others, like Merezhkovsky and Bely, were fascinated by Russian religious sectarianism and theosophy. Bely’s novel *The Silver Dove* (*Serebriany golub*, 1909) about the sect of Khlysty, who were believed to have practiced self-flagellation and orgiastic sex, was symptomatic of the time.

The sectarian tendencies were strong enough for Merezhkovsky and Hippius to experiment with inventing their own religion, contrasting it with the “historical Christianity” represented by the Russian Orthodox ecclesiastical establishment. They called their experiment the “Church of the Holy Spirit” or the “Church of the Third Covenant,” implying that the covenant revealed in the New Testament would be superseded by new public divine revelation. The
members of the “Church of the Third Covenant” gathered at the flat of Nikolai Minsky (1855–1937) to participate in the twentieth-century re-enactment of Dionysian mysteries. Berdyaev, who was among the participants, later recalled this conventicle with a sense of embarrassment.20 Others, like V. Ivanov and Chulkov imagined themselves to be the creators of a new cult and myth.21 While the experiment with inventing a new religion was short-lived, the associated “new religious consciousness” movement proved to be more enduring.

Merezhkovsky, Hippius, Filosofov, and Minsky were the main proponents of the “new religious consciousness,” joined by Berdyaev, Kartashev, Rozanov, and Ternavtsev. They were united in their criticism of “historical Christianity” and their quasi-apocalyptic expectation of divine self-disclosure through the historical cataclysms. In different ways, the protagonists of the “new religious consciousness” turned to the first Christian centuries in search of paradigms of renewal for the Church and society. Although the “new religious consciousness” was influential, it would be a mistake to regard all Renaissance leaders as sharing its more extreme ideas.22

Nothing could redeem the “new religious consciousness” in Florovsky’s eyes. When he read about the movement as a college student in Odessa, he became apprehensive. When he encountered the final stirrings of the “new religious consciousness” in emigration, he stated his opposition to the movement in no uncertain terms. Florovsky’s generation did not “expect any new revelations, any ‘Third Covenant,’ did not search for ‘new Christianity’ that could replace ‘historical Christianity,’ did not appeal to anyone to embark on the road of pseudo-religious adventurism, did not expect an earthly Apocalypse and were determined to turn away from the hysterical preaching of the ‘new religious consciousness.’”23 In short, the “Church of the Third Covenant” was an “Anti-church.”24 As an antidote to the sectarian and decadent tendencies of the religiously seeking intelligentsia, in his theological epistemology Florovsky would stress the role of ecclesial incorporation in obtaining the knowledge of God. For him, responsible theological discourse was inseparable from participation in the life of the Church.

20 Berdyaev, Samopoznanie, 146. For a recreation of these experiments, see A. Etkind, Khlyst: Sekty, literatura i revoliutsiia (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1998).
22 For a sympathetic account of the Movement, see S. A. Askoldov, “O starom i novom religioznom soznani,” RFO I: 36–72.
24 A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 61.
In November 1901, Merezhkovsky and his associates invited the official representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church to an unprecedented series of public discussions. The meetings, which took place in St Petersburg, were chaired by Bishop Sergius Stragorodsky, then Rector of the St Petersburg Theological Academy. Bishop Sergius would become the head of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) during the trying time of Stalin’s purges and the first years of WWII. The meetings were well attended by the St Petersburg clergy and intelligentsia.

In her memoirs, Hippius vividly portrayed a profound cultural divide separating her world of the Russian literary elite from that of the ecclesiastical establishment:

When we became better acquainted with the “new” people, our surprise grew more and more. I am not even speaking of inner differences, but simply of acquired habits, customs, the language itself; everything was different, as if this was a different culture. Neither origins, nor clerical estate—the cassock—played any role. The man of the bygone ecclesiastical world—whether he was an administrator, a professor, a writer, a teacher, or simply a theologian, whether he was clever or stupid, talented or inept, attractive or repulsive—bore a mark of his world, which was so unlike our “secular” world, according to their vocabulary.  

Even if we make allowance for a measure of literary exaggeration, the divide was real and acutely felt by both sides.

The range of the questions addressed at the meetings was broad and daring. The topics offered for debate included the issue of doctrinal development; the possibility of continuing revelation; the freedom of conscience in the Church; the religious significance of human creativity; Christian asceticism and the religious significance of the body; the tensions between the institutional and charismatic authority; the problem of the Orthodox Church’s subservience to the state; and the demands of Christian teaching regarding social justice. These and other questions were addressed from different perspectives with boldness and passion. The issue underlying all issues was how to bridge the widening gap between the Church and Russian society. While the meetings only began to address the underlying issue, they had the effect of bringing the spiritual quest of the Renaissance leaders to the attention of the Church and the general public.

According to Florovsky, the central concern that ran through all meetings was how to make Christianity influential in Russian life again.  

26 Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 471.
the meetings was shot through with eschatological expectations, even premonitions of a new revelation. There was a general sense that the Church’s role in Russian society was about to change. In Florovsky’s words, “intelligentsia was returning to the Church, but expected reforms.” Both camps—the official representatives of the Church and the literati—were hesitant to undertake any practical steps together because of the enduring tensions.

The religious-philosophical meetings in St Petersburg were a landmark in the history of the Renaissance. The problems raised by the Russian intellectuals had to some extent presaged the rise of political theology, theology of the body, theology of gender, and ethno-theology in the West. On their trip to France in 1906, the Merezhkovskys discovered similarities between the agenda of their religious-philosophical meetings and that of the French Catholic Modernists, who at the time were being silenced by the Vatican. Similarly, St Petersburg religious-philosophical meetings were banned in 1903 by the sporadically repressive government of the last tsar, Nicholas II. But the Merezhkovsky circle and its supporters were undeterred, publicizing the proceedings of the meetings in the newly organized journal, The New Way (Novyi Put’, 1903–1904). In later years, the editorship of the journal passed into the hands of Berdyaev and Bulgakov, changing the title to The Questions of Life (Voprosy Zhizni). These journals were important vehicles through which the creative impulses of the Russian Religious Renaissance were shared with wider circles of the intelligentsia and clergy, including Florovsky’s family in Odessa.

Religious-philosophical societies were subsequently started in Moscow (1905–1918), St Petersburg (1907–1917), and Kiev (1908–1918). The

27 Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 475.
28 Hippius recounts her and Merezhkovsky’s meetings with the Catholic Modernists, including Portal, Paul Sabatier, Lucien Laberthonnière, Paul Desjardains, and Lagardelle in Paris in 1906. See her Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, 165–9.
30 The earliest attempt to start a religious-philosophical society without the involvement of church officials was made with Vladimir Solovyov’s participation in St Petersburg, in the winter of 1879–80. See Albert Sobolev, “K istorii religiozno-filosofskogo obschestva pamiati Vladimira Soloviova,” in A. V. Sobolev (ed.), O russkoi filosofii (St Petersburg: Mir, 2008), 306–24. Another important predecessor of the religious-philosophical societies was the Moscow Psychological Society (1885–1922) and the associated journal Problems of Philosophy and Psychology, founded by Nikolai Grot (1852–1899) in 1889.
religious-philosophical society of Moscow was an initiative of Bulgakov, who was then a professor of economics. Berdyaev founded the religious-philosophical society of St Petersburg, but soon left the city and handed the leadership to the Merezhkovskys. The religious-philosophical society in Kiev was for a period chaired by Vasily Zenkovsky, a notable historian of Russian religious thought. After the Revolution, Florovsky closely collaborated with Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Zenkovsky in emigration.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION OF 1917

As the fateful year of the Bolshevik Revolution approached, the Renaissance leaders became increasingly involved in the life of the Orthodox Church. For example, Sergius Bulgakov and Anton Kartashev (1875–1960) came to play a prominent role at the historic Moscow Church Council of 1917. Bulgakov was trusted with ghost-writing speeches for the newly elected patriarch Tikhon (Beliavin), and Kartashev prepared the drafts of several important conciliar documents. Tragically, much of the Council’s work was frustrated by the atheist regime that would paralyze the activities of the Church after the Revolution.

In a belated response to the Revolution, the Renaissance leaders doubled their organizational efforts. For instance, Bulgakov and Florensky planned to establish a Religious-Philosophical Academy in Moscow. This endeavor came to a halt when the new regime fired Bulgakov from his post at the University of Moscow. Undeterred, Bulgakov moved to Crimea in the summer of 1918 and spearheaded three new religious-philosophical societies in Simferopol, Yalta, and Sebastopol (1919–1920).

In 1919, Berdyaev opened the Free Academy of Spiritual Culture, which offered public lectures to the broadest possible audiences. He invited A. Bely, V. Ivanov, S. Frank, B. Vysheslavtsev, and F. Stepun to deliver the lectures, and regularly spoke himself. This enterprise, which Berdyaev recalled with deep nostalgia in his autobiography, was closed soon after the deportation of the religious philosophers from Russia in 1922–1923. Berdyaev’s subsequent

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33 The impact of the Russian Religious Renaissance upon the Council of 1917 deserves a separate monographic treatment.


Religious-Philosophical Academies in Berlin and Paris were modeled after this earlier undertaking. By the mid-1920s, most of the Renaissance leaders were banished abroad. Those who stayed were persecuted and often killed by the Soviet government.

Regrettably, the Renaissance’s cultural refinement rendered its achievements less accessible to the wider circles of Russian society. Affected by the decadent spirit of the European fin du siècle, most leaders of the Renaissance expended their creative energies on literary productions and works of art. In this way, they succeeded in partially Christianizing their small corner of Russian culture. However, comparably little effort was dedicated to providing the institutional and social framework vital for advancing the Renaissance’s ambitious program. Years after the Revolution, in exile, Berdyaev would lament that, as an elite undertaking, the Russian Religious Renaissance had lacked a sufficient social base.

The makers of the Bolshevik Revolution, in contrast, operated on a more basic, even primitive, cultural level. Their robust political program enabled them to disseminate their ideas very broadly. A crude ideology, inculcated by means of unabashed indoctrination and carried by a violent impulse to turn Russian society upside down, won far more supporters than the Renaissance did.

CONCLUSION

The Renaissance was an elite subculture groping for the transcendent at a time when the majority of Russian intellectuals directed their energies to the resolution of social and political problems within a secular, non-religious framework. The aim of the Renaissance was extremely ambitious: to give religious expression to culture, art, philosophy, politics, and indeed all aspects of life. The official Church, on the contrary, by and large acquiesced in its limited social role under the state’s protectorate, and was itself unprepared to accommodate and quite reluctant to undertake such a far-ranging project. As a result, the Renaissance project of transforming Russian culture remained mostly unfulfilled. Russia’s history was shaped instead by the destructive forces of the Bolshevik Revolution.

37 Berdyaev, “Russkii dukhovnyi renessans,” 12. For Florovsky’s discussion of this passage, see Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 491. In 1963, Nicolas Zernov lamented that the legacy of the Renaissance was being consigned to oblivion: “The Russian renaissance [...] only carried with it the élite of the nation. It began too late to check the momentum of the revolution. At present its achievements seem to be utterly obliterated and its effects erased for ever from the memory of the Russian people,” Russian Religious Renaissance, 324–5. It is encouraging that after the Perestroika the heritage of the Renaissance is being freshly appropriated in a new, post-Soviet Russia.
Florovsky was too young to register the first stirrings of the Renaissance at the turn of the century. When in the 1910s he became aware of a religious turn in Russian philosophy, the Renaissance was already in full swing in the cultural centers of the Russian Empire. From the very beginning, it was primarily the philosophical side of the Renaissance that attracted and inspired him. As for the literary and artistic side of the Renaissance, in Florovsky’s judgment, the “new religious consciousness” clouded the spiritual vision of the Renaissance, compromising the whole endeavor. As his thought matured, Florovsky came to formulate his relation to the main representatives of the Renaissance in increasingly negative, at times even flippant, terms. But such a polemical posture should not blind his readers to the fact that both the questions that he asked of the patristic sources as well as the range of answers that he was prepared to entertain were guided by the main themes of the Renaissance. Hence, in order to understand the background of the neopatristic synthesis, it is necessary to grasp the circumstances under which young Florovsky first came in contact with the movement. Much in his intellectual development can be explained by the dynamic of fascination and repulsion by the different sides of the Renaissance.
Early Encounters with the Renaissance

Initially I accepted the Renaissance in all seriousness, which is why I later came to denounce and reject it. Although I read everything at a young age, I have innocently ignored certain things and have not been poisoned by the Renaissance. I did not have enough “imagination” to be poisoned; through no merit of my own, I had a certain naive sobriety.\(^1\)

As early as 1913, nineteen-year-old Florovsky noted a “presently happening religious-philosophical renaissance”\(^2\) in one of his first publications. Florovsky did not invent the expression, but drew on a stockpile of self-designations emanating from the literary circles associated with Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Merezhkovsky. At the age of sixteen, Florovsky discovered the writings of Vladimir Solovyov. This discovery was formative, stimulating Florovsky’s pursuit of theological subjects. Inspired by Solovyov to seek a synthesis of scientific and religious knowledge, young Florovsky agonized over a choice between studies at a state university or a theological academy. To clarify his options, Florovsky entered into a correspondence with Nikolai Glubokovsky (1863–1937) and Pavel Florensky (1882–1937), who provided a connection with the worlds of Russian theological academies and of the Renaissance. Unstudied in western scholarship,\(^3\) this correspondence reveals Florovsky’s early struggles to find his vocation, as well as his earliest quest for a Solovyov-inspired “religious synthesis.”

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3 In the Russian-language scholarship, see the monograph of A. V. Cherniaev, *G. V. Florovskii kak filosof i istorik russkoi mysli* (Moscow: IFRAN, 2010), esp. 13–30.
city-port of Odessa, then a part of the Russian Empire. His family had strong ties both to the Russian Orthodox Church and to the secular academy. In the pre-revolutionary Russia, it was not uncommon for the children of the Russian clergy to turn against their fathers and pursue secular careers or even embrace revolutionary causes. But the young Florovsky, whose family steered him towards a secular rather than a clerical educational path, had little reason to rebel against his religious upbringing. He also did not envy the educated classes, since his family was considerably advanced academically. This peculiar dual heritage accounts for the fact that Florovsky later reacted to the writings of the religious intelligentsia as a representative of the clerical estate, and to the writings of the academic Orthodox theologians as a representative of the “order of intelligentsia.”

According to his own admission, in the company of the modernist theologians, such as Bulgakov, Berdyaev, and Kartashev, he tended to take a more conservative side, whereas when dealing with the Russian Orthodox nationalists and traditionalists, he often resorted to the arguments associated with the modernist stance. In both cases, such reactions acquired a decidedly polemical bent. True to his patrimony in the Orthodox ecclesiastical establishment, he positioned himself vis-à-vis his theological interlocutors as someone who could speak authoritatively on behalf of the Church.

Florovsky’s mother, Klavdiia Georgievna Popruzhenko (1863–1933), came from a Ukrainian family of “high level academic clergy.” Klavdiia’s father, Georgy Popruzhenko, finished Kiev Theological Academy and in the 1850s settled in Odessa, where he taught Hebrew and Greek at the local theological seminary. Several other relatives on Klavdiia’s side were university and seminary professors. Both Georgy Popruzhenko and his wife, Maria

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4 Florovsky, “Russian Intelligentsia and Religion: Notes and Comments,” unpublished typescript, p. 5, GFP PUL, Box 5, f. 1: “Russian Clergy have been isolated and estranged from the rest of the Society for a long time. It was almost a separate caste. Yet, this statement must be carefully qualified [ . . . ] In fact, the ‘clerical caste’ has never been really closed. On the contrary, probably one-half of the Russian intelligentsia was of clerical origin, and educated in the schools sponsored and run by the Church [ . . . ] It was not an accident that several of the radical leaders of the intelligentsia came from the Church schools: Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Eliseev, Antonovich. They utterly resented their own background. Nor could they easily fit into the new environment. There was an obvious element of embitterment and disappointment in their rapid ’retreat from the faith.’” On this social dynamic, see Laurie Manchester, Holy Fathers, Secular Sons: Clergy, Intelligentsia, and the Modern Self in Revolutionary Russia (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

5 For the history of this expression, see Nicolas Zernov, The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century, 243.

6 A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 19.


8 For example, Klavdiia’s brother Mikhail Popruzhenko taught Slavic philology and the history of Southern Slavs at the Novorossiysky University, when Georges Florovsky was studying
Samborskaia, were typical Ukrainians. To become a member of the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church required a measure of Russification from the non-Russian candidates. Those Ukrainians who wished to preserve their distinct national identity tended to join the Greek Catholic Church, which was especially strong in western Ukraine, but not in the Crimea. At some point, possibly after the move to Odessa, which was a vibrant, cosmopolitan, predominantly Russian-speaking city-port, his mother’s side of the family was Russified. Half-Ukrainian himself, Georges Florovsky was able to read Ukrainian, but spoke Russian at home and identified with the Russian imperial rather than with the national Ukrainian cultural heritage. After the Bolshevik Revolution, when military attempts were made to establish an independent Ukrainian state, Florovsky disapproved of these developments. These political predilections shaped a general framework of *The Ways of Russian Theology*, where Florovsky simply took it for granted that Ukrainian religious-intellectual history could be subsumed under the history of “Russian” theology.

Florovsky’s father, Vasily Antonovich Florovsky (1852–1928), was of a more humble pedigree. We know that Antony, Vasily’s father, served as a reader in the village church near the northern Russian city of Novgorod. It was not uncommon for the village clergy of peasant origins to be given family names derived from those of their parishes or places of birth. It is likely that the family name “Florovsky” came from the name of Antony’s parish, the church of Stt Florus and Laurus. Young Florovsky felt more attached to the austere Russian north than to the Ukrainian south.

Academically gifted, Vasily was able not only to complete the expected seminary education, but also to pursue postgraduate work at the Moscow Theological Academy, where he received an excellent training in patristics and Russian history. During this time the Academy was headed by Aleksandr Gorsky (1812–1875), a well-respected historian, who was said to have raised the study of patristics in Russia to the level of a scholarly discipline and who


10 Florovsky, Letter to N. Glubokovsky, August 8, 1918, *Sosud izbrannyi*, 244.

11 The legitimacy of this historiographical scheme will be scrutinized in chapter 10.


took a personal interest in Vasily’s studies. Gorsky awakened the “historical consciousness” of his students by encouraging them to engage as much as possible with primary sources in order to formulate their own position before turning to scholarly interpretations.\textsuperscript{14} Georges Florovsky followed this mode of inquiry closely in his own study of the Church Fathers. Like Gorsky, Florovsky possessed a gift for making the early Church debates existentially relevant to his students.\textsuperscript{15}

Vasily Florovsky also gratefully remembered the lectures of Vasily Kliuchevsky (1841–1911), who was then working on what would become one of the most comprehensive and influential studies of Russian history. It is also noteworthy that Vasily attended the Moscow Theological Academy at the time when Vladimir Solovyov audited a few courses there.\textsuperscript{16} Upon his ordination, Fr Vasily gradually rose through the ranks of tsarist Russia’s system of religious education, serving in various teaching and administrative positions. In 1900, at the height of his career, he became president (rektor) of Odessa Theological Seminary, but after only three years in this post, he was forced to resign due to a student rebellion.\textsuperscript{17} While the circumstances of his resignation are unknown, student discontent was commonly a backlash against a rigidly authoritarian style, generally expected from all high-level administrators in the ecclesiastical educational system.

Out of the four siblings only Georges Florovsky, the youngest child, followed in his father’s footsteps. Like Fr Vasily, his son Georges would be ordained a priest in his thirties and divide his professional responsibilities between the scholarly life and the Church. True to his father’s leadership skills, Georges would be appointed a dean of the St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York in 1949. In a twist that paralleled his father’s career, he would resign from this post in 1955, citing “agitation against myself among the students in which apparently certain members of the faculty were actively involved” and adding that he “was accused by two members of the Faculty of cruel and despotic behaviour, in a language which can be described but as wild, and there are rumours that students were induced to make a statement to

\textsuperscript{14} Florovsky, \textit{Puti russkogo bogoslovia}, 371.

\textsuperscript{15} Possibly relying on his father’s recollections, in The Ways of Russian Theology, 369, Georges Florovsky wrote that “Gorsky’s listeners could not forget his characterization of Origen.”

\textsuperscript{16} It is possible that their paths could cross in the library or at the lecture of A. Gorsky: see G. Florovsky, “Molodost’ Vladimira Solovyova,” \textit{Put’}, 9 (1928), 84.

\textsuperscript{17} As Florovsky told his biographers, his father “left the seminary because there was a revolt in the seminary, and it had to be closed,” A. Blane and T. Bird, “Interview with Fr. Georges Florovsky on April 4, 1969,” p. 24 (unpublished). In fact, when Florovsky’s father left the rector’s post in 1903 the seminary was merely moved to a new building, to be eventually closed by the Soviet government in 1920. This was a time of much student unrest for the educational institutions across the country.
the same effect.”18 The students revolted against Florovsky’s unrealistically high academic expectations, such as the requirement of New Testament Greek for all seminary graduates. According to one observer, the faculty meetings at Florovsky’s apartment usually consisted of “ritualistic assents to Florovskyian soliloquies.”19 It appears that Vasily Florovsky’s authoritarian administrative style was stamped upon the character of his son, no matter how reluctant Georges himself was to acknowledge this fact.20

Georges’ oldest brother, Vasily Vasil’evich (1881–1924), a physician by training, made a fateful decision to remain in the Soviet Russia. He died of tuberculosis in the great famine which followed the Civil War (1917–1922). His only sister, Klavdia Vasil’evna (1883–1963), possessed outstanding linguistic skills and studied at elite universities in Russia and abroad to become a medievalist. In the emigration she taught Russian at the University of Sofia, Bulgaria. Upon retirement she returned to the Soviet Union in 1955, where she worked for the Moscow Patriarchate. Towards the end of her life she translated into Russian a number of Georges’ English essays, thereby making them available to his countrymen living behind the Iron Curtain.21 Georges Florovsky followed the church situation in Soviet Russia closely, but did not seek permission to visit the country, even when this became a possibility after WWII.22 Unlike his sister, Georges never contemplated repatriation.

Georges’ second brother, Antony Vasil’evich (1884–1968), completed his graduate work in history at Novorossiisky University before the Revolution. As far as the general orientation of Georges’ studies at college was concerned, he followed in Antony’s footsteps, approaching most subjects in humanities historically. As a historian, Georges gravitated towards an interpretation-laden history of ideas, in contrast to Antony’s preference for “pure history,” in which the dimension of personal judgment was deliberately minimized.

18 Florovsky, Letter to the President and Trustees of St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary & Academy in the City of New York, September–October (?) 1955, pp. 1, 3, GFP PUL, Box 12, f. 1 (all of Florovsky’s stylistic peculiarities are retained). Although Florovsky did not mention any names, the charge against him was led by Alexander Schmemann, who was probably supported by Veselin Kesich, Serge Verkhovskoy, William Shneirla, and other members of the faculty.


20 Florovsky, Letter to N. N. Glubokovsky, May 27, 1910, Sosud izbrannyi, 103. Georges’ photographs in his sixties bear an arresting resemblance to those of his father.


22 For Florovsky’s take on the Soviet policy regarding Christianity, see a transcript of his presentation entitled “The Church and the Soviet Union,” GFP PUL, Box 2, f. 1, at the seminar organized by the Russian Research Center at Harvard University, attended by Joseph Pipes, Isaiah Berlin, and Vasily Zenkovsky.
In September 1922, Antony was expelled from Russia by the Soviet government and eventually settled in Prague, where he had a successful career as a professor of Russian history, publishing five scholarly monographs on Czech–Russian relations, and teaching at Charles University and the Slavic Institute.23 After WWII, Antony acquired Soviet citizenship but chose to remain in Czechoslovakia, which eventually became a socialist state. In contrast, both geographically and in terms of his political loyalties, Georges moved away from Soviet Russia.

Young Georges was a microcosm of his family, combining his father’s religious inclinations, Klavdiia’s linguistic gifts, and Antony’s penchant for history. A sickly child, Georges ended up spending many school days studying at home and learned much by interacting with his relatives.24 As a teenager, he devoured voluminous nineteenth-century studies of Russian history, the works of the Slavophiles and the emerging authors of the Russian Religious Renaissance.25

CORRESPONDENCE WITH NIKOLAI
GLUBOKOVSKY AND PAVEL FLORENSKY

In May 1910, Florovksy, then an eighth-grade gymnasium student (which approximately corresponds to the junior year in the modern US high school), wrote a letter of introduction to Professor Nikolai Glubokovsky, seeking his advice regarding the future course of his studies. At the time of their pre-revolutionary correspondence, Glubokovsky was a well-respected professor of the New Testament at the St Petersburg Theological Academy. He was a bridge figure who sought to bring together the Church and the secular university, a pursuit that particularly appealed to Florovsky, given his upbringing. Glubokovsky’s advice was equally trusted by his colleagues, by the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, and by the leaders of the Russian Religious Renaissance, such as Vasily Rozanov and Fr Pavel Florensky.26

In the pre-revolutionary Russia, theology was mostly taught at church-run schools, seminaries, and theological academies. While theology was introduced into the curriculum of Moscow State University as early as 1819, the academic exchange between the universities and ecclesiastical institutions

25 A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 22–6.
26 The correspondence between Rozanov and Glubokovsky, from 1905 to 1916, was published in Sosud izbrannyi, 71–6, 85–91, 104–7, 136–8; two extant letters of P. Florensky to Glubokovsky, dated October 20, 1917 and March 13, 1919, are also in Sosud izbrannyi, 164–8, 262.
remained very limited. To address this situation, in 1905, Glubokovsky put forth a proposal to open theology departments at state universities, arguing that Russian theological scholarship was mature enough to claim academic credibility, not merely confessional utility. At the same time, Glubokovsky argued for a measure of academic autonomy of the graduate schools of theology from the control of the bishops and the monastic elite. These proposals had to be shelved under the Soviets, who closed down or destroyed most educational institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Glubokovsky was also the author of the first bibliographic study of Russian academic theology, entitled Russian Theological Scholarship in Its Historical Development and Newest Interpretation, finished in 1917 and eventually published abroad in an abridged form more than a decade later. Glubokovsky demonstrated that the historical interpretation of church doctrine was a leading direction of Orthodox pre-revolutionary scholarship. Florovsky’s own patristic scholarship could be understood as broadly following this general trend. Glubokovsky’s survey of academic theological scholarship was an important precursor to Florovsky’s magnum opus, The Ways of Russian Theology (1937).

In 1921, following upon the closure of the St Petersbourg Theological Academy by the Soviet government, Glubokovsky was forced to leave Russia. After a series of arduous migrations, he settled in Sofia, Bulgaria, where he became a member of the theology faculty at the University of St Clement of Ochrid from 1923 until his death in 1937. Florovsky met Glubokovsky for the first time in Prague, in the summer of 1922. Later their paths crossed in Paris, where Florovsky was a full-time professor and Glubokovsky was occasionally a visiting scholar.

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27 Istoriia Moskovskogo universiteta: 1755–1955 (Moscow: Moscow State University, 1955), vol. I, p. 100. Only corporate authorship of the book is given as “Moscow State University.”
28 N. N. Glubokovsky, “K voprosu o postanovke vysshego bogoslovskogo izucheniia v Rossii,” in no editor, Otzyvy eparkhial’nykh arkhiereev po voprosu o tserkovnoi reforme, part III (St Petersburg, 1906). See also Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 482; Vera A. Tarasova, Vysshiaia dakhovnaia shkola v Rossii v kontse XIX-nachale XX veka: istoriia imperatorskikh pravoslavnykh dakhovnykh akademii (Moscow: Novyi khronograf, 2005), 355–6.
29 Glubokovsky, Letter to Rozanov, March 26, 1905, Sosud izbrannyi, 71–6. A limited autonomy was briefly enjoyed by the Moscow Theological Academy, after its President, Bishop Feodor (Pozdeevsky) was removed from the post by Oberprocurator V. N. Lavrov in the spring between the two Revolutions of 1917. See Sergei Volkov, Poslednie u Troitsy: vospominaniiia o Moskovskoi dakhovnoi akademii, 1917–1920 (Moscow/St Petersburg: Dmitri Bulanin, 1995), 50–1. For other attempts to gain autonomy, see V. Tarasova, Vysshiaia dakhovnaia shkola v Rossii v kontse XIX-nachale XX veka, 324–30.
30 Glubokovsky, Russkaia bogoslovskaiia nauka v ee istoricheskom razvitiit i noveischem istolkovanii (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Sviato-Vladimirskogo Bratstva, 2002). The unabridged text of the typescript is in the Russian State Archive and remains unpublished, see Sosud izbrannyi, 174–93.
31 Glubokovsky, Russkaia bogoslovskaiia nauka, 11.
lecturer at the St Sergius Theological Institute.\textsuperscript{33} In 1930, Florovsky published his essay “The Death on the Cross” in a Festschrift celebrating forty years of Glubokovsky’s scholarly career.\textsuperscript{34} Florovsky did not forget that at a formative stage in his life in Odessa, Glubokovsky meticulously responded to his inquiries and even sent his teenage addressee books and articles to read.\textsuperscript{35}

In his introductory letter to Glubokovsky, Florovsky shared his doubts and disappointments, revealed his religious inclinations and academic interests, and asked for the respected scholar’s advice in choosing a direction of his future studies. Florovsky was at the crossroads: he was divided between following his father’s career by completing a course of studies at a theological academy, or heeding the persistent bidding of the relatives on his mother’s side and following the path already trodden by his siblings by pursuing a career at a university. Should he choose a theological academy or a state university, Florovsky asked Glubokovsky?\textsuperscript{36} His addressee cautiously replied that both choices held different benefits for Florovsky’s future.\textsuperscript{37}

As a talented young man, whose academic gifts became apparent early, Florovsky was hoping to dedicate his life to scholarship. Disheartened by the secular character of his education at the gymnasium, Florovsky himself was more inclined towards entering a school of theology than towards a secular university. Since at this point Florovsky did not have immediate plans for becoming a priest, although the thought did cross his mind, he intended to skip the stage of pastoral training by matriculating directly into a theological academy rather than a seminary. In order to accomplish this plan, Florovsky had to pass certain additional examinations. Such a fast track was possible, but not commonly attempted: most students matriculated in the Academies after college or undergraduate seminary.\textsuperscript{38}

Continuing to agonize over his decision, in March 1911, Florovsky also wrote to Pavel Florensky, who had recently become Assistant Professor (\textit{Dotsent}) of Philosophy at the Moscow Theological Academy.\textsuperscript{39} When their

\textsuperscript{33} As a guest lecturer, Glubokovsky taught the New Testament at the Institute. See K. K. Davydov et al., eds, \textit{Sviato-Sergievskoe podvor’e v Parizhe: k 75-letiiu so dnia osnovaniia} (St Petersburg: Aleteia, 1999), 99.


\textsuperscript{35} Florovsky thanks Glubokovsky for sending him scholarly literature in the letters of November 11, 1912 and November 7, 1915, \textit{Sosud izbrannyi}, 123 and 133.

\textsuperscript{36} Florovsky, Letter to N. Glubokovsky, March 30, 1911, \textit{Sosud izbrannyi}, 111.

\textsuperscript{37} Florovsky mentions Glubokovsky’s two responses in his letter to P. A. Florensky, March 16, 1911, \textit{Issledovaniia} (2003), 54.

\textsuperscript{38} One exception was Aleksei Khrapovitsky, future metropolitan Anthony, who apparently undertook his studies at the St Petersburg Theological Academy immediately after the gymnasium. See N. K. Gavriushin, \textit{Russkoe bogoslovie: ocherki i portrety} (Nizhnii Novgorod: Glagol, 2005), 83. The memoirist Sergei Volkov matriculated into the Moscow Theological Academy under similar circumstances: see Volkov, \textit{Poslednie u Troitsy}, 56–7.

\textsuperscript{39} Florovsky’s letters to Florensky were published by Sergei Polovinkin, “Pis’ma G. V. Florovskogo k P. A. Florenskomu (1911–1914),” \textit{Issledovaniia} (2004), 51–68.
correspondence began, Florensky was twenty-nine. Although his major theological works were yet to be published, he was already well-known and respected in Renaissance circles. Like Glubokovsky, Florensky dutifully responded to the aspiring scholar’s inquiries.

Young Florovsky was honored by the attention that he had received from Florensky, who published one of Florovsky’s book reviews in *The Theological Messenger*. The somewhat harsh tone of Florovsky’s later critique of Florensky should not obscure the fact that Florovsky was profoundly influenced by Florensky’s magnum opus, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1912, 1914). As Florovsky acknowledged years later, it was Florensky’s theology that made him turn his attention to the peculiar features of the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing.

At home and in the gymnasium, Florovsky was repeatedly told that his exceptional abilities in history could be better cultivated in the setting of a university, rather than that of a school of theology. Health considerations, rather than his interests, eventually determined his choice. In his youth he suffered from inflammation of his inner ear, which in turn led to blood poisoning, surgeries, and severe damage to the central nervous system. As a result, Florovsky had to stay at home for long periods of time, suffering from “neurasthenia” and “attacks of asthma.” His sickness made it expedient to study closer to home, thereby ruling out the possibility of travelling north to study at one of the theological academies.

While his health improved considerably during young adulthood, his childhood sickness may have contributed to his psychological difficulties with people later in life. He writes revealingly that his disease “has condemned and continues to condemn [him] to solitude.” He felt alienated from his family, which in reality provided an ideal environment for his academic studies. But in Georges’ young mind the matter looked a bit differently: “due to various circumstances I began scholarly life in a strict sense very early (in the sixth grade of the gymnasium) and became satiated. I have never been a child or adolescent, I have not known friends, acquaintances, society, life, or nature.” Even if one allows for an element of exaggeration, the overall

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43 Florovsky, Letter to N. Glubokovsky, May 27, 1910, *Sosud izbrannyi*, 102. In his unpublished interview with A. Blane and T. Bird on April 3, 1969, p. 5, Florovsky admitted this vaguely: “I had a neurosis of everything: heart, stomach. This should not be mentioned in the biography but it explains certain things, strange things to you.”
impression is that of a self-absorbed young mind, disconnected from the rest of the world, and in Byron’s fine phrase, “sacrificed to books.” This sense of a profound psychological disjunction between Florovsky and the world, his family and colleagues, remained throughout his life. When he married, the vital emotional connection was restored in the especially trying moments by his wife and life-long companion, Kseniia Ivanovna Simonova.

Young Florovsky craved to leave Odessa, because of its distance from cultural centers, and, more importantly, because of the growing frictions with his religiously indifferent teachers.45 As he confided in Glubokovsky: “In the realm of ideas I am without a mentor. Already in the gymnasium I produced an impression that I did not need a mentor and that I had outgrown an age of intellectual weakness.”46 Later Florovsky repeatedly claimed that in theology he was an autodidact.47 Such a claim was hardly an admission of his educational limitations. On the contrary, the status of an “autodidact” implied that Florovsky was a child prodigy who quickly outgrew the wisdom of his mentors. This perception of having no mentors, pardonable in a rebellious youth, would follow him into adulthood. Throughout his life, Florovsky tended to downplay the informal guidance of his family and the impact that the personal acquaintance with the leaders of the Renaissance had on his intellectual formation.

Besides, as a self-confessed “amateur” and “autodidact” in theology, Florovsky joined the ranks of such intellectual giants as Khomiakov, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov.48 The academic theology of the Russian pre-revolutionary seminaries, which his father and Glubokovsky embodied, did not put its institutional stamp upon his formation as a theologian. Thus, Florovsky shared his secular university education with many other religious seekers of his time. With a few notable exceptions, such as Florensky, Kartashev, and Zenkovsky, the makers of the Russian Religious Renaissance were likewise trained at the state universities, not at the theological academies.

In young adulthood, Florovsky admitted his “difficulty debating or discussing any question with people who think differently,” adding: “I am almost incapable of appreciating another person’s point of view, of internalizing it,

45 He was prone to exaggerate Odessa’s provincialism in his pre-revolutionary years. See Florovsky, Letter to N. Glubokovsky, August 8, 1918, Sosud izbrannyi, 244; Letter to P. Florensky, July 30, 1912, Issledovania (2003), 58.
46 Florovsky, Letter to N. Glubokovsky, December 28, 1912, Sosud izbrannyi, 126.
47 As Florovsky told his biographer: “I had no regular theological training (if not by my own fault). I am an autodidact in theology, a kind of dilettante, a self-made man, to use an American phrase. I was trained to become a teacher in history and philosophy,” A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 153.
and of offering a higher form of analysis.”

Even allowing for an element of youthful melodrama, it seems that this psychological flaw was behind the epic denunciations of Russian religious thinkers in the harshest possible terms in *The Ways of Russian Theology*. Whatever his early difficulties in defending his point of view and handling conflict, strife would accompany him for the rest of his life, especially when dealing with his Russian peers.

In the same correspondence Florovsky revealed a disturbing side of his intense scholarly work:

> I give myself to my scholarly work entirely. But this does not bring me satisfaction and fear creeps into my heart: I write my essays under a surge of inspiration of sorts, without a clear awareness of the flow and harmonious unity of my thoughts, and being consciously aware only of my final results; in other words, I know what I am writing about, but do not know what I am writing. But the surge of inspiration passes by and nothing comes out of my work, that is, I write but the material has decomposed. The finished work appears alien to me.

This observation, made when the author was only nineteen, could explain the eccentrically hurried, syncopated, and jittery style of his Russian prose, especially in his arguably most creative period of the 1920s and 1930s. The pattern of intense engagement followed by bitter self-alienation marked not only his attitude towards his written work, but also his relations with other people. Throughout his life he felt an almost compulsive need to fracture his most treasured intellectual partnerships at some point, be it the Eurasians, the members of the Brotherhood of St Sophia, his colleagues at the St Sergius Institute, or the faculty and students of St Vladimir’s Seminary. He also infuriated his publishers by violating all conceivable deadlines, sometimes procrastinating for years.

In *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky claimed that the most promising trends of modern Orthodox thought were nothing but dead-ends. It could be asked, was he evaluating the trends in question, or the growing frustration of what he perceived as the “decomposition” of his own scholarly work? While it would be unfair to reduce Florovsky’s negative theological judgment to psychological oddities alone, the problem, which he self-diagnosed in 1912, did not go away with time; arguably, it only grew worse. While *The Ways of Russian Theology* was not autobiographical, his choice of words bore the distinctive stamp of his own psychological make-up. As some of his unpublished correspondence reveals, his critique of the Russian Religious Renaissance tended to become more extreme over the years.

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Florovsky wrote to Glubokovsky and Florensky not only because he was divided over the future venue of his studies, but also because he was conflicted about the focus of his scholarship. He related his fascination with the history of early Christianity as well as contemporary Russian religious philosophy. Both subjects at once attracted him and gave him pause. As far as early Church history was concerned, already in 1911 he became interested in the study of Christian origins, especially in the relation between early Christianity and Hellenistic culture. Young Florovsky’s interest in patristics was stimulated by the historical scholarship of Aleksei Lebedev (1845–1908). Lebedev’s accessible and engaging style drew other gifted students to the study of church history, including such scholars as Glubokovsky and Aleksandr Dobroklonsky (1856–1937). Glubokovsky credited Lebedev with bringing Russian historical scholarship to the attention of an international scholarly community.

Glubokovsky’s essay “Orthodoxy in Its Essence” (1913) influenced Florovsky’s later articulation of Christian Hellenism as a key component of the neopatristic synthesis. In this essay, initially published in the American journal, The Constructive Quarterly, and intended for a western readership, Glubokovsky introduced Christian Hellenism as one of the main historical expressions of the Orthodox faith that came to fruition in Byzantium. Glubokovsky cautioned that Christian Hellenism should not be turned into a program of cultural dominance of the Patriarchate of Constantinople over the other historical patriarchates, including those of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Moscow. When freed from its nationalist and imperialist overtones, Christian Hellenism was a noble expression of Orthodox faith, rooted in the foundational beliefs of early Christianity. In the same article, Glubokovsky contrasted Christian Hellenism, as accepted in Orthodox historiography, with the nineteenth-century attempts of Protestant scholars to separate “the essence of Christianity”—here Glubokovsky alluded to Adolf von Harnack’s Das Wesen des Christentums—from what they considered to be the pagan accretions of Hellenism.

In Florovsky’s works written in the 1920s and later, Christian Hellenism would be identified with the perennial philosophy of the Greek Church.

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51 Florovsky, Letter to N. Glubokovsky, March 30, 1911, Sosud izbrannyi, 111. Later, however, Florovsky dismissed Lebedev as a mere popularizer of the western approaches to church history. See Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 373–5.

Fathers that needed to be recovered in contemporary Orthodox theology. Following Glubokovsky, Florovsky would contrast his understanding of Christian Hellenism with Harnack’s interpretation of Hellenization as a corruption of the gospel’s message. But unlike Glubokovsky, Florovsky as a rule disregarded the unseemly political and nationalist side of Christian Hellenism.

Florovsky’s review of Glubokovsky’s “Orthodoxy in Its Essence” was the young scholar’s first foray into the domain of church history. This review revealed the general direction that Florovsky’s study of patristic theology would later acquire. He already showed little interest in what he called “pure history,” a plain historical exposition with no immediate bearing upon contemporary theology. Instead, he turned to the study of the Church Fathers in order to uncover the blueprints for present-day theological thinking. Florovsky construed Eastern Orthodoxy as providing a “synthesis” of the “centripetal” tendencies of Catholicism and the “centrifugal” tendencies of Protestantism. According to this scheme, first proposed by Aleksei Khomiakov, Catholicism imposed unity at the expense of freedom, Protestantism offered freedom at the expense of unity, whereas Orthodoxy successfully integrated both unity and freedom. In this instance, the category of a “synthesis” had a distinctly Hegelian ring to it: the Catholic thesis (unity without freedom) was matched by the Protestant antithesis (freedom without unity) and transcended in the Orthodox synthesis (free unity of love). At this stage, Florovsky was prepared to conceive of the Orthodox theological “synthesis” in Hegelian-Khomiakovian terms.

53 In his essay “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church” (1959), CW IV: 11–30, Florovsky draws extensively upon Glubokovsky’s “Orthodoxy in Its Essence,” arguing that normative for Orthodoxy is the Christological dogma of the patristic period, not the seventeenth-century confessions of faith, written in response to distinctly Western doctrinal debates.

54 In one instance, Florovsky did warn against the danger of understanding his program as a justification of Greek phyletism: see Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 509.

55 Florovsky submitted this review to The Theological Messenger, but Florensky decided against its publication. The text of the review was published by Sergei Polovinkin, “Invectiva skoree, chem kritika: Florovskii i Florenskii,” Issledovaniia (2004), 66–8. Polovinkin argues that it was the rejection of this review that caused Florovsky to be exceedingly critical of Florensky’s Pillar and the Ground of Truth years later. While this may have been a factor, theological disagreement was a primary source of Florovsky’s irritation. Florovsky criticized Florensky for lack of Christological focus, echoing a similar criticism previously voiced by Berdyaev: see Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 495–6.

The philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov had a formative impact on Florovsky’s young mind. As Florovsky stated in his letter to Florensky: “Vl. Solovyov was my first teacher of religious philosophy.”⁵⁷ Years later Florovsky recalled: “I read Soloviov . . . when I was sixteen, was awakened, troubled, fascinated and impressed.”⁵⁸ Florovsky was captivated by Solovyov’s philosophy of all-unity and his theory of integral knowledge. The influence of Solovyov’s *Philosophical Foundations of Integral Knowledge* (1877) is evident in Florovsky’s earliest surviving piece of writing, his first letter to Glubokovsky. Florovsky related his youthful search for a “religious synthesis” (*religioznyi sintez*), adding that such a synthesis was lacking in his education at the gymnasium.⁵⁹ Florovsky rejected a secular approach to education in favor of Solovyov’s panreligious approach to all aspects of human life. Florovsky complained that his desire for such a “religious synthesis” met with the resistance of his siblings, who were satisfied with the pursuit of purely secular learning.

It would be tempting to read Florovsky’s later program of the neopatristic synthesis into his youthful musings about the “religious synthesis.” But such an interpretation would be anachronistic, since the “religious synthesis” which Florovsky sought in his youth had little to do directly with patristic theology. The concept of the “religious synthesis” reflected a common aspiration of the Renaissance leaders to integrate the artistic, cultural, and philosophical dimensions of life with the religious dimension. In one of his earliest sketches of Russian intellectual history, the 1912 article “From the Past of Russian Thought,” nineteen-year-old Florovsky accorded to Solovyov the central role in the development of Russian philosophy. Searching for the distinctive features of emerging Russian philosophical tradition, Florovsky singled out Solovyov’s concept of “integral knowledge” as the guiding principle and the most original idea of Russian philosophy. He even postulated a distinctive “school of integral knowledge,”⁶⁰ established by Solovyov and continued by his followers. At the time, Florovsky held that Solovyov’s epistemology of integral knowledge and his metaphysics of all-unity were in line with patristic theology.

Nonetheless, Solovyov’s mystical and theosophical side troubled Florovsky. This worry only grew as Florovsky continued to read the works of Solovyov’s followers:

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⁵⁸ “The Renewal of Orthodox Theology, Florensky, Bulgakov and the Others,” unpublished typescript, p. 3, GFP PUL, Box 5, folder marked “*.”
Over the last months [of late 1910 and early 1911], I have been fascinated by the works of the new Russian philosophers of the Solovyovan school—Bulgakov, Berdyaev, prince Trubetskoy, and professor of the Moscow Theological Academy, Florensky. While I found many bright ideas, many explanations of essential things, many rays of light poured in the realm of the dark and the unknown, I also felt a certain fear welling up deep inside me. Among other things, I had a strange perception of the existence of the evil spirits and their involvement in human life. More generally, I felt a dread of the supernatural, disclosed in divine things, even in prayer, in love, in everything.\(^\text{61}\)

On the one hand, Florovsky was drawn into the world of Solovyov and the Renaissance leaders—Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Florensky—devoured their writings, interiorized their questions, and was captivated by their ideas. But on the other hand, Florovsky was deeply troubled by their theosophical and mystical explorations. Any form of religious experience that was not explicitly sanctioned by the Orthodox Church appeared to Florovsky as a sort of a spiritual minefield, fraught with mortal dangers.\(^\text{62}\) Underlying these deep suspicions was a concern for doctrinal orthodoxy and a psychological disposition that Florovsky described as his “dread of the supernatural.” This visceral fear was not just a youthful feeling, but his recurrent state.\(^\text{63}\) It is simply astonishing that despite his emphasis on “ecclesial experience” as the main source of Christian doctrine, he rarely, if at all, addresses the content of this experience, especially its mystical dimension. It appears that the “dread of the supernatural,” which Florovsky experienced as a teenager, made later engagement of the particular content of any religious experience, whether sanctioned or not sanctioned by the Church, a forbidden subject.

**FLOROVSKY’S UNIVERSITY STUDIES**

The two central scholarly interests of Florovsky’s life, Russian intellectual history and patristic theology, had surfaced remarkably early in his scholarly


\(^{63}\) Less than a month after his confession to Glubokovsky, Florovsky wrote to Florensky: “I feel very peculiar now; I have almost no perception of the reality of my surroundings, of my closeness to people, of sharing something in common with them; simultaneously I sense no inner illumination in the realm of other-worldly things; on the contrary, I have a fear of the supernatural things, of the things that are not sensory or earthly,” Letter to P. A. Florensky, April 22, 1911, *Issledovania* (2003), 55.
career, when he was about seventeen, two years before he entered the university. But his subsequent studies at Novorossiiskiy University took him in other directions: natural sciences, languages, history, philosophy, Russian literature, and so on. Positivism provided a virtually uncontested philosophical platform for the study of all disciplines. The critique of positivism and materialism undertaken by the Renaissance leaders in *The Problems of Idealism* did not make a palpable impact on academic life in Odessa. While Florovsky read the idealist philosophers on his own, there were no champions of idealism among his university mentors.

As a college student, Florovsky applied himself to the study of natural sciences and even published a paper on physiology. His mentor, the noted experimental psychologist Nikolai Lange (1858–1921), himself a positivist, allowed his gifted student considerable latitude in his philosophical studies. Years later, Florovsky recalled that the most valuable part of his undergraduate education was his own independent reading in the history of ancient Greek and modern European philosophies. His proficiency in these fields is manifest on every page of his work in patristics and Russian intellectual history. Florovsky also emphasized that it was his first-hand knowledge of the primary philosophical sources that secured his later intellectual independence from the prevailing philosophical currents of the Russian Religious Renaissance.

As for his independent study of early Christian history, no one at Novorossiisky University could properly support his work in this area. The university curriculum provided no place for the study of theological disciplines. As he later reminisced:

I was forgiven my interest in religion because I was the son of a priest. But still I was considered a peculiar man, a strange boy, especially in the Department of Letters. The only encouragement I had was from certain professors of science and especially from professors of pure mathematics who were regarded by their colleagues as also a bit...what in Russian is called *tronutyi*, a bit confused, touched, as from illness.

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65 Florovsky, unpublished incomplete transcript of a lecture with a missing title, beginning with the words “…Actually about two major groups […]”, pp. 9–10, GFP PUL, Box 5, f. "Reviews without date or place of publication."

While his professors could not offer any help in theological subjects, his academically advanced family, especially his father, who had a graduate training in church history, and his brother, Antony, who specialized in Russian history, provided an environment conducive to the historical study of theology.

CONCLUSION

Florovsky’s pedigree uniquely positioned him for his future leadership in the Russian Religious Renaissance. His family was a microcosm of the Renaissance’s endeavor to bring the representatives of the Church into dialogue with the representatives of the religiously seeking intelligentsia. Later in life, Florovsky would invariably wear a beret and a cassock, reflecting two sides of his personality. The beret was a recognizable attribute of the Russian intelligentsia. Cassocks were worn only by the Orthodox clergy. The members of intelligentsia stayed away from cassocks and the members of the clergy as a rule avoided berets. But Florovsky united both worlds in himself (see the photo on the front cover of this book).

The discovery of Solovyov and his Renaissance followers inspired Florovsky to pursue a religious synthesis consisting in the integration of secular and religious knowledge. Torn between a theological academy and a university, Florovsky ended up receiving a secular education that was not conducive to the pursuit of theological subjects. Florovsky’s Odessa, despite its cosmopolitan spirit and intellectual vibrancy, was not directly affected by the Russian Religious Renaissance. During his Russian period (1893–1920), young Florovsky’s acquaintance with the Renaissance was mostly restricted to books and epistolary contacts, such as those with Glubokovsky and Florensky.

It is in the emigration that his path would cross with those of the most significant Renaissance leaders; from a largely passive recipient of the Renaissance’s ideas he would grow into its relentless critic; his theoretical grasp of the movement would be immensely enriched by personal acquaintance and collaboration, as well as the inevitable conflict and disagreement with the “fathers” of the Renaissance.
The “Fathers” and “Children” of the Renaissance in the Dispersion

Emigration to the West made the meeting with the West unavoidable, much as many would have wanted to remain in their own habitual mental world.¹

The Russian Religious Renaissance was permanently marked by the social trauma of the Revolution. Because of emigration that followed upon the Revolution, one could divide the Renaissance into the “pre-exilic” period (in Russia, the 1890s–1910s) and the “exilic” period (outside Russia, the 1920s–1940s).² The expulsion of the Renaissance leaders from the new Soviet Russia in the 1920s meant both a disruption of the Renaissance in its homeland and a continuation of the Renaissance abroad. In the dispersion, the process of the intelligentsia’s return to Christianity intensified and acquired a more church-oriented character. As a historical theologian, Florovsky offered his own answer to the challenges of Orthodox theology in exile.

GENERATIONAL TENSIONS

The “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance were born in the 1870s–1880s. They began exerting influence upon Russian society at the turn of the century and remained productive until the end of WWII. Florovsky belonged to the younger generation of the “children” of the Renaissance, born in the 1890s–1900s. By speaking of the “fathers” and “children” of the Renaissance, I intend


² Extending this scheme, one could speak of Russian theology after the Perestroika as the post-exilic period (1990s to the present). Much is expected from the post-Soviet Russian and Ukrainian theological scholarship in the twenty-first century.
to retain the association with a classic portrayal of Russian generational tensions in Ivan Turgenev’s novella *Fathers and Children* (1862). Florovsky also occasionally turned to this theme, contrasting effete, reflective, and politically flaccid Turgenevan “fathers” of the 1840s, with the less culturally refined, pragmatic, action-oriented, and politically radical “children” of the 1860s. Florovsky’s Russian contemporaries could not fail to recognize in the two Turgenevan generations the mirror-images of themselves. By extension, the generation of the 1910s–1920s, which included Alexander Schmemann and John Meyendorff, could be counted as that of the “grandchildren” of the Renaissance, whose understanding of the movement was shaped by the “children” of the Renaissance, Florovsky and V. Lossky.

Florovsky’s spiritual and intellectual development followed a trajectory quite different from that of the “fathers” of the Renaissance. Unlike them, Florovsky had never been drawn to Marxism, or to any other socio-economic theory, for that matter. Instead, his analysis of Byzantine and Russian culture focused almost exclusively on philosophical and religious factors, largely ignoring economic and geopolitical factors, a conscious choice, but also an omission for which he was criticized. Moreover, unlike the majority of the Renaissance “fathers,” Florovsky had never left the Church and, therefore, could not identify with their experience of the “return of the prodigals.” Unlike Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and N. Lossky, Florovsky never experienced a loss of his childhood faith. Florovsky’s doubts were of a different kind. As Anatoly Cherniaev has recently shown, hidden

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3 The Russian title is *Ottsy i deti*. Using the term “father” is not meant to exclude prominent women who contributed to the Renaissance. These included personalities as different as Zinaida Hippius and Margarita Morozova and, among the “daughters” of the Renaissance, a nun Maria Skobtsova (1891–1945), recently proclaimed a saint.

4 See e.g. G. P. Fedotov, “Pravoslavnyi nigelizm ili pravoslavnaia kul’tura?,” in *Rossiia, Evropa i my: sbornik statei* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1973), vol. II: 9–10. S. Bulgakov described generational differences in his letter to A. V. Stavrovsky of October 1, 1924: “Our difference lies in the historical orientation, age, as well as cultural intensity and as a result in a certain inevitable divergence of language and cultural psychology. As I am quite aware, this difference is qualified in relation to us as a certain indecisiveness and half-heartedness, as opposed to willful radicalism of the young [generation]; on our part, we perceive [this difference] as barbarization, trendism (*napravlenchestvo*) and dangerous religious syncretism. To be sure, youth has the right, and in a certain sense even responsibility to be straightforward, which would have been intolerable camouflage for the old men of the older generation; youth may inevitably fall into trendism. Nevertheless, we should and must overcome the tensions of ‘the fathers’ and ‘children’ of the previous times,” *Voprosy filosofii*, 10 (1994), 160–1.


behind the self-confident façade was a deeply conflicted and emotionally lonely man, who for many years could not find his true calling. Cherniaev perceptively correlated a period of intellectual wanderings of the older generation away from the Church with the early period of Florovsky’s scholarly career (1913–1925), during which he was searching for an intellectual center of gravity outside theology. 8  

It should be recalled that Florovsky was reared in a family belonging to the Russian academic and ecclesiastical establishment. Owing to this background, in the debates with the Renaissance “fathers,” Florovsky would position himself as someone who was entitled to speak on behalf of the Church and who functioned as a guardian of orthodoxy. No one officially granted this gate-keeping role to him; yet he assumed it quite naturally, a posture that became especially evident in his confrontations with his Orthodox colleagues during ecumenical meetings and in other public settings. This posture generated Nicholas Lossky’s remark that Florovsky was “the most Orthodox of all Orthodox theologians.” 9 Whatever he said, Florovsky always projected unshakable confidence in the soundness of his cause, the theological dimension of which he characterized as entering and acquiring the mind of the Church Fathers.

The “fathers” of the Renaissance became respected cultural leaders and established scholars while still in Russia. As was common before the Bolshevik Revolution, they spent years studying abroad. The scholarly careers of Florovsky’s generation were disrupted by WWI, the Russian Revolutions (January 1905, February 1917, and October 1917), and the Civil War. Upon completing his undergraduate degree in 1916, in the midst of the Civil War, Florovsky continued his graduate work in the history of philosophy and Russian literature at Novorossiisky University amidst a shortage of the basic necessities of life, such as food supplies and heating.

Two months after the Bolshevik coup of October 1917, Florovsky registered a common feeling of brokenness: “We, the young generation, lack the clarity of spirit and the freshness of strength; we feel broken, thrown out of life. I say ‘we,’ because my feelings are shared by my acquaintances and those who were left at the [Novorossiisky] University.” 10 Although he successfully completed his graduate examinations in Odessa, the writing of his master’s thesis was interrupted by his family’s evacuation from Russia. The circumstances were so dire that Florovsky had to leave his library, including the precious drafts of his

8 See A. V. Cherniaev, G. V. Florovskii kak filosof russkoi mysli (Moscow: IFRAN, 2010).
unpublished research articles, in Russia. Florovsky’s family was reduced to subsistence living and had to make drastic career changes in order to survive. The access to basic scholarly resources, such as books, journals, and archival material often required major efforts. To compensate for the dearth of resources, Florovsky routinely borrowed books from his colleagues. As the resources could only remain in his possession for short periods of time, he often could not properly document the works that were no longer at his disposal. This partly accounts for the fact that his historical works of the European period, especially The Ways of Russian Theology and patrology lectures, often lacked proper documentation.

Considered from a different angle, however, the ever-changing geographic and intellectual landscape of Florovsky’s life, unlike the secure life that he used to live in the pre-revolutionary Odessa, provided a tremendous boost for his creative work. As an intellectual, Florovsky thrived on cognitive dissonance and conflict, for which the life in the Diaspora afforded many opportunities. His theological vision, like that of his contemporaries, was born out of the experience of crisis and dislocation. In contrast to the older generation, Florovsky’s younger contemporaries favored stability in matters of faith over reform, spiritual sobriety over inebriating creativity, clear guidance over ambiguity, traditional Orthodoxy over modernist experimentation.

THE EXPULSION OF THE RENAISSANCE LEADERS
FROM THE BOLSHEVIK RUSSIA

In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, from 1917 to 1925, more than one million people left the Russian Empire. The majority eventually settled

11 Florovsky, Letter to Irzhi Polivka, July 6, 1921, Slavianovedenie, 4 (1999), 95.
12 E.g. Florovsky, Letter to Irzhi Polivka, August 11, 1922; Letter to Anne Spalding, February 27, 1940.
13 It should be noted that there were voices among Florovsky’s generation that do not easily fit my schematization of generational differences. These voices include, for example, Pavel Evdokimov (1901–1970), Nicholas Arsen’ev (1893–1966), and Lev Zander, who could be more accurately characterized as transitional figures.
14 Efim I. Pivovar, Rossiiskoe zarubezh’e: sotsial’no-istoricheskii fenomen, rol’ i mesto v kul’turo-istoricheskom nasledii (Moscow: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2008), 82–4, discusses different estimates, ranging from 1.5 to more than two million, emphasizing that the exact figure is difficult to establish. R. G. Shmaglit, Russkoe zarubezh’e v XX veke: 800 biografii (Moscow: Ast, 2007), 6, puts the total at three million. M. Raeff, Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 202–3, gives the statistical data on Russian emigration by country. It should be noted that pre-revolutionary emigration was numerically larger. From the second half of the nineteenth century until 1917, an estimated 4.2 million left the country, 95% heading for the US and Canada. See Raeff, Russia Abroad, 6.
in different European counties, while some also headed for Turkey, China, the United States, and Canada. The major centers of the Russian dispersion included Constantinople, Sofia, Prague, Berlin, Paris, Belgrade, New York, Toronto, Shanghai, and Harbin. In the 1920s, much academic activity of the Russian emigration was associated with Prague, as well as Sofia, Belgrade, and Berlin. Towards the mid-1920s, Paris became a center of cultural and intellectual life. As Florovsky moved between different European centers—Sofia, Prague, Paris, and Belgrade—the character of his academic engagements changed. The scope of his scholarly work also expanded from Russian intellectual history to patristics and ecumenical studies.

After the Revolution, the Bolsheviks were particularly concerned to get rid of those who could be suspected of potentially undermining their regime: aristocracy, former government administrators and military commanders, clergy, public intellectuals, and cultural elite. Those who were not immediately involved in politics had somewhat greater chances of survival.

In January 1920, as the Soviet government strengthened its grip on Crimea, Florovsky’s parents decided to leave Russia. The Renaissance leaders who fled the country during the Civil War included Kartashev, Zenkovsky, Merezhkovsky, and Hippius. Still others were expelled from Russia in the following years.

Especially conspicuous among those expelled was a group of religious philosophers and public intellectuals, which included N. Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov, N. Lossky, S. Frank, L. Karsavin, and F. Stepun. In August 1922, Berdyaev was arrested, secretly interrogated at night by the dreaded head of the Soviet Secret Service (GPU), Felix Dzerzhinsky, and ordered to pack his bags for Berlin. Nicholas Lossky (the father of Vladimir Lossky) recalled how during the interrogation which led to his family’s expulsion from Soviet Russia, a young officer told him matter-of-factly: “Our superiors decided to send you abroad, but in my opinion, you should be shot on the spot.” During

15 See P. V. Basinskii and S. R. Fediakin (eds), Sovremennoe russkoe zarubezh’e (Moscow: Astrel’, 2003), 6.
16 Raeff, Russia Abroad, 77.
17 In his foundational study Russia Abroad, Marc Raeff demonstrates that the majority of emigrants came from the working class, not from the elites, as is sometimes portrayed.
18 For the story of trials and tribulations suffered by Merezhkovsky and Hippius during their flight from Bolshevik Russia to Poland, see Z. Hippius, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii (Paris: YMCA Press, 1951), 251–72.
19 For the discussion of the process of expulsion, see Sergei Horuzhy, Posle pereryva. Puti russkoi filosofii (St Petersburg: Aleteia, 1994), 189–208, with the list of thirteen philosophers on p. 201.
Stalin’s purges of the 1930s, this officer’s line of thinking became a standard government policy.

For Bulgakov, the last years spent in Russia were equally trying: “After the occupation of Crimea by the Bolsheviks in 1920, I did not join the general evacuation and stayed in my country. Before me passed the horrors of the red terror, the atrocious famine and the first wave of the persecution of the Church, which resulted in the confiscation of ecclesiastical possessions and the foundation of the Living Church. In 1922, I served at a parish in Yalta in complete theological solitude. I envisioned ending my days there, having dedicated my remaining efforts to pastoral work.” But Bulgakov was too prominent a figure to remain untouched by the brutal regime. He was arrested by the Bolsheviks in August 1922 and for several months detained in the quarters of the Yalta police department, where he occasionally witnessed how the “enemies of the revolution” were being shot in the building’s courtyard by the drunken officers of the Red Army.

In his memoirs, Bulgakov recalled the circumstances under which his fate was decided by the Soviet government in the following exchange with the officer in charge of his case:

OFFICER: “Is your name Bulgakov, ... Sergius Bulgakov?”
BULGAKOV: “Yes.”
OFFICER: “Are you the author of ‘Marx as a Religious Type’?”
BULGAKOV: “Yes, I am.”
OFFICER: “We have decided to send you to China.”
I [BULGAKOV] WAS TERRIFIED, AND PLEADED: “This is impossible. I was told that I am to be sent to Constantinople!”
OFFICER: “No, Constantinople would be too good for you. We will send you to China. Let’s discuss this matter later.”

During the next interrogation the same officer tried to entice Bulgakov into the service of the Soviet state with an offer of a high post in Moscow. When Bulgakov proved uncooperative, he was ordered to pack his bags for Constantinople, from which he then moved on to Prague, and eventually settled in Paris. As others, he was forbidden to return to Russia under the penalty of execution. Bulgakov put the matter astringently: “As she was herself rotting in a casket, Russia expelled me as useless, having branded me with the mark of a slave.” The arbitrary cruelty of government policy had its logic: the leaders of the religious intelligentsia were shown who was in charge in new Russia.

24 S. Bulgakov, “Iz dnevnika,” in Tikhie dumy (Moscow: Republika, 1996), 351.
The experience of having been banished from one’s own country would scar Bulgakov’s generation permanently. Reflecting on this collective trauma in 1930, Florovsky wrote:

It is especially tragic that several years ago, by the order of the Soviet authorities, a large group of Russian philosophers was expelled from its own country. They were exiled specifically as philosophers. This was a symbolic gesture, signifying the denial of creativity and freedom. Philosophy became useless and forbidden in Soviet Russia precisely because philosophical pathos and creativity are the expressions of spiritual freedom. The Soviet lifestyle, on the contrary, is a willful rejection and extinguishing of the free spirit.

The expatriates who dared to return were either punished or shot. Occasionally, the Soviet government permitted an adult member of the expelled family to remain in Russia. This was not a benevolent gesture, but a cunning political maneuver: the family member who was retained in Russia could conveniently serve, if necessary, as a hostage. In this way, Bulgakov’s oldest son, Fyodor (1902–1991), a young artist, was retained in Russia on the grounds that he could be drafted to serve in the army. Fr Sergius often agonized over his son’s fate during the periods when he received no letters from Russia. Bulgakov’s family would never see Fyodor again.

Similarly, when the Florovsky family moved to Sofia in 1920, the two elder brothers, Vasily and Antony, were left behind in Odessa. Antony would be eventually expelled from Russia in September 1922 by the order of the Soviet government. But Vasily remained in the country, where he continued to work as an army surgeon. He died of tuberculosis, age 43, during the great famine following the Civil War. This war was a humanitarian disaster of epic proportions. For example, in 1921 alone, nearly five million people died of starvation caused by the Bolshevik confiscation of the food reserves in the region of the Ural Mountains and Volga River Valley.

The fate of the Renaissance leaders who stayed in Russia was tragic. In 1919, in the midst of the Civil War, forgotten and demoralized, Rozanov died of malnutrition. Florensky was arrested on fictitious charges during the time of Stalin’s purges, sent to Siberia, and eventually executed by the secret tribunal in 1937. In the same year, Kievan philosopher Gustav Shpet (1879–1937)
perished in the Gulag under similar circumstances. A prominent historian of antiquity and philosopher Aleksei Losev (1893–1988) was also sent to the labor camp, but survived it at the cost of nearly losing his sight. As I discuss in chapter 5, Florovsky drew on Shpet’s interpretation of Alexander Herzen’s personalist philosophy as well as on his master narrative of Russian religious thought. Florovsky closely followed Losev’s historical account of personalism and his work in ancient Greek aesthetics.

Philosopher Lev Karsavin (1882–1952) was expelled from Russia in 1922, together with other important religious thinkers. In the mid-1920s, he associated with the Eurasian movement, fulfilling some of the functions that were previously delegated to Florovsky. He also briefly taught patristics at the St Sergius Institute, before Florovsky replaced him. In 1927, Karsavin moved to Lithuania, which during WWII passed under Soviet control. In 1949, he was arrested on the fabricated charges of crimes against the state, sentenced to hard labor and died of tuberculosis in a Siberian labor camp three years later.29

Ivan Lagovsky (1889–1941) was in the 1920s Florovsky’s colleague at the St Sergius Institute and the editor of The Messenger of the Russian (Student) Christian Movement journal, but later moved to Estonia. After the Soviet Army’s invasion of Baltic countries, he was arrested by Stalin’s secret police and executed.

By banishing the religious philosophers abroad, Lenin not only disrupted, but also preserved the Russian Religious Renaissance from annihilation.30 Stalin was not as humane. It is estimated that the total number of all those killed during his dictatorship (1924–1953) was more than six million.31

BUILDING UP RUSSIA ABROAD

The chances of survival were higher abroad than back in Soviet Russia, although life in emigration was also full of deprivation and suffering. The painful experience of dislocation, rejection, and permanent exile was shared by all former Russian citizens who found themselves in the dispersion. Writing in 1925, Nicholas Berdyaev summarized this experience aphoristically: “The

Russian dispersion is a unique phenomenon. In its scope it can only be compared to the Jewish Diaspora.” Berdyaev’s apt comparison could be elaborated further. For the ancient Israelites, the profound historical trauma of the Babylonian exile provided an impetus for the recording, selection, and preservation of the Torah and prophetic writings. Faced with the loss of the two crucial identity markers—the Promised Land and the Jerusalem Temple—the exiled Jewish people had to define themselves in the context of a foreign Babylonian civilization. The exile held out the dangers of assimilation and provided opportunities for cultural cross-fertilization. The nation’s leaders also struggled with the question whether the Jews who remained in Palestine or those who settled in Babylon could claim to better represent ancient Israel. While traumatic and disruptive, the Babylonian captivity stimulated a more deliberate articulation of the Jewish identity.

The forced relocation of the former Russian citizens to the West, although a different kind of exile, had the similar effect of bringing into focus the problem of articulating and preserving the émigré community’s identity. The exiled Russians fought two formidable cultural forces at once: the assimilation to the western patterns of life in the exile, and the destruction of the cultural and religious traditions of pre-revolutionary Russia at home. They were cut off from their roots, deprived of their homes, and rejected by their own countrymen. In the dispersion, they felt a need to defend, preserve, and disseminate Russia’s cultural heritage until such time as it could be reclaimed at home. They fought for social space and recognition, engaged in a variety of cultural initiatives, and, against all financial odds, started new institutions. They lectured at European universities on Russian history and culture, held concerts of Russian music and exhibitions of Russian art, promoted Russian literature, theatre, and ballet.

They opened primary schools for children with most of the instruction offered in Russian, built churches, launched new publishing ventures and scholarly associations.

The historical import of these efforts, as far as Russian religious philosophy was concerned, did not escape Florovsky:

It could be said that Russian philosophical “dispersion” is a unified whole, despite its manifold and often competing trends. Russian thinkers abroad are not isolated refugees, but precisely the “dispersion”—the Russian philosophical colony in Europe. They remain the only bearers of creative traditions and heritage of Russian philosophy, which they guard and continue. One could say that the


33 In the 1920–1930s, five Russian institutions of higher learning were founded in Prague, six in Harbin, and eight in Paris: see A. A. Bondarev, V. V. Kholin, A. V. Popov, et al., eds, Emigratsiia i repatriatsiia v Rossi (Moscow: Popechitel’stvo o nuzhdakh rossiiskikh repatriantov, 2001), 55.
Russian philosophical “dispersion” means a new moment, a new stage of the common historical destiny of Russian thought.\textsuperscript{34}

As a young member of the “Russian philosophical colony,” Florovsky became involved in several émigré undertakings. In 1922, Pavel Novgorodtsev, a prominent Russian legal scholar, founded and became the head of the Russian Law Faculty at Charles University in Prague. In the same year, Florovsky relocated to Prague in order to defend his master’s thesis and teach at this newly created Law School. Petr Struve established and became the general editor of an important political émigré magazine \textit{Russian Thought (Russkaia Mysl’)}, to which Florovsky occasionally contributed essays and book reviews. With financial help from the YMCA, the Russian Religious Philosophical Academy was started by Berdyaev in Berlin in 1922, and moved to Paris in 1924, when the founder himself relocated to the French capital. Florovsky was on occasion invited to offer public lectures at the Academy in Paris.

Berdyaev also founded the League of Russian Culture, which for many years functioned as a theological summer institute for students and young adults. Boris Vysheslavtsev and Berdyaev co-edited the extremely influential journal \textit{The Way (Put’}, 1925–1940), to which Florovsky contributed articles and book reviews. Nicholas Zernov (1898–1980), Vasily Zenkovsky, and Sergius Bulgakov played the leading roles in the Russian Student Christian Movement, which had held annual meetings since 1923. Florovsky and young Alexander Schmemann participated in these meetings.

Florovsky also took an active part in the ecumenical movement since its inception and played a leading role in articulating, explaining, and defending the Orthodox position in the eyes of the Christian West. Since 1929, at the invitation of a prominent Anglican churchman, Bishop Charles Gore (1853–1932), and Bulgakov, Florovsky regularly participated in the meetings of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius. As an intellectual, Florovsky was stimulated as much by the initiatives that he supported as by the projects and thinkers with whom he eventually parted ways.

With the help of American, British, and European friends, vigorous publishing activities continued unabated until WWII in the fields of literature, poetry, political thought, Russian history, philosophy, and theology.\textsuperscript{35} For those who wrote exclusively in Russian, the readership was gradually shrinking, since the chances of being read behind the Iron Curtain were diminishing.

\textsuperscript{34} Florovsky, “Russkaia filosofia v emigratsii,” p. 2, GFP PUL, Box 2, f. 4.

\textsuperscript{35} Antony Florovsky, “The Work of Russian Émigrés in History (1921–1927),” \textit{SR}, 7 (1928), 216–19, reported that 500 essays and books were written by émigré scholars on Russian history, despite the financial constraints and the inaccessibility of the archival material in Russia (p. 216). Regarding the vital foreign financing of the St Sergius Institute, see also Donald A. Lourie, \textit{Saint Sergius Institute in Paris: The Orthodox Theological Institute} (London: SPCK, 1954), 71–89; M. Raeff, \textit{Russia Abroad}, 73–94.
every year. Concomitantly, the most prominent of the exiled Russian thinkers, such as Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Florovsky, Trubetskoy, Stepun, Nikolai and Vladimir Lossky, gained a new audience among the western intellectuals by publishing not only in Russian, but also in the European languages. As a rule, the “children” of the Renaissance made the linguistic shift more readily than did the “fathers.” A measure of émigré integration into the host culture was for some a conscious choice, but for most a matter of survival.

This veritable fury of émigré activity could be seen as an uphill battle for cultural self-preservation and as a herculean attempt at retaining collective memory. The Revolution was a trauma, a tragedy, and a cultural disruption, but the Bolshevik takeover did not put an end to the Russian Religious Renaissance. Instead, the Renaissance ideas were purified in the fire of the revolutions and tested by the horrific losses of the wars. For most Russian émigrés the decadent exuberance of the Silver Age became a luxury of the past. Against all odds, despite the daily deprivations and tribulations, there was a focusing of spiritual energy in the exile, a new burst of creativity, stimulated in part by the need to combat the forces of assimilation. Merezhkovsky, who formed the “Green Lamp” group in Paris on the model of the former religious-philosophical meetings in St Petersburg, put the matter succinctly: “We are not in exile; we are on a mission.” It was a mission to continue a cultural Renaissance in the exile.

Initially the Russian refugees did not expect to remain abroad permanently. For the first ten years in the dispersion, many hoped that the Bolshevik regime would be overthrown in the near future. But towards the beginning of the 1930s the interventionist hopes faded away. The émigré communities had to come to terms with the fact that the exile would last an indefinite time and could even become permanent. The things that they said, thought, and wrote grew out of this nostalgia, this hope, which gradually turned into disillusionment.

The exiled leaders of the Russian Religious Renaissance were, in biblical terms, a “remnant” of “Holy Russia” in exile, hoping to return home. In his letter to Berdyaev written from Prague, Bulgakov observed with a touch of tragic irony: “In this Russian ghetto I feel like a Russian Jew waiting for his Palestine.” As the years passed by, they came to realize that their “Palestine”

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38 S. Bulgakov, Letter to Berdyaev, May 12, 1923, Bratstvo sviaatoi Sofii, 182.
was finished, that the Soviet regime would last in Russia for a long time, perhaps even become permanent. But in the 1920s, they could not foresee how things would turn out. At the time, the hopes of overthrowing the Bolsheviks ran high in the emigration.

Russian émigré theology was “exilic” to the extent to which it reflected an outlook of a religious and ethnic minority threatened with assimilation. A strong, at times astringently anti-western rhetoric of émigré writings has been aptly called “compensatory nationalism” by Nikolai Trubetskoy, inasmuch as it served as a literary compensation for the Diaspora’s marginal social status and inevitable westernization. In order to regain its sense of identity, Florovsky’s generation turned to the Orthodox Church.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The generation of Bulgakov and Berdyaev reached its spiritual maturity through the experience of wandering from and subsequently returning to the Russian Orthodox Church. The generation of Florovsky did not share in the experience of the prodigals. The outlook of Florovsky’s generation matured in the exile, where the suffering Church required support rather than modernization, faithful service rather than a prophetic word. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the older generation was preoccupied with testing the boundaries of orthodoxy and with shaking the state-supported Church out of its complacency. In contrast, the younger generation faced a different set of circumstances in the exile. The atheistic regime of the Soviets was a massive falling away from the Church. In opposition to this historical choice, the exiles opted for “[en]churching” (*otserkovlenie*), understood as growing into the life, experience, and the mind of the Church. The “enchurching” of the mind was an essential aspect of Florovsky’s theological epistemology. For him, to theologize was to enter into the mind of the Church Fathers, to shed everything that was idiosyncratic, to acquire a catholic consciousness, and to learn

39 For the analysis of this common experience, see A. Arjakovsky, *Zhurnal “Put’*, 57.
40 *Votserkovlenie* is sometimes claimed to be a Russian émigré neologism. This claim is inaccurate. It was apparently Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) who introduced into nineteenth-century Russian literature the Church Slavonic term *otserkovlenie*, which for him described the process of returning Russia to the roots of the Orthodox faith. See Zenkovsky, *Russkie mysliteli i Evropa: kritika evropeiskoi kul’tury u russkikh myslitelei* (Paris: YMCA, 1955), 44. There is a negligible difference between *votserkovlenie* (prefix “vo” indicating the direction “into [the church]”) and *otserkovlenie* (prefix “o” indicating a process of making something or someone acquire the properties of the “church”). The two terms—*votserkovlenie* and *nie*—were used interchangeably in the émigré literature.
how to think with the Church, exercising spiritual sobriety, ascetic effort, and discernment. Such an attitude resonated with the changing understanding of the mission of the Renaissance in the exile.

Before the Revolution, the main goal of the Renaissance was the diffusion of religious themes in culture. The emphasis was on new forms of Christianity, the reform of the Church, and the critique of “historical Christianity.” In the exile, the Renaissance took a more theologically responsible form of the enchurching of culture. For the younger generation, the preservation and defense of Orthodoxy in its more traditional form became a greater priority. In contrast to the generation of the “fathers,” especially the leaders of the avant-garde “new religious consciousness” (Merezhkovsky, Hippius, Rozanov, Minsky, Ternavtsev, and Berdyaev), the “children” (including Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, Myrrha Lot-Borodine, and Basil Krivocheine) maintained that in the West, Orthodoxy needed to be articulated and defended, rather than modernized and reformed.

At home, the Russian Orthodox Church was simultaneously being decimated and co-opted by the Soviets. Because of this complex political situation, both in Russia and abroad the Church was torn by painful divisions, threatening her very existence. In Russia, the main splinter group, which had separated from the official patriarchal Church after the Revolution and had survived until the end of WWII, was called the “Living Church.”

The political shenanigans of this group made the already precarious existence of the official Church even more difficult.

In the dispersion there emerged three ecclesiastical bodies, all laying claims to Russian Orthodox patrimony. The first group was supported by the synod of the bishops who left their dioceses in Russia after the Revolution and took residence in Sremski Karlovci (Serbia, then a part of Yugoslavia). After the death of the Patriarch Tikhon, the new head of the Russian Orthodox Church, metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky declared the Moscow Patriarchate’s “loyalty” to the Bolshevik state. Interpreting the metropolitan’s gesture as a compromise with the atheist regime, the Karlovci synod took the radical step of breaking communion with Moscow and forming an independent church, which became known as the “Russian Orthodox Church Abroad” (ROCA) or the “Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia” (ROCOR). Especially vocal in this group were those who favored a military intervention, an overthrow of the Bolshevik regime, and a restoration of monarchy. Dominated by the traditionalists, the ROCOR opposed the involvement of the

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41 In 1925, this group counted approximately thirty ruling bishops, excluding more than twenty bishops who had died. See the lists of bishops in Sosud izbrannyi, 328–30.
42 ROCOR’s central administration later moved from Karlovci to Munich and then to New York. In 2007, the communion between the Patriarchate of Moscow and the ROCOR was officially restored.
Orthodox leaders in the ecumenical movement. Ever concerned about the dangers of political manipulation of the Church, Florovsky initially distanced himself from the political activities of this group and did not support its insubordination to the Moscow Patriarchate. But when Florovsky and his wife moved to Serbia during WWII, they had to function within this Orthodox jurisdiction and came in contact with its leaders.

The second group, headed by metropolitan Evlogy Georgievsky, at first attempted to retain its canonical affiliation with Moscow, but in 1927 decided to pass into the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The move was intended to signal the group’s neutrality in the controversial matter of the metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky’s declaration of loyalty to the Soviet state. The affiliation with Constantinople did not bring about a change of ethos from Russian to Greek, since the individual ethnic parishes were given much latitude in this matter by the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate. As a rule, the parishes of this group tended to switch more quickly to the vernacular languages in their services than did the émigré congregations of the other two groups. Many leaders of the Russian Religious Renaissance, including Bulgakov, Berdyaev, Zenkovsky, Frank, N. Lossky, and Florovsky, associated with Evlogy’s jurisdiction because they were averse to the political manipulation of the Church, whether by the monarchists or by the Soviets. Florovsky hypothetically considered an autocephaly of the Diaspora church as early as 1925, two years before the metropolitan Evlogy’s disaffiliation from the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1932, Florovsky was ordained a priest in this jurisdiction and later reinstated his ecclesiastical subordination to the Patriarchate of Constantinople after his move to the United States, to the consternation of some nationalists in the Russian émigré community in America.

The third group, considerably smaller in size, was comprised of a handful of parishes that remained under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate.

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43 Florovsky, Letter to P. P. Suvchinsky, December 3, 1923, Istoriia filosofii, 9 (2002), 164; Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii, 93. At one of the meetings of the Brotherhood of St Sophia, Florovsky made the following revealing declaration: “I personally would want to eliminate political elements from church life, but frankly, I realize that this is very difficult,” O polozhenii Tserkvi v Rossii, Minutes of the Brotherhood Meeting in Prague, May 21, 1925, Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii, 81–2. On Florovsky’s critique of the political stance of the ROCOR, see Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii, 96.


45 Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii, 85.

46 The letter from the Archbishop Michael, Greek Orthodox Church of North and South America, of June 2, 1958 (GFP PUL, Box 23, f. 1) documents Florovsky’s affiliation with the Patriarchate of Constantinople.
One Parisian theologian who remained faithful to this jurisdiction was Vladimir Lossky. Due to different jurisdictional loyalties, Florovsky and Lossky did not cooperate as much as one could expect from intellectuals sharing a similar theological vision.

In this period the church, despite its internal troubles, was more than a place of worship: it provided peace in the world torn by wars, offered consolation in the midst of turmoil, and upheld human dignity and unity in the face of dehumanization and alienation. The former state church became a shelter of the persecuted, an abode of the exiles. While the difficulties of the refugee existence did drive some Russians even further away from the church, the majority, especially the younger generation, became more involved in its life. Reflecting on this phenomenon in 1923, Vasily Zenkovsky observed: “In Russian society, among the Russian people the turn towards religion is occurring with indubitable clarity.”47 Zenkovsky went on to explain: “Orthodoxy is now being revealed to the Russian soul as a foundation for the building of wholesome culture, as the only force capable of renewing life and reconciling the contradictions of history.”48 For many exiles, enchurching served as a means of spiritual self-preservation.

Particularly noteworthy in this regard was the rise of the Russian Student Christian Movement, a grassroots organization that provided young believers in the dispersion with much-needed moral support and ties of Christian fellowship.49 Speaking as one of the leaders of the Movement, Florovsky remarked: “We are beginning to return to the Church. All need to return, even those who were born and remained in the Church, for a large part of our existence is still outside of the Church. We must participate in this return intellectually. This is required for the fullness and permanence of our enchurching.”50 In his later addresses to the émigré community, Florovsky especially stressed the doctrinal and intellectual element of enchurching.51

Despite the fragmentations or perhaps partly because of them, church life was vibrant in the dispersion. In fact, the church proved to be one of the most enduring institutions, if not the most enduring institution of Russia Abroad. The church offered a sense of continuity to the uprooted and dispersed communities of the Russian refugees, who were constantly on the move,

48 V. Zenkovsky, ed., Pravoslavie i kultura, 5. The Orthodox Church remained a catalyst of group identity for the emigrants of the subsequent waves too: see Bondarev, Emigratsiia i repatriatsiia v Rossii, 185.
50 Florovsky, “Opravdanie znaniia” [“In Defense of Learning” (1928)], VK, 343–9, at 349. A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 353, translates this title as “The Justification of Knowledge,” which is correct, but conveys a bit more than this brief note achieves.
migrating from one European city to another in search of gainful employment. Florovsky’s own nomadic existence illustrates this pattern. Having spent less than two years in Sofia (1920–1921), where his parents had settled for good, Florovsky and his second older brother, Antony, would move to Prague in December 1921, where there was a promise of teaching at the future Russian Law Faculty at Charles University. Antony, who was more academically advanced than Georges, secured a permanent university post at Charles University and settled in Czechoslovakia for the rest of his life. Georges moved on to Paris in 1926, in order to teach at the newly founded St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute. He spent the war years in Yugoslavia (1939–1946), then briefly moved back to France (1946–1948), and subsequently left for the US in 1948, three years after the end of the war. Despite the problems generated by frequent relocations, as well as the urgent need to find employment and tolerable living conditions, the prewar years in the Dispersion were the most productive and creative period of Florovsky’s career.

THE METAPHOR OF THE “WESTERN CAPTIVITY” OF RUSSIAN THEOLOGY

For the émigrés, the West was no longer a geographically distant reality. On the contrary, western social institutions, its Christian life, and piety, were now a part of the day-to-day existence, the inescapable “Other.” As Florovsky put it: “Emigration to the West made the meeting with the West unavoidable, much as many would have wanted to remain in their own habitual mental world.”52 Florovsky himself had no inclination to isolate himself from the West. His first loyalty was neither to the Russian nation, nor to the glorified Russian past, nor to a political plot of wresting Russia from the clutches of Bolshevism, but to the enduring theological treasures of Orthodoxy, transcending national and political concerns. The central task of expounding Orthodoxy in the West would occupy him for the rest of his life.

The predicament of the exile explains why the metaphor of “western captivity” would have such evocative power in Florovsky’s diagnosis of the pathologies of modern Russian Orthodox theology. As he would come to see the matter, the post-revolutionary banishment of Russians to the West was preceded by another kind of exile. Orthodox theology itself had been corrupted by western influences and had been held intellectually captive in the West for several centuries. Orthodox theology could be freed from its “western captivity” by being brought back to the “land of the Church Fathers.” In

52 Florovsky, “Ecumenics and the Polity of Churches,” 291.
1926, Florovsky put the matter as follows: “Today we face a mission of Orthodox philosophy as a special responsibility. We face the task of returning to the grace-filled land of the Fathers of the universal Church. Such a return would guarantee the rebirth and renewal of life, the healing of our open wounds.” Instead of an expatriation to the new Russia, Florovsky envisioned a spiritual return to the “grace-filled land of the Fathers,” a return conceived not in geo-political terms, but in historical and theological terms. The purpose was to end the stage of intellectual exile and to obtain a true corporate Orthodox identity.

To address the problem of Russia’s confrontation with the West in the new circumstances, the leaders of the Russian European dispersion turned to the paradigmatic nineteenth-century debate between the Westernizers and the Slavophiles, initiated in the 1840s. The Westernizers welcomed Russia’s European integration, which was significantly advanced by the reforms of Peter the Great. The Slavophiles, in contrast, emphasized the non-European distinctiveness of Russia’s historical destiny, enshrined in the country’s folklore, customs, and, above all, the treasures of Eastern Orthodox spirituality. Florovsky saw the present predicament of the dispersion as a confrontation with the West that raised the Slavophile-Westernizers debate to a new level:

It could be said that only now [in the Dispersion] Russia has encountered the real West, the essence of the West, meeting it with open eyes and heart. This is despite the ages of Russian Westernism, which was a departure and even a flight to the West, a denial of Russia. In the final analysis, the Russian Slavophiles understood the West better than the Westernizers did. It was the Slavophiles who perceived the soul of the West, understood and recognized its religious nature.

Unlike the Slavophiles, the Westernizers focused on the secular dimension of the West and, on Florovsky’s reading, failed to appreciate its religious nature. In the discourse of the nineteenth century the “East” and the “West” were used as multivalent, mutually defining symbols. The precise referents of both terms were often rather vaguely expressed. The “West” was commonly associated with individualism, egalitarianism, anthropocentrism, legalism, and rationalism. More concretely, the “West” could refer to German philosophical thought (especially, Idealism and Romanticism), British political economy, French literature and fine arts, as well as the Italian Renaissance and Papacy. Despite its pluriform character, as a rule, the “West” was treated as a monolithic entity. Geographically, the “West” stood in most discussions for Western and Central Europe, as well as Great Britain. It was not clear how North

55 Florovsky, “Vstrecha s Zapadom” (“An Encounter with the West”), unpublished manuscript, GFP PUL, Box 8, no folder number, unnumbered p. 1.
America factored into the conceptualization of the “West.” Interestingly, this lacuna allowed Florovsky to have a surprisingly high regard for American philosophy, especially pragmatism.

In contrast, the “East” was seen as communitarian rather than individualist, hierarchical rather than egalitarian, theocentric rather than anthropocentric, valuing informal personal relations over the letter of the law, privileging intuitive and concrete modes of knowing over discursive and abstract reasoning. The signification of the “East” changed depending on the circumstances. The “East” most commonly referred to Russia, or to Russia’s Asian neighbors, or to both Russia and Asia, or to Russia as shaped by the Byzantine heritage in distinction from Russia as influenced by Western Europe. For Florovsky, the referent of the “East” was the “Byzantino-Slavic world,” an aggregate entity that combined the pre-Bolshevik Russia and the long-gone Byzantium into one cultural unit, with Orthodox faith being the main uniting factor. It was also possible to locate Russia culturally between the East and the West, as did, for example, Chaadaev and V. Solovyov, eschewing the country’s exclusive identification with a single side of the East–West binary opposition. For Florovsky, such a scheme smacked of Hegelian rationalistic historiography (Russia as a “synthesis” of the western “thesis” and the eastern “antithesis”). For this reason, he did not take this option as a serious alternative, which could have allowed for greater dynamism and permeability of the realities to which the categories of “East” and “West” referred.

At different stages, the “Great Debate” between those leaning in the Slavophile direction and those favoring the Westernizer position, was reignited by the captivating portrayals of the “Russian soul” in literature (Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and so on), as well as by the military confrontations between Russia and the western powers. In the dispersion, the “Great Debate” would acquire a new existential dimension. Defining the “West” became a way of indirectly defining oneself against the “Other.” Early in his scholarly career, Florovsky entered the “Great Debate” as a participant in the Eurasian movement.

56 The expression was previously used by Tiutchev: see Florovsky, “Tiutchev i Vladimir Solov’iov,” *PRM*, 344–57.
The Eurasian Temptation

A nation is a group of people united by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbors.¹

In emigration, Florovsky’s family first settled in Sofia, where his aging father initially secured a nominal administrative appointment, which guaranteed some sustenance for the whole family. Without permanent employment, Georges Florovsky gave private lessons, worked at a printing press, and participated in establishing the Russian Religious-Philosophical Society.² To find his own voice in the contentious and fragile intellectual world of the Russian dispersion, Florovsky, then in his mid-twenties, joined a circle of young émigré intellectuals who styled themselves the “Eurasians.” Since Florovsky eventually left the movement, his association with the Eurasians is commonly viewed as having had little impact on his subsequent historical and theological work. However, if we probe beneath the surface, Florovsky’s brief participation in the Eurasian movement holds important clues for understanding his later thought. In fact, he remained attracted to some aspects of the Eurasian teaching, as he understood it, to the end of his life.

THE EURASIAN GROUP

Besides Florovsky, the original Eurasian Group included three young Russian intellectuals: a linguist and geographer prince Nikolai Trubetskoj (1890–1938), a geographer and economist Petr Savitsky (1895–1968), and a musicologist, pianist, literary critic, and philosopher, Count Petr Suvchinsky (1892–1985).³

³ As early as December 1920, Andrei Liven spoke of “the concentration of the Eurasian forces in Constantinople,” implying that the Eurasian idea, if not the movement, had a history prior to the convergence of the three leaders in Sofia. See M. A. Kolerov, “Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii: ‘Vekhovtsy’ i ‘Evraziitsy’ (1921–1925),” Voprosy filosofii, 10 (1994), 143–66, at 144. The group
The Eurasians sought answers to the questions raised by the Slavophiles and the Westernizers in the new historical circumstances, defined by the European political situation between the two World Wars, the Russian Revolutions, and the predicament of the Russian dispersion.  

Although they were of diverse backgrounds and professional interests, the original members of the group belonged to the same generation as the “children” of the Renaissance. To various degrees they were convinced that the older generation, whom the Eurasians in private company called “the old grumblers” (starye grymzy), had let them down by failing to avert the disaster of the Bolshevik Revolution. With their compatriots in the dispersion, as well as with the Europeans recovering from WWI, the Eurasians shared a “catastrophic consciousness,” rooted in a deeply tragic sense of history. Such a sense permeated not only the Eurasian writings, but also the works of Nicholas Berdyaev, Fedor Stepun, Boris Vysheslavtsev, Vladimir Ern, Vasily Zenariesky, and other leaders of the Renaissance. For Florovsky, catastrophic consciousness involved a sense of crisis, a sense that at present history had reached a turning point. The concept of “catastrophic consciousness” or “historical catastrophism” (isoricheskii katastrofizm) retained a prominent place in Florovsky’s eclectic philosophy of history in later years. In particular, Florovsky questioned any historical account that made the past “rationally transparent” and emphasized the prominence of rifts, inexplicable turns, and discontinuities in history.

Prince N. Trubetskoy’s brochure Europe and Humankind (1920), gave the first impetus to the emergence of the Eurasian movement. Building on the insights of Nikolai Danilevsky’s Russia and Europe (1871), Trubetskoy argued that the notion of so-called “universal human values” was created to mask...
Romano-Germanic chauvinism and European cultural expansionism.\textsuperscript{10} It was apparently Trubetskoy who coined the term “Eurocentricity” (\textit{Evropotsentrichnost}) and was the first to subject the associated cultural myopia to a devastating critique.\textsuperscript{11} He embraced an ideal of “organic” and spontaneous development of national culture, in which external influences were minimized. Trubetskoy developed Danilevsky’s theory of closed cultural-historical types, focusing on two in particular, that of Romano-Germanic Europe and of Russia-Eurasia.\textsuperscript{12}

Florovsky was ambivalent towards these ideas. As a methodological stance, he rejected the concept of the organic development of culture, although he had recourse to the term “organic,” when he needed to emphasize historical continuities. As for the intellectual culture that could lay claims to universality, Florovsky associated such a culture with “Christian Hellenism,” showing his Eurasian preference for the Byzantine East, in contrast to the Romano-Germanic West.

\section*{THE THREE FIRST EURASIAN SYMPOSIA}

The Eurasian movement became public after the publication of the first programmatic collection of essays \textit{Exodus to the East} (\textit{Iskhod k Vostoku}, 1921). Florovsky contributed three essays to this volume and most likely collaborated in writing its unsigned introduction.\textsuperscript{13} This collection generated much discussion in the émigré circles and was followed in Soviet Russia. Florovsky also included his essays in the next two Eurasian publications, \textit{On the Ways} (1922)\textsuperscript{14} and \textit{Russia and Latinity} (1923).\textsuperscript{15} On at least three


\textsuperscript{11} The invention of the term “europa-zentrisch” is more commonly attributed to Karl Haushofer, \textit{Geopolitik des pazifischen Ozeans} (Berlin: Kurt Vowinckel Verlag, 1924), 11–23, 110–13. However, after the appearance of Trubetskoy’s book in Olga Strada’s translation as \textit{L’Europa e l’umanità: la prima critica all’eurocentrismo} (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1982), the Russian scholar’s pioneering critique of eurocentrism became more recognized in the West.

\textsuperscript{12} On Danilevsky, see V. Zenkovsky, \textit{Russkie mysliteli i Evropa}, 134–5.

\textsuperscript{13} The text of the introduction is replete with ellipses, a trademark of Florovsky’s Russian writings.

\textsuperscript{14} Petr N. Savitsky et al., \textit{Na putiakh: utverzhdenie evraziitsev} (Moscow/Berlin: Gelikon, 1922). For this volume the original Eurasian group was joined, possibly at Florovsky’s prodding, by the scholars of the older generation, Petr Bitsilli (1879–1953) and Anton Kartashev (1875–1960).

\textsuperscript{15} Petr M. Bitsilli et al., \textit{Rossiia i latinstvo} (Berlin: Logos, 1923).
other occasions, he defended the Eurasian position in print against the movement’s detractors. From 1921 to 1926, Florovsky published nine essays expounding and defending the Eurasian program, as he understood it.\(^{16}\)

In his Eurasian essays Florovsky mastered what would be described, sometimes with a touch of irony, as his “prophetic style.”\(^{17}\) As he was searching for his intellectual center of gravity, he was also trying to find a distinctive mode of expression: “staccato syntax,” as Marc Raeff characterized his Eurasian writings;\(^{18}\) syncopated thoughts expressed in a language reminiscent of the dissonances that his compatriot, Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) was then introducing into orchestral music (like *The Rite of the Spring*, 1913); frequent recourse to ellipsis in lieu of paragraph breaks; and excessive use of pleonastic expressions, which somewhat diminished in his English-language prose. It was a catastrophic style for a catastrophic time.

Greatly varying in quality, all Eurasian writings offered a mixture of quasi-scientific analysis and cultural criticism, interspersed with personal commentary and moral exhortation. The spirit of the movement was reflected by the awkwardly verbose title of the first symposium: *Exodus to the East: Premonitions and Happenings. The Eurasian Statement*. The biblical allusion to Exodus claimed for the Eurasians a prophetic role in leading Russian emigrants from western captivity. The Eurasians announced their “premonitions” about the present “happenings”—particularly, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Civil War, and the forced emigration—and purported to make a “statement” (*utverzhdenie*) of liberating significance to the exiles. For Florovsky, the term “statement” signified an ideological platform, rather than a scholarly analysis.\(^{19}\) The Eurasians were not detached scholarly observers, but rather émigré intellectuals personally invested in Russia’s future. They aimed to offer spiritual and cultural guidance to the confused and sharply divided Russian exiles. The oscillation between the poles of a quasi-scientific approach and a purely ideological construction will remain characteristic of the movement at all stages of its development, including its unexpected afterlife in post-Soviet Russia.

\(^{16}\) “Razryvy i sviazi,” “Khitrost’ razuma,” “O narodakh ne-istoricheskikh,” *Iskhod k Vostoku* (1921), 9–13, 28–39, 52–70; “O patriotizme pravednom i grekhovnom,” *Na putiakh* (1922), 230–93; “Ps’mo k P. B. Struve o Evraziistve” (1922); “Dela i prizraki (otvet g. Grigoriu Landau)” (1922); “Ps’mo k redaktoru ‘Russkoi mysli’” (1923); “Dva zaveta,” *Rossiiia i Latinstvo* (1923), 152–76; “Okameneloe beschuvstvie” (1926).


\(^{19}\) Florovsky, Letter to N. S. Trubetskoy, March 25 (April 7) 1923, *Istoriia filosofii*, 9 (2002), 159. P. Suvchinsky regretted the use of the term “statement” and preferred the term “reflections” (*razmyslenia*) instead. See P. Suvchinsky, Letter to G. Florovsky, April 18, 1922, GFP SVSL, Box 1, f. “Correspondence from P. Savitsky, etc.”
This peculiar style, mixing historical exposition with the elements of moral diatribe, would become second nature to Florovsky, both in his study of patristics and of Russian intellectual history. Having abandoned “pure history” as an enterprise he deemed intellectually sterile, Florovsky would put Russian theology on trial. He would come to interpret the history of Russian theology as a saga of false starts, dead ends, rifts, and departures from the spirit of patristic theology. To judge the Russian past was for him as important, if not even more important than to reconstruct it. Conversely, Florovsky would study the Fathers in order to offer guidance for the perplexed, to show Orthodox theology its only authentic direction.

On the quasi-scientific side, Trubetskoy and Savitsky were heavily invested in a form of geographic reductionism, seeking to derive ethnic identity from the material peculiarities of landscape and climate. From the beginning, this deterministic scheme was quite foreign to Florovsky. Partly in reaction to his fellow-Eurasians, towards the end of the 1920s, Florovsky would work out a personalist and anti-determinist philosophy of history, discussed in chapter 5.

OSWALD SPENGLER AND THE EURASIAN CRITIQUE OF THE WEST

The Eurasians emphasized the distinctiveness of Russia-Eurasia and criticized the methods and consequences of Russia’s westernization. Following Danilevsky and the Slavophiles, they represented Western Europe as “aging,” “decaying,” and even “dead,” overburdened by its past cultural and philosophical riches. The first volume of Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (Der Untergang des Abendlandes, 1918) was widely read in Russia and in the dispersion. The book had a general effect of giving additional weight to the Slavophile prognosis concerning the approaching cultural decline of Western Europe. Spengler criticized theories of progress, denied the commensurability of cultures and prophesied the degeneration of the European society into a culturally sterile, yet technologically sophisticated civilization.

It is not surprising that Florovsky and his fellow-Eurasians concurred with Spengler’s thesis that Europe was at the end of its historical road and that its

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23 Shortly before their expulsion from Russia, F. Stepun, N. Berdyaev, S. L. Frank, and Ya. M. Bukshpan published their response to Spengler in a symposium *Oswald Shpengler i Zakat Evropy* [Oswald Spengler and the Decline of Europe] (Moscow: Bereg, 1922).
cultural resources had been largely spent.\textsuperscript{24} Such a thesis had considerable rhetorical power and social consequences for life in the Diaspora. For the leaders of Russia Abroad to pronounce the European culture “dead” was a way of resisting the very real forces of cultural assimilation. Spengler’s claim that different cultures were self-contained entities, subject to growth and eventual decline similar to the development of organisms, must have resonated with N. Trubetskoy and Savitsky. The first Eurasian volume, \textit{Exodus to the East}, aimed to provide a solution to the European crisis that Spengler had diagnosed in \textit{The Decline of the West}. According to the Eurasians, the cultural hegemony of the West was not permanent: the culture of the East would eventually replace the “declining” West.\textsuperscript{25}

Florovsky slightly departed from this scheme, proposing that “the death of Europe” would be followed by an advancement of the “young” peoples of Russia and the United States.\textsuperscript{26} Generally critical of the West, Florovsky viewed American philosophical pragmatism as a viable alternative to European rationalism. This attitude in part explains Florovsky’s openness to making another major culture move, this time to the New World, after WWII.

Much of Trubetskoy’s historiography was Slavophile in its basic orientation. For instance, he accepted the Slavophile thesis that Byzantine Orthodoxy was an organic part of Russian culture. With little justification, he deemed the Romano-Germanic elements to be alien to Russian culture and, therefore, incapable of being organically indigenized. As Trubetskoy himself summed up the matter: “Everything Byzantine was digested in Russia easier and more organically than everything western.”\textsuperscript{27} He concurred with the Slavophiles that militarism and serfdom were the consequences of Russia’s Europeanization. Ultimately, Russia’s cultural collapse was precipitated by her westernization: “While Russia was building a culture which was crowned with the Byzantine cupola, the structure endured; when the roof was replaced with the Romano-Germanic culture, the whole edifice crumbled.”\textsuperscript{28}

The Eurasians saw the Bolshevik Revolution as the epitome of western influences wreaking havoc in Russia. But unlike the majority of the exiles, they were not satisfied with merely rejecting the historical outcome of the Revolution. At first they saw in the failures of the Soviet regime—civil wars,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Following the Slavophiles (especially Khomiakov and Kireevsky) and the European Romantics, Florovsky saw rationalism as the “original sin” of Europe. The influence of V. Solovyov’s \textit{Critique of Abstract Principles} (1880), is also quite palpable in his Eurasian essay “Khitrost’ razuma,” \textit{PRM}, 57–67.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Cf. L. Chamberlain, \textit{The Philosophy Steamer: Lenin and the Exile of the Intelligentsia} (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), 244: “Eurasianism had the name of Spengler’s \textit{Decline of the West} written all over it.”
\item \textsuperscript{26} The point is argued at length in “O narodakh ne-istoricheshkikh,” \textit{PRM}, 116–18.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Trubetskoy, “Verkhi i nizy russkoi kul’tury,” \textit{Iskhod k Vostoku}, 211.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Trubetskoy, “Verkhi i nizy russkoi kul’tury,” 223.
\end{itemize}
bloodshed, famine, and dehumanization—a confirmation of the moral bankruptcy of socialism and an indirect vindication of the truth of Christianity, against which the Bolshevik leaders rose so violently. Later the Eurasians became profoundly divided in their moral assessment of Bolshevism, however, managing to agree on one point: the Revolution had revealed the uniqueness of Russia’s historical destiny by increasing the country’s political isolation from Western Europe. Trubetskoy proposed that in order to reclaim its true identity, Russia had to recover its Byzantine cultural roots—a point that Florovsky found particularly congenial.

Despite his subsequent disagreements with the Eurasians, Florovsky followed both Trubetskoy’s Byzantine orientation and his account of the detrimental impact of the West on Russia’s cultural and religious development. More importantly, he shared the Eurasian program of comprehensive and intentional cultural identity-building, although he predicated such a program on a “theology of culture,” whereas the other members of the original Eurasian group spoke more vaguely about religion, rather than about Orthodox theology proper. In *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky would recast Trubetskoy’s sweeping historiosophical claims in theological terms: Russian Orthodox theology was to be liberated from its “western captivity” and to be returned to the “Promised Land” of Greek patristic and Byzantine theology. In essence, in *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky offered his own religious-historiographic version of the Eurasian “exodus to the East.” Thus, the assumptions that Florovsky brought to bear upon his historical analysis of the development of Russian Orthodox theology—that Russia’s encounter with Byzantium led to authentic development of native culture and that the encounter with the West brought about a pseudomorphosis—were first formulated in his conversations with his Eurasian colleagues and with Trubetskoy in particular.

Apart from a cultural analysis based on geography and linguistics, Eurasianism had a strong ideological impetus, which by the time Florovsky parted ways with the movement had developed into a full-fledged political program. The Eurasians were prepared to cast their support behind a totalitarian state if it promoted their cultural agenda. They hoped that in due course their cultural platform would replace Marxism-Leninism. Even more controversially, they contended that due to ethnic similarities based on climate and geography, Orthodox Slavs had more in common with Muslim Tartars than with Western Christians. Consequently, the Eurasians advocated the program of Russia’s integration with the peoples of Central Asia.

In practice this geopolitical project, especially in a totalitarian guise, appealed to the Bolshevik government, which took steps to expand its rule to the

29 Trubetskoy, “Verkhi i nizy russkoi kul’tury,” 224.
Asian territories previously subordinated to the Russian Empire. In 1924, the émigré Eurasian movement was infiltrated by the agents of the Soviet intelligence service, the infamous GPU. As a result, the movement split into pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet camps, with the former being especially closely involved in politics.  

The reaction of the “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance to the Eurasian manifestos was extremely critical. Berdyaev published a scathing review accusing Eurasians of plagiarizing Slavophilism, encouraging isolationism in the Diaspora and endorsing fanatical ethnic exclusivism verging on fascism. Bulgakov declared that he “had nothing in common with the belligerent and immature orientalism” of the Eurasians and decried their utilitarian attitude towards the Orthodox Church. Struve dismissed the Eurasian historiography as a piece of mythology and did not dignify it with a scholarly critique.

From the very start Florovsky did not find the pro-Asian orientation of his fellow-Eurasians to be particularly congenial. As in the nineteenth-century debates between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers, the precise referent of the “East” remained quite ambiguous in the Eurasian writings. For Savitsky and Suvchinsky, the “East” referred to Russia and Central Asia. Departing from the Slavophiles, they argued for the positive impact of the Mongol invasion on Eurasia’s historical destiny. Florovsky, who prioritized intellectual changes over military and political events, was inclined to minimize

30 The culturological debate that could be traced back to the Slavophile and Eurasian frameworks shows no signs of abating in Russia today. While the Eurasian geopolitics was scientifically dubious to say the least, they considerably influenced the work of the Soviet author Lev Gumilev (1912–1992), the founder of the so-called “theory of ethnogenesis.” Some of Gumilev’s followers, such as the mathematician Igor Shafarevich (b. 1923) and political philosopher Alexandr Dugin (b. 1962), became notorious for their chauvinist leanings. See the excellent study of Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore, MD/Washington, D. C.: The Johns Hopkins University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008).

35 He points to the “asiatic” fascination of N. S. Trubetskoy and other Eurasians as his bone of contention in his letter to N. S. Trubetskoy of April 7, 1923. As Florovsky observed in his letter to Iu. Ivask, April 8, 1965, *Vestnik RKhD,* 130 (1979), 46: “I have always been negatively disposed towards Trubetskoy’s “Turanism” [i.e. pro-Asian orientation], primarily for historical reasons.”
or altogether ignore the importance of the Mongol period in Russia’s history.36 For Florovsky, the “East” meant “Eastern Christendom,” associated primarily with Russia and Byzantium, which he subsumed, following the Slavophiles, under one composite concept of the “Byzantino-Slavic world.”37 For N. Trubetskoy, who was aware of the ambiguity,38 the category of the “East” embraced both Asia and Byzantium, although his emphasis was on the former rather than the latter. It appears that this ambiguity was a cause of misunderstanding and division among the leaders of the Eurasian movement. Nevertheless, initially the Eurasians were united by their common impulse to accentuate the cultural separation of “East” and “West,” although each of them drew on different aspects of the binary opposition. For his part, Florovsky was keen to point out the abyss, which in his opinion separated the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic forms of mysticism.39

Later, possibly influenced by Bulgakov’s and Berdyaev’s critique of Eurasianism, Florovsky would come to view the anti-western impulse as a byproduct of the Diaspora’s cultural isolationism.40 In his account of Russian religious thought, Florovsky would recognize that Russia’s westernization itself was not a problem; rather the problem lay in the slavish, mechanical, and unquestioning manner in which the western influences were absorbed in Orthodox theology.

The polemics against “Latinity”—a derogatory old Russian designation of Roman Catholicism resurrected by the Slavophiles41—was a prominent feature of the Eurasian ideology. The Eurasians saw the differences between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism as irreconcilable and permanent. The strongest attack against Roman Catholicism was launched in the third Eurasian collection of essays, entitled, Russia and Latinity (1923). The introductory article of this volume earnestly advanced a radical claim that for the exiled Orthodox believer to be converted to Roman Catholicism was worse than to be killed by the Bolsheviks in Communist Russia, on the grounds that the former led to the eternal perdition of the soul, whereas the latter caused

36 Less than a page is accorded to the discussion of the Mongol period in Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 8–9.
37 “Vechnoe i prekhodiashchee v uchenii russkikh slavianofilov,” PRM, 35.
38 See his letter to P. N. Savitsky, January 21, 1937, in A. Sobolev (ed.), O russkoi filosofii (St Petersburg: Mir, 2008), 465.
39 “Khitrost’ razuma,” PRM, 60.
40 Berdyaev, “Utopicheskii etatizm evraziitsev,” Put’, 8 (1928), 141–4. Florovsky’s 1933 essay “Tiutchev i Vladimir Soloviev (glavy iz knigi)” refined considerably his originally static and rigid understanding of the binary opposition between the “East” and “West.” In the article, through the work of Tiutchev, Florovsky showed a dynamic and interdependent character of both categories: see PRM, 346–52.
merely a temporal destruction of the body. When this astonishing idea was criticized by Prince Grigory Trubetskoy (Nikolai Trubetskoy’s brother) in the pages of Berdyaev’s journal *The Way (Put)*, the Eurasians promptly responded with an open letter in defense of their moral comparison of the repressive character of Bolshevism and Roman Catholicism. Florovsky, who was one of the contributors to the Eurasian volume *Russia and Latinity*, had also signed the open letter in question. In the same issue of *The Way*, Florovsky alsofelt compelled to defend the Eurasian position against Berdyaev in a separate article. Thus, before his involvement in the ecumenical discussions, Florovsky sympathized with the anti-Catholic sentiments of his fellow Eurasians, at least to the extent of participating in the *Russia and Latinity* symposium.

As most Orthodox churchmen of his time, Florovsky held that the Roman Church was principally responsible for the schism between the East and West. He was also fond of Tiutchev’s provocative observation (later developed by Aleksei Khomiakov), that the pope was the “first Protestant.” Furthermore, he held that the Vatican’s continuing political difficulties were due to the Roman Catholic Church’s imperialist pretensions, claiming that “the health of the West could be restored only by its appropriation of Orthodoxy” and “freeing itself from papacy.” Florovsky’s subsequent participation in the ecumenical movement needs to be seen in light of his Eurasian beginnings.

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42 Petr Bitsilli et al., *Rossiia i Latinstvo*, 11: “We must understand that in some sense, Bolshevism and Latinity, International and Vatican, in historical and empirical sense are co-workers and partners. For both forces have risen against the fortress of the Orthodox Spirit, the fortress in which resides Russia’s might. The Orthodox children who are converted to Latinity when they enter Catholic schools (sometimes parents who have been tempted [by Latinity] become accomplices in such a conversion) as well as the Orthodox folk who become involved in Latinity succumbing to external and internal temptations may be compared and contrasted with the victims of the Bolshevik purges. While the latter may cause flesh to perish, we believe that by the mercy of God they will find spiritual salvation. Those who convert to Latinity may satisfy their material wellbeing, but they perish spiritually by departing from the full Truth to the perversion of the Truth, from Christ’s Church to a society which sacrified the ecclesial foundations to human hubris.”


45 “Istoricheskie prozreniia Tiutcheva,” *PRM*, 228; originally published in the English translation as “Historical Premonitions of Tiutchev (1803–1873),” *SR*, 3 (1924), 337–49. Tiutchev called the pope a “Dalai Lama of the Vatican” and a “false vicar of Christ,” a harsh rhetoric that was not uncommon in the “patriotic” Russian prose of the nineteenth century. Florovsky quoted these Tiutchevan appellations without commentary, which would indicate that at the time he had some sympathy for them: see *PRM*, 228.

46 Florovsky made this point in the stenographically recorded protocol of the St Sophia Brotherbood meeting of April 13 (26), 1924, see *Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii*, 31.
His ecumenical platform would include a rebuilding of Christian unity upon a common foundation of the Greek patristic tradition.

THE VATICAN’S EXPANSIONIST POLICY

The virulently anti-Catholic rhetoric of *Russia and Latinity* had been partly provoked by the expansionist efforts of the Vatican, which saw the fall of the tsarist government in Russia as an opportunity to spread Catholic influence to the previously inaccessible territory.47 In 1917, promptly reacting to the changed circumstances, pope Benedict XV founded the papal Oriental Institute in Rome with the aim of preparing Catholic missionaries for work in Russia. Florovsky was apparently aware of these moves, describing Russia in 1922 as a country “where children were given to be corrupted by the Jesuits, sacred things were being blasphemously looted, the church hierarchy was slandered, the saints were being executed as martyrs, and the foundations of the church were being shaken.”48 In a manner reminiscent of Savitsky’s article in *Russia and Latinity*, Florovsky listed the horrors of the state persecution of the Church side-by-side with the Roman Catholic attempts at proselytism, describing the latter as “corruption of children by the Jesuits.”

In 1923, the same year in which *Russia and Latinity* was published, Benedict XV’s successor, pope Pius XI, issued the encyclical *Ecclesiam Dei*, which was addressed to the Eastern Slavs, and even more pointedly to the refugees from Russia. In this document, the pope lamented the “separation of the Greeks from the unity of the Church Universal” as a result of which “the Eastern Slavs were also led astray and lost to the Faith.”49 The encyclical celebrated the life and “martyrdom” of the seventeenth-century Ruthenian bishop, Josaphat of Polotsk, who was allegedly killed for his efforts at bringing the Orthodox “schismatics” into the fold of the Greek Catholic Church.50 Turning to the twentieth-century situation, the pope encouraged Catholics to charitable works in the émigré communities with a view to ultimately reconciling the “Eastern schismatics” with the Catholic Church along the unionist lines.51 To prove that he meant business, in 1929, the pope started a college for training Greek Catholic priests for the Ukraine in the Italian capital.

49 *Ecclesiam Dei*, §3 at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net>.
51 *Ecclesiam Dei*, §16–22.
Whatever the pope’s intentions, the encyclical left a bad taste in the mouths of the émigré leaders, not only the Eurasians, but also those more ecumenically inclined.\textsuperscript{52} To make things more complicated, the Vatican threw its support behind the “Living Church.” This sizable schismatic group, which at one point counted more than thirty bishops, operated in Russia from 1917 until 1946, and did much to undermine the already precarious position of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Furthermore, on an official level, the Catholic Church mostly kept aloof from the ecumenical movement. To be sure, this official policy did not prevent individual Catholic thinkers and church leaders from establishing unofficial contacts and privately supporting the Orthodox exiles.\textsuperscript{53} But the official position of the Catholic Church remained guarded, and at times even hostile, before the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). If the children of the Russian exiles wished to study in Catholic schools, they were encouraged, sometimes even pressured, to convert to Catholicism.\textsuperscript{54} To make matters worse, Greek Catholic clergy engaged in proselytism in the émigré communities of Turkey, Czechoslovakia, and other European countries.\textsuperscript{55} The relocation from the predominantly Orthodox Bulgaria to the non-Orthodox European countries, such as Czechoslovakia, France, and Germany, at the time of writing Russia and Latinity, made the Eurasian authors particularly alarmed about the dangers of proselytism and assimilation.\textsuperscript{56}

**FLOROVSKY’S VERSION OF EURASIANISM**

In Florovsky’s own words, the task of the first Eurasian volume, Exodus to the East, was “to discuss the cultural-philosophical problem of the meaning of Russian history and of the Russian revolution.”\textsuperscript{57} In his analysis of this problem, Florovsky consistently upheld the “preeminence of culture over politics.”\textsuperscript{58} In practice this meant that in the politically overheated atmosphere of the Diaspora, Florovsky distanced himself from overtly political associations and did

\textsuperscript{52} See Bratstvo svyatoi Sofii, 44.
\textsuperscript{53} Berdyaev, Letter to P. B. Struve, November 6, 1922 (from Berlin), Bratstvo svyatoi Sofii, 170-1.
\textsuperscript{54} See Gillian Crow, This Holy Man: Impressions of Metropolitan Anthony (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006), 24.
\textsuperscript{56} See P. Suvchinsky, “Strasti i opasnost’,” Rossiia i Latinstvo, 33.
\textsuperscript{57} Florovsky, Letter to P. Struve, August 3, 1921, PRM, 131, originally published in Russkaia Mysl, 43 (1922), 267–74; cf. “Razryvy i sviazi,” PRM, 52–6.
\textsuperscript{58} The phrase reads in Russian: "primat kul’tury nad obshchestvennost’iu," which literally means “the primacy of culture over sociality.” See Florovsky, Letter to P. Struve, August 3, 1921, PRM, 124; cf. Florovsky, Letter to Iu. Ivask, April 8, 1965, Vestnik RKhD, 130 (1979), 45.
not subscribe to any specific program of reshaping Russia’s future. He rejected both the military intervention advocated by the monarchists on the extreme right and the expatriation undertaken by the Bolshevik sympathizers on the extreme left. Psychologically a loner, rather than a party man, Florovsky by his own description was an “antipolitical being.”

By asserting the “primacy of culture over politics,” Florovsky also aimed to contest the tendency of Russian social thought, whether at home or abroad, to judge complex cultural phenomena and philosophical ideas by their potential political consequences. For example, it was not uncommon in the Soviet press to view materialism as “progressive” and any alternative to materialism as “retrograde,” thereby precluding any serious debate of underlying philosophical issues. Florovsky found such a political reductionism intolerable. For him, Eurasianism was first and foremost a positive vision of Russia’s future cultural orientation, not an ideology to be implemented by political means. Apparently his determination to keep away from émigré politics did not sit well with the other Eurasian leaders.

Florovsky’s rejection of political reductionism and his remarks regarding the meaning of the revolution echo the analysis that Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Struve had previously offered in *The Landmarks* (1909). According to these thinkers, the emergence of revolutionary socialism with no moral constraints—Russia in the 1900s was a hotbed of political terrorism—was indicative of the spiritual fall of the nation. They also insisted that the revolution should be first and foremost analyzed religiously and opposed spiritually, rather than politically. As these authors predicted, the utopian vision of the revolutionary socialism would bring about a bacchanalia of violence, murder, hatred, and dehumanization. Florovsky read *The Landmarks* at an impressionable age of sixteen, when he was a gymnasium student in Odessa. At the time, he held that “the points of view developed in the volume coincide to great extent with my deepest convictions, which were formed independently before the appearance of *The Landmarks*.” Youthful proclamation of intellectual independence aside, the volume moved Florovsky so deeply that he planned to write what could have become his first published article on a related topic. Although Florovsky did not follow through with the

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59 A. Blane and T. Bird, “Interview with Fr. Georges Florovsky, April 5, 1969,” p. 43: “I am an antipolitical being: politics is something I do not like. It does not mean I ignore the existence of politics, I know it does [exist], but I have not the slightest desire to be involved” (unpublished typescript).

60 As Berdyaev put the matter in his letter to P. B. Struve, December 17, 1922: “Now is not the time for peaceful academic journals. We must discuss the problems of socialism, democracy, revolution, and so on, but as the problems of the spirit,” *Bratstvo sviaioi Sofii*, 174. Berdyaev further developed this theme in *The Origin of Russian Communism* (1937); cf. also S. Bulgakov, Letter to N. Berdyaev, January 25, 1923, *Bratstvo sviaioi Sofii*, 179.

The Eurasian Temptation

plan, The Landmarks had a profound impact on his understanding of the spiritual roots of the Russian revolution and of the preeminence of spiritual culture over politics.

Florovsky’s single contribution to the second Eurasian volume, On the Ways (1922), provided a blueprint for his later study of Russian intellectual history and patristics. This little-discussed essay, entitled “On Righteous and Sinful Patriotism,” reveals the earliest instance of Florovsky’s recourse to patristic theology as a source of the renewal of contemporary Russian Orthodox theology.  

Taking the Slavophile interpretation of Russian history as his point of departure, Florovsky averred that despite its problems, medieval Russia was a monolithic society, all strata of which, the rich and the poor, the literate clergy and the illiterate common people, were united by the common religious ideal of Eastern Orthodoxy.

According to Florovsky, with the advent of the reforms of Peter the Great in the eighteenth century, this organic cultural unity was fractured. The problem with Peter’s “breaking a window into Europe” was not so much Russia’s exposure to western influences, as the authoritarian and technocratic means by which Russia’s Europeanization was imposed by the tsar. Russia’s westernization amounted to slavish copying of all things European and to the application of foreign practices in the interests of Russian state. Echoing the verdict pronounced by the Slavophiles, Florovsky concluded that Russia’s “Europeanization amounted to its denationalization.”  

According to Florovsky, the fundamental problem of the St Petersburg period of Russian history was a growing alienation between the westernized ruling elites and the common people, who resisted westernization and preserved Orthodox spirituality. The Bolshevik Revolution sought to put an end to this alienation, to reunite the rulers and the ruled in Russia again. 

Florovsky insisted that, contrary to what many émigrés were inclined to believe, the Revolution did not bring
about Russia’s destruction altogether, but only ended the St Petersburg period of Russia’s history.67

In Florovsky’s judgment, the communist ideology of Bolshevism was morally bankrupt, metaphysically inadequate, and ultimately incapable of healing the rifts of Russian society. The present situation called for a rebuilding of Russian culture on a new basis, which alone could provide the desired unity. Florovsky wrote:

We have the creative task of building religious culture on a solid foundation of Orthodox church life, resolutely following patristic heritage. I am not speaking of a “restoration” of Byzantine or patristic antiquity. We must be creative, we must seek new forms in order to express the inner content, which over the ages has remained unchanged in the immediate experience of ecclesial worship, despite the fact that the “forms” have indeed changed.68

In this essay, dated December 1921–January 1922, Florovsky for the first time dwelt on the importance of going back to patristic and Byzantine sources in fulfillment of the Eurasian program of rebuilding Russian culture after the expected defeat of the Bolsheviks. When the hopes of bringing down the Soviet regime waned, he turned to the more achievable task of recalling émigré Orthodox theology (rather than the Russian nation as a whole) to its patristic foundations, a program that would become the leitmotif of his scholarship. The emerging contours of his neopatristic program were already discernible in this essay from the second Eurasian volume. He exhorted the Diaspora faithful to “resolutely follow patristic heritage;” he observed that the retrieval of the Fathers had to be creative, not just restorationist; he appealed to the concept of the “experience of ecclesial worship,” which would become prominent in his later theological works. In the same essay, he also rejected “the development of dogma,” a claim for which he would provide a more robust support in his writings on the philosophy of history and historical theology.69 He added that the “official Orthodox scholarship” of the Russian theological schools had uncritically accepted the conclusions of western scholarship and consequently had lost its patristic moorings. A similar criticism was voiced by Ivan Kireevsky in the nineteenth century and in the twentieth century more forcefully repeated by metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky.70 Thus, Florovsky had formulated several central guiding principles of the neopatristic renewal early in his career, when he did not yet consider himself a patristic scholar, about two years before he undertook a sustained study of the Church Fathers.

67 Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 499.
68 “O patriotizme pravednom i grekhovnom,” PRM, 161. The significance of this passage was also noted by A. V. Cherniaev, G. V. Florovskii kak filosof i istorik russkoi mysli, 86.
70 “O patriotizme pravednom i grekhovnom,” PRM, 160.
It is revealing to compare these initial insights, which surfaced first during his Eurasian period and to which he would return repeatedly, with the opening paragraph of *The Ways of Russian Theology*, published approximately fifteen years later: “The study of the Russian past has convinced me that an Orthodox theologian today can find the true norm and the living spring of creative inspiration only in the heritage of the Holy Fathers. I am convinced that the intellectual separation from patristics and Byzantinism was the main cause of all interruptions and spiritual failures in Russian development.” The insight that emerged during the Eurasian years was later turned into a norm for assessing Russian religious history.

FLOROVSKY’S BREAK WITH THE EURASIANS

In December 1921, Florovsky relocated to Prague, attracted by the prospect of teaching Russian literature at the Higher Commercial Institute and of joining the newly founded Russian Law Faculty at Charles University. The establishment of a Russian Law Faculty and humanities department at Czechoslovakia’s most prestigious university was a part of the so-called “Russian Action,” an initiative of the Czech government, which was also supported by the World Christian Student Movement, the YMCA, and private donors from the United States.

In Prague, Florovsky came to know personally several influential intellectuals of the Russian dispersion, including the “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance. A photograph of the Russian Law Faculty at Charles University over the period of 1922–1927 shows Florovsky, then in his early thirties, and his brother, Antony, in the distinguished company of P. Novgorodtsev, S. Bulgakov, P. Struve, N. Lossky, S. Frank, and other lights of the older generation. As a young scholar, Florovsky was offered a number of temporary posts, including that of a teaching assistant to Professor Novgorodtsev. Florovsky was also invited to teach at the Slavic Institute, where he offered a course on the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov during the winter semester of 1922–1923.

Because of his European migrations from Sofia to Prague in 1921, and subsequently to Paris in 1926, Florovsky’s ties with the leaders of the Eurasian movement weakened. His essay “Two Covenants,” published in the third

Eurasian collection *Russia and Latinity* (1923), in some respects already struck a discordant note. In this essay, Florovsky inveighed against etatism, an ideology that gave to the state a totalitarian control over all spheres of life, including economy, culture, and religion. The other Eurasians, in contrast, treated religion as an instrument of the state. For them, religion was important to the extent to which it promoted nation-building. Florovsky, in this case aligning himself with Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Zenkovsky, condemned such an understanding of the role of religion as unacceptable utilitarianism.

Florovsky also rejected any possibility of realizing the Christian ideal in society by the coercive hand of the state. While Florovsky’s critique of etatism did not target the views of his fellow-Eurasians directly, the third Eurasian volume displays a tension between his thesis and the rest of the volume. The tendency to conflate the interests of the Church with those of the state was already evident in the title—*Russia and Latinity*—which juxtaposed “Russia” (a country, state, nation) with “Latinity,” which stood primarily for Roman Catholicism, or more broadly, for Western Christendom.

In 1923, possibly a watershed year in his relations with his fellow-Eurasians, Florovsky made a failed attempt to seize control of the movement’s publication agenda. He proposed to N. S. Trubetskoy a plan for a new “thick” Eurasian journal and even proceeded to assign the essay topics on various religion-related themes to the rest of the group. The choice of Trubetskoy as a confidant was particularly inept, since Trubetskoy was inclined to underemphasize the distinctly Orthodox elements of Eurasian ideology. To further complicate the matter, Florovsky was at the same time trying to orchestrate a partnership between the original Eurasian “troika” of Trubetskoy, Savitsky, and Suvchinsky, and the authorities of the older generation, including Novgorodtsev, Struve, N. Lossky, Bulgakov, Berdyaev, and Zenkovsky.

Of the two collaborative initiatives, the partnership with the “old grumblers” was resolutely rejected by his fellow-Eurasians. As for the “thick” journal, Florovsky’s aristocratic friends sent him a signal that he had overstepped the implied boundaries of his role in the movement and was in no

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75 In his letter to N. S. Trubetskoy, February 1, 1923, Florovsky mentioned having just completed this essay “with great consternation (s prevelikim nadryvom),” in “Piš’ma G. V. Florovskogo 1922–1924,” *Istoriia filosofii*, 9 (2002), 154–73, at 155. Florovsky’s Eurasian essays were quite uneven in quality and produced an impression of having been written in a state of hurried excitement.


position to issue orders regarding the movement’s publication agenda. Undeterred, Florovsky attempted to take over the co-editorship of future publications, stating that “under the present circumstances I could not be satisfied with a role of a mere subordinate collaborator and ‘claim’ the editor’s prerogatives.”

But instead of gaining the upper hand in the movement, Florovsky actually had to withdraw his own essay from the newly launched Eurasian periodical *The Eurasian Times (Evraziiskii Vremennik)*, citing his disagreement with the editorial agenda. Beginning from 1924, he stopped publishing in the Eurasian collections, but continued to follow the group’s activities. In the same year, the Eurasian group was infiltrated by agents of the Soviet secret service, eventually causing a split within the movement between the right-wing anti-Soviet and the left-wing pro-Soviet Eurasians.

Florovsky’s final public break with the Eurasian movement was marked by his essay “The Eurasian Temptation,” published in 1928. In this article, Florovsky reiterated the central claims that he had previously made in his Eurasian essays. The difference was that he now openly declared his views incompatible with the movement’s stated social and political agenda. He pronounced Eurasianism a failure on the grounds that the movement’s ideology had succumbed to the temptation of etatism. He lamented the fact that the movement had become more politicized than it had been in the beginning—a predictable outcome, given how passionately the Eurasians were involved in promoting future Russian geopolitical ideology. Drawing on Herzen, he accused the Eurasians of excessive determinism and of downplaying the causal role of free human choices in shaping history.

The proximate targets of Florovsky’s veiled attack were probably P. Suvchinsky’s essay “Passions and Danger” and the statements of N. Trubetskoy, which could be interpreted along similar lines. Florovsky now declared Eurasianism a “dead end,” the expression that he would later use to characterize most directions of modern Russian religious thought.

85 “Evraziiskii soblazn,” *PRM*, 311. In the same year that Florovsky published his critique of Eurasianism, Trubetskoy also distanced himself from the movement for other reasons. Both continued to follow the movement’s affairs by staying in touch with P. N. Savitsky, who alone of the original four leaders remained at the helm of the Eurasian publications in the 1930s. See N. S. Trubetskoy’s letters to P. N. Savitsky (1930–1938), in Albert Sobolev (ed.), *O russkoi filosofii*, 333–493. The last letter from Savitsky to Florovsky preserved in GFP PUL, Box 26, f. 5, is dated December 27, 1964.
Retrospectively Florovsky was inclined to think that he had never fully agreed with the Eurasian agenda, especially its political aspect. Perhaps because of this attitude, Florovsky tended to backdate his break with the movement to 1923. While the exact time of the break is difficult to establish conclusively, it is clear that Florovsky continued to engage the elements of Eurasian historiography in his later work. The difficulty of interpreting Florovsky is that in a few cases he construes the boundary between the East and West as permeable and dynamic, whereas in the vast majority of cases he treats the same boundary as impermeable and static. In any case, seminal insights that would feed directly into his future neopatristic vision surfaced for the first time during the Eurasian period.

CONCLUSION

The passionate anti-Western pathos of the Eurasian writings must be viewed against the background of the refugee community that was undergoing a rapid assimilation under strong social and economic pressures. The bitterness with which the Eurasians decried “Latinity”—going out of their way to prove that Russian Orthodox Christians had more in common with Muslim Tartars than with Roman Catholics—must be seen against the background of the dominant imperial Russian culture turned into a powerless minority culture in Western


With N. K. Gavriushin, Russkoe bogoslovie, 284–9, I find Florovsky’s dating of the final break to 1923 rather forced. Such a backdating requires that we accept Florovsky’s dubious claim that his 1926 article in defense of the Eurasians, “Okameneloe beschuvstvie” was edited by Berdiaev to the point of reversing its main thesis. It is more likely that Florovsky’s final break with the Eurasians occurred later, perhaps closer to 1928. As late as August 1925, Sergei Chetverikov in his letter to Florovsky assumed that he was still a part of the movement: see GFP PUL, Box 12, f. 10. Florovsky’s association with the movement in 1925 is also indirectly confirmed by his letter to N. Berdyaev of October 24, 1925, GFP PUL, Box 59, f. 5, in which he expresses his chagrin with G. N. Trubetskoy’s article in The Ways criticizing Russia and Latinity.
Europe and threatened with assimilation. Writing in the 1930s, N. S. Trubetskoy could critically look back at his Eurasian years and explain his aggressively anti-Western stance as a form of “compensatory nationalism,” as a literary compensation for the powerful western cultural influences in the life of the Russian Diaspora.

While Florovsky cannot be accused of “compensatory nationalism,” the Eurasian orientation towards the East found its own original expression in his later work, especially in his critique of the western influences in The Ways of Russian Theology. Florovsky’s historiography, especially his endeavor to use Greek patristics in order to make straight the ways of Russian theology was heavily indebted to and in some respects struggled to overcome the Eurasian cultural morphology. Florovsky conceived of the encounter between the Orthodox Christian East and the heterodox West almost entirely on Eastern theological terms. A retrieval of Greek patristic theology was to provide a basis for this encounter.

The concept of “western captivity” was intimated to Florovsky not only by the Eurasians and the Slavophiles, but also by the day-to-day realities of the Russian Diaspora, which dictated assimilation to the West as a matter of survival. Over time, Florovsky became less interested in saving the “soul of the Russian nation” (the Eurasian focus), and more concerned with liberating twentieth-century Russian Orthodox theology from its western captivity by turning to the Greek Church Fathers. Florovsky opted for reversing the westernization of Orthodox theology and instead seeking the recovery of what he considered its true identity through a re-appropriation of Christian Hellenism. In his attempt to compensate for the “western corruption” of Orthodox theology, Florovsky transformed the “compensatory nationalism” of Eurasianism into the Christian Hellenism of the Church Fathers.

The topos of a “return to the Fathers” had surfaced for the first time in Florovsky’s essay “On Righteous and Sinful Patriotism,” included in the second Eurasian symposium of 1922. In the same essay, Florovsky also gestured in the direction of a “new Christian philosophy” that was to be developed on the foundation of patristic tradition. This essay displays the first soundings of his future neopatristic synthesis.

As Florovsky continued to ponder the meaning of the Russian Revolution in light of Russian history and, in turn, the future of Russia in light of the Revolution, he also came to formulate his philosophy of history, which served as a methodological prelude to his neopatristic theology and his history of Russian religious thought.

87 Marc Raeff provocatively dates the “end” of Russia Abroad to 1939, noting that the beginning of WWII brought about a massive cultural disruption and closure of many émigré institutions.

88 N. S. Trubetskoy, Letter to P. N. Savitsky, July 12, 1933, in Albert Sobolev (ed.), O russkoi filosofii, 376.
Philosophy of History

History is a realm of personal agency, hence a realm of creativity and freedom. Person is the true subject of history.¹

Florovsky had already begun his explorations in philosophy of history in his Eurasian writings. He continued these explorations in his dissertation on Alexander Herzen (1812–1870). Florovsky’s philosophy of history subsequently informed his neopatristic synthesis and his history of Russian theology. Tracing the genesis of Florovsky’s thought, it is difficult to escape an impression that as early as the 1920s he advanced on independent philosophical grounds some of the insights that he would later credit to the Church Fathers.

WORK ON HERZEN

Florovsky’s graduate studies were interrupted by his family’s hasty evacuation from Odessa during the Civil War. In Sofia he continued his work on Russian intellectual history and wrote his M. A. thesis on Alexander Herzen. Hailed as a prophet of Russian socialism and a theoretician of the revolutionary movement, Herzen was a thinker full of tensions and contradictions. The Romantic and personalist dimension of his philosophical heritage was not easily reconcilable with his nihilism, humanism, and positivism. If the emerging Soviet interpretation presented Herzen as a forerunner of the Bolshevik Revolution, Florovsky, in contrast, highlighted Herzen’s damaging critique of the nineteenth-century theories of historical development. Crucially, Herzen provided Florovsky with the conceptual tools for criticizing Hegel’s philosophy of history.²

² For a nuanced presentation of this matter, see A. P. Kozyrev, ”Dve modeli istoriosofii v russkoi mysli (A. I. Gertsen i G. V. Florovskii versus sofiologija),” in I. P. Smirnov, Istoriia mysli: istoriografiia (Moscow: Vuzovskaia kniga, 2002), 131–42, at 134.
When Florovsky left for Prague in December 1921, the first draft of his dissertation had been completed. Florovsky subsequently revised the dissertation several times for the defense on June 3, 1923. A standard practice in Russian academic life, Florovsky’s defense was a public affair, involving three official opponents (external readers): N. O. Lossky, V. V. Zenkovsky, and P. B. Struve. After a grueling disputation lasting several hours, which was an expected part of this academic ritual, Florovsky was awarded the degree of Master of Philosophy and appointed to teach the history of Russian literature at the Russian Law Faculty of Charles University. He made several unsuccessful attempts to publish his work on Herzen as a separate monograph, but managed to put out only the first and the third chapters.

Until recently the complete text of the monograph was considered lost. I have unearthed five documents pertaining to the dissertation in the Florovsky Papers at St Vladimir’s Seminary Library in Yonkers, New York. By assembling the data from three other archives, I have identified at least six major redactions of the dissertation’s 1921 draft and reconstructed its nearly complete text as revised in 1928–1930. According to my reconstruction, the dissertation consisted of the introduction “Russian Philosophy as a Task,” three chapters, conclusion, and the appendix. The dissertation bore the title Herzen’s Philosophy of History, which was somewhat of a misnomer, since the bulk of the work was Herzen’s intellectual biography. Later Florovsky sought to rectify this problem by renaming his work, Herzen’s Spiritual Way.

In the introductory chapter of the dissertation, Florovsky sketched out some of the ideas that would animate his later work in patristics. For example, he asserted that “the first principles of any philosophical inquiry are religious, constituting theologia naturalis” and that “strictly speaking, there is no such a thing as ‘secular’ philosophy.” Consistent with this principle and contrary to purely secular interpretations of Herzen’s thought, Florovsky drew attention to Herzen’s youthful religious search, as well as his romantic fascination with

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3 GFP PUL, Box 2, f. 5, contains A. S. Izgoev’s precis of Florovsky’s dissertation, together with paragraph-length summaries of the criticisms of the three readers. S. Volkov relates that at Moscow Theological Academy before the Revolution such debates could routinely last 4–5 hours and up to two days. See his Poslednie u Troitsy, 68–71. Nikolai Lossky’s dissertation dispute in St Petersburg lasted no less than 5 hours and was extremely exhausting. See his Vospominaniiia (Moscow: Pusskii Put’, 2008), 110.


5 “Vvedenie: russkaia filosofia kak zadacha,” GFP SVSL, Box 2, Sub-box “Unpublished Papers and Fragments (by Florovsky),” unpublished manuscript, pp. 8, 9 (pagination absent).
Schelling’s pantheistic philosophy of nature. The critique of pantheism in its different historical guises as violating patristic “intuition of creaturehood” will repeatedly occupy Florovsky in his later writings. More generally, the study of Herzen led Florovsky to embrace personalism and to reject overly rationalistic and deterministic accounts of historical development.

PERSONALISM

Herzen’s widely discussed social and political thought was also the subject of Gustav Shpet’s lecture Herzen’s Philosophical Worldview (1921). Unfortunately, Shpet’s important work was little noticed in the emigration, since the philosopher himself stayed in Bolshevik Russia and was executed during the Stalinist purges in 1937. Florovsky wrote a review of Herzen’s Philosophical Worldview, endorsing Shpet’s main insight that “Herzen’s worldview as a whole is an apotheosis of personhood.” The guiding, if not always clearly expressed concern of Florovsky’s philosophy of history was to uphold the causal priority of personal agency. In Florovsky’s own formulation: “History is a realm of personal agency, hence a realm of creativity and freedom. Person is the true subject of history.” Concrete human persons, their acts, thoughts, intentions, and achievements, are the primary agents of historical change. Florovsky defended this claim both against those scholars who emphasized impersonal causes, such as changing material and economic circumstances, as well as those historians who focused on the activity of communal, transpersonal entities, such as social currents, political institutions, trends, schools of thought, and social and political movements.

By embracing personalism, Florovsky was following a trend in the nineteenth-century Russian literature, associated with the names of Herzen, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, to name only a few well-known authors. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy explored the tragic confrontation of personal and impersonal dimensions of human existence with a depth and power unreeched before. In Russia, personalist philosophy was more a climate of thought and a shared philosophical sensibility than a clearly identifiable school of thought. Russian personalism was a philosophical offspring of the Russian Religious Renaissance, coming of age in the 1910s and the 1920s. In twentieth-century Russian religious thought, the most influential exponents of personalism included

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6 Gustav Shpet, Filosofske mirovozzrenie Gertsena (Petrograd [St Petersburg]: Kolos, 1921).
8 Florovsky, “Evoliutsiia i epigenez” (1930), VK, 439.
thinkers as different as N. Berdyaev, V. Ern, L. Karsavin, A. Losev, N. Lossky, V. Lossky, L. Shestov, P. Struve, and S. Trubetskoy. Berdyaev characterized the Russian Religious Renaissance as “a struggle for personhood, for the fullness of person’s creative life, suppressed by social realities.” Vladimir Ern contrasted the “comprehensive personalism” of Eastern Christian thought with the impersonalist rationalism of modern European philosophy, a point that Florovsky would develop in his critique of German Idealism and Romanticism. It should be noted that Western Europe had numerous proponents of personalism, including Martin Buber (1878–1965), Étienne Gilson (1884–1978), Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), Charles Renouvier (1815–1903), and Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950). According to V. Zenkovsky, “notwithstanding some exceptions, the whole spiritual life of Europe was inspired by the ideals of philosophical personalism.” Of all western European thinkers, Florovsky was particularly influenced by the personalist philosophy of Renouvier.

In Russia and elsewhere, personalism was a reaction against populism, socialism, Marxism, positivism, utilitarianism, economic materialism, and other social philosophies that subordinated the individual’s spiritual needs to the material concerns of class, nation, or state. In the field of metaphysics, personalism opposed pantheism, monism, collectivism, and determinism in the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophies. In contrast to these philosophies, personalism drew on such aspects of nineteenth-century Romanticism as the emphasis on the uniqueness and unrepeatability of individual human life; the celebration of the boundless and indeterministic character of human creativity; the prioritization of non-discursive modes of knowing.


10 Berdyaev, “Russkii dukhovnyi renessans nachala XX v. i zhurnal Put,” Put’, 49 (1935), 3–23, at 4. Florovsky, on the contrary, saw “the major malaise of the Russian 'Renaissance’—in the depersonalization of man and the fetishism of 'free concepts’,” adding that “Berdyaev was more cautious than others,” Letter to Iu. Ivask, February 24, 1972, Vestnik RKhD, 130 (1979), 52. While Florovsky was probably aiming his arrows at Bulgakov and Karsavin, as a sweeping generalization this was a misrepresentation of the aims of the Renaissance and an understatement of Berdyaev’s deeply original contribution to personalism.


such as intuition and perceptual experience; and openness to the suprarational and mystical dimension of human existence. In Russia, this Romantic package was filtered through Herzen’s and Dostoevsky’s sense of the tragic pathos of human freedom.

In his patrology lectures, which appeared in the early 1930s, Florovsky maintained that “The antique world did not know the mystery of personal being. There was no word in ancient languages that could strictly designate personality (lichnost”).14 Because of this linguistic limitation, “for the Eastern [Fathers], specifically for Basil the Great, the expression ‘three persons,’ both in Greek and in Latin retained a dangerous ambiguity.”15 Discussing the theological context of the Council of Chalcedon, Florovsky problematized the matter further by observing that pope Leo the Great had not offered a definition of the Latin term persona and had not clarified whether the term corresponded to hypostasis, physis, or prosopon in Greek.16 Consequently, the Latin term that was commonly translated as “person” in English, initially had a broader range of possible renderings in Greek, including “substance” and “nature.”

In his later writings, Florovsky abandoned his earlier view regarding the “dangerous ambiguity” of early Christian terminology. No longer inclined to give credit for personalism to modern philosophers, he wrote in 1957: “The idea of personality itself was probably the greatest Christian contribution to philosophy.”17 Following S. Trubetskoy and A. Losev, Florovsky maintained that pre-Christian Greek philosophy offered limited philosophical tools for articulating the metaphysics of personhood. In patristic theology, in contrast, the grappling with the mystery of the three persons in the Godhead and with the divine-human person of Christ gave a strong impetus to the development of personalist metaphysics.18 Before Florovsky, Losev offered a sustained historical argument in support of these claims. Since Losev wrote in Russian and labored behind the Iron Curtain, his post-revolutionary work remained little known in the West. Florovsky closely followed Losev’s work on the history of Greek philosophy and eagerly endorsed his conclusions.19 The

14 Vostochnye ottsy IVgo veka, 22.
15 Vostochnye ottsy IVgo veka, 22.
17 Florovsky, “Eschatology in the Patristic Age,” Studia Patristica, 2 (1957), 249. The essay was published while Florovsky was teaching at Harvard. American Personalism also had important exponents, including Harvard professor Ernest Hocking (1873–1966) and the so-called Boston personalist school, founded by B. P. Bowne (1847–1910) and continued in Florovsky’s time by R. T. Flewelling (1871–1960), among others.
18 For an illuminating constructive engagement of the trinitarian ontology of personhood, see Philip Rolnick, Person, Grace, and God (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007).
implications of the claim that the “discovery” of personhood was to be credited to patristic theology were subsequently worked out in different and controversial ways by Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas.20

HISTORICAL A-TELEOLOGY

It should be emphasized, however, that Florovsky first became interested in personalism under the influence of Herzen and other Russian thinkers, not as a result of a sustained study of the Church Fathers. Florovsky’s personalist debut was his 1921 essay “The Meaning of Life and the Meaning of History,” published in the émigré journal The Russian Thought (Russkaia Mysl’), edited by Petr Struve. Drawing on Herzen and Struve, Florovsky criticized the nineteenth-century theories of progress on the grounds that they were overly rationalistic and deterministic. The Hegelian assumption of the rational transparency of history failed to do justice to the irrational and tragic character of human freedom.21 The future was, in Herzen’s phrase, a “messy improvisation on the theme of the past” rather than a logical development of the Hegelian Absolute Idea.22 To Florovsky’s generation coming of age in the midst of enormous cultural disruptions caused by the wars and revolutions, the nineteenth-century theories of progress seemed overly rationalistic and hollow.

Florovsky also concurred with Herzen and Dostoevsky that to subordinate the meaning of an individual human life to the meaning of history was in the final analysis to relativize the value of personhood and to undermine human freedom. Herzen rejected the overarching meaning of history in the name of preserving the value and meaning of individual human life. History, Herzen maintained, “has no meaning,” is “an autobiography of a madman,” and “leads nowhere.”23

be appreciated not only as a philosopher and historian of antiquity, but also as a theological voice crying out in the Soviet wilderness, a historical theologian in his own right. Similar insights were earlier expressed by S. N. Trubetskoy, O prirode chelovecheskogo soznaniia (Moscow: Mysl’, 1994), 492.


23 Quotes from Herzen are in Florovsky, “Smysl istorii i smysl zhizni,” PRM, 108 and “Vechnoe i prekhodiashchee v uchenii russkih slavianofilov” (1921), PRM, 44. For a brilliant exposition of Herzen’s social thought, see Isaiah Berlin, “Herzen and Bakunin on Individual
In his 1920s essays, Florovsky was not disconcerted by the fact that Herzen aimed his nihilist historical conclusion against a Christian view of history. In due course, Florovsky apparently realized that the conclusion “history leads nowhere” implied a rejection of the divine providence. It appears that in the conclusion to his dissertation Florovsky nuanced this nihilist thesis by allowing that the purpose of history was discoverable outside the boundaries of historical inquiry and as such was unknowable, rather than non-existent. Thus, Florovsky recast Herzen’s teleological nihilism into more cautious epistemic agnosticism about history’s ultimate purposes—a stance that had important implications for his critique of Solovyov’s and Bulgakov’s conceptions of historical process.

In The Meaning of History (1923), Berdyaev argued that the meaning of history could be found outside the boundaries of history in the divinely sanctioned meta-history, or in the kingdom of God. Bulgakov also spoke of the immanent and transcendent meaning of history in a number of his pre-revolutionary works. The subject was pursued with systematic rigor and developed sophiologically by Evgeny Trubetskoy in The Meaning of Life (1918), another work that would have been familiar to Florovsky.

Florovsky’s historical a-teleology is problematic for several reasons. Following Herzen, Florovsky saw the meaning of history and the meaning of individual human life as incompatible. But a deterministic theory of progress is not the only way of making sense of history (other possibilities include theories of the “rise and fall of civilizations,” circular conceptions of time, theories of historical regress, and so on). Besides, to acknowledge a contribution that each individual human life has on a larger scale of human history is not to devalue personal uniqueness. On the contrary, it could be argued that a seemingly purposeless life might acquire a meaning precisely by being placed in a larger historical context. In other words, the meaning of individual life and the meaning of world history could be interpreted as mutually enriching, not as mutually exclusive.

Besides, if one rejects the possibility of large-scale causal chains, it would seem logical to question the possibility of small-scale historical causality too.

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24 See Shpet, Filosofskoe mirovozzrenie Gertsena, 39: “Herzen could not accept the standpoint of theological providentialism primarily because it was a standpoint of theology. Herzen was inclined to see theology behind any teleology.”


27 S. Bulgakov, “Apokaliptika i sotsializm,” Dva grada. Issledovaniia o prirode obschestvennykh idealov (St Petersburg: Iz-vo RGKH, 1997), 207–47. For the discussion of Bulgakov, see Florovsky, “Chelovecheskia mudrost’ i Premudrost’ Bozhia” (1922), PRM, 79–81.

28 Smysl zhyzni (Moscow: I. D. Sytin, 1918).

For example, if one allows that different human lives are teleologically dis-connected, a deeper skepticism about a similar causal connection between different acts of one individual becomes unavoidable too. Thus, the question-able nihilist logic that purports to dissolve the meaning of history would have the same disintegrating impact on the meaning of individual human life—a ramification that Florovsky would not have found acceptable.

The methodological assumption that “history leads nowhere” had devas-tating consequences for Florovsky’s later investigation of the “ways of Russian theology.” Consistently applied, such an assumption disallows any teleological explanation of trans-personal and trans-generational historical “ways.” Given his fondness for Herzen’s a-teleological philosophy of history, in *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky was setting the stage for an inescapable conclu-sion that the development of Russian theology was a fiasco. Remarkably, Florovsky suspended his a-teleological presuppositions when he approached patristic theology. I will return to the issue of consistency of Florovsky’s historical method later in this chapter.

**THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE**

The discussion of historical knowledge came to European scholarly attention at the time of Giovanni Battista Vico (1668–1744) and intensified towards the end of the nineteenth century. Did historical knowledge fit a general epis-temological paradigm, or should history be regarded as a type of knowledge sui generis? Florovsky shared a commonly accepted view that history and natural sciences addressed themselves to different objects of inquiry. The objects of natural sciences are available to potential observation, whereas the objects of history are not. The past event can never become the present or, in other words, repeated in its entirety, like a scientific experiment. The past, being unrepeatable, could only be indirectly accessed and reconstructed. For this reason, the paradigm of historical knowledge was different from the paradigm of knowledge in natural sciences.30

To shed light on the process of historical knowing, Florovsky critically engaged two theories of his day. According to the theory of French scholars Charles Langlois (1863–1929) and Charles Seignobos (1854–1942), historical sources are “traces” of the past.31 The historian’s task is to make valid inferences from the remaining “traces” (effects) to the actual events (causes).

31 Ch. V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques* (1898). Florovsky read the book in A. Serebriakova’s Russian translation as *Vvedenie v izuchenie istorii* (St Petersburg, 1899).
This theory emphasized the role of constructive imagination and inferential reasoning in the act of historical knowing.

Florovsky’s compatriot, Russian philosopher Lev Karsavin, proposed a different theory. According to Karsavin, when interpreting a historical source, the historian did not reason from the source to the underlying past reality; rather, the historian sought to relive the past in an act of understanding his sources. Since such a reliving had an immediate character, it was closer to intuition, to the direct intellectual vision of the past, than inference from “traces” to past reality.32

In Florovsky’s judgment, both theories were problematic inasmuch as they reified the historical sources into the entities more or less independent of the historian. He contended that, in practice, certain items became “historical sources” only when they were selected as “signs” and “symbols” of the past by the historian. Florovsky noted that “‘source’ and ‘interpretation’ were mutually defining terms.”33 Following Shpet, Florovsky proposed that working with sources was akin to reading signs.34 As such, this cognitive act was neither purely intuitive, nor purely inferential, but something in between. The act of historical knowing was a movement from signs to their meaning; it was neither a direct vision, nor a formal deduction from effects to causes. Vision-like penetration into the dynamic of past events was a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of historical knowing. The historian did not passively apprehend the past as if it were an external object. Rather, the historian inquired and then represented the past in his imagination, synthesizing the data and filling in the gaps in evidence.

Thus Florovsky underlined the structural, synthesizing function of personal judgment in historical expositions. He categorically rejected the claim that the historian’s goal was to reconstruct was ist eigentich gewesen, what had really happened.35 He saw such an objectification of historical knowledge as both undesirable and unattainable. For him, the historian was not a detached observer, but a committed inquirer.36

32 L. Karsavin, Filosofia istorii (Berlin, 1923), 299–307; Vvedenie v istoriiu (Teoriia istorii) (St Petersburg, 1920).


34 See Shpet, Istorika kak predmet logiki (Moscow: Akademicheskii tsentr Narkomprosa, 1922), 15–16.

35 “O tipakh istoricheskogo istolkovaniia,” 531; cf. “The Predicament of the Christian Historian,” CW II: 44–5. However, in his “Review of A. d’Alès, Le dogme d’Ephese (Paris, 1931),” Put’, 33 (1932), 72–6 at 72, Florovsky less polemically spoke of the reconstruction of “what had really happened” as being only a part of history, to be complemented by “uncovering and showing the meaning of what had happened.”

36 In his paper “The Oxford Conference on Patristic Studies. September 1955,” SVSQ, 4/1–2 (Fall 1955–Winter 1956), 60–1, Florovsky discussed with approval H. I. Marrou’s point that
THE IMAGINATIVE PSYCHOLOGISM
OF MIKHAIL GERSHENZON

As a philosopher of history, Florovsky found especially congenial the approach of Jewish-Russian philosopher and literary theorist, Mikhail Gershenzon (1869–1925). According to Marc Raeff, three aspects of Gershenzon’s theory left their mark on Florovsky’s historiography:

In the first place, a thinker’s intellectual make-up and development have a single spiritual source which provides a basic unity, as well as explanation, for his lifework, and it is the historian’s principle task to detect and penetrate this unifying source. Secondly, this task is best accomplished through empathy, Einfühlung, for even rational thoughts and concepts do not come naked in an exclusively logical form, they appear within an emotional, existential matrix that the historian must try to perceive and understand [...] Third and last, an individual’s intellectual and spiritual life is to be understood only within the wider context of his cultural milieu, that is mainly from his spiritual and aesthetic ambiance.

Following Gershenzon, in The Ways of Russian Theology, Florovsky insisted on the importance of “grasping the major intuition and finding the original standpoint” of each thinker before properly assessing his place in intellectual history.

The emphasis on empathy (Einfühlung) in Gershenzon’s “imaginative psychologism” struck a particular cord with Florovsky. According to this approach, in order to understand a given historical figure, it is requisite to enter her inner world in order to discover what moved her, what she loved. Florovsky writes: “An Einfühlung into the witnesses is an obvious prerequisite of understanding [...] No understanding is possible without some measure of ‘congeniality,’ of intellectual or spiritual sympathy, without a real meeting of minds.” Intellectual history must be concerned not only with the development of ideas, but also with the emotional attitudes and volitional dispositions of concrete thinkers. Following Gershenzon, Florovsky treated the realm of ideas and the realm of emotion-driven motivations as two patristic scholarship was a theologically committed form of study; cf. “The Predicament of the Christian Historian,” CW II: 34: “An unbiased history is simply impossible, and actually does not exist.”


38 Florovsky, “The Predicament of the Christian Historian,” CW II: 39, 40. While these statements were made in the context of discussing the approach of British idealist philosopher of history R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943), they applied in equal measure to the approach of M. O. Gershenzon.
inseparable parts of one psycho-intellectual whole. For example, in *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovskya
would often sketch out the psychological portraits of his protagonists in the course of discussing their ideas. Not unlike Gershenzon, Florovskya was more focused on the pre-logical impulses stimulating the emergence of ideas than on the unfolding of ideas into comprehensive theological systems.

Florovskya underscores that “cognizing the past is richer than ‘the past itself,’ since it is a renewed reliving of the past as a viable tradition and its appropriating and clarifying interpretation.” Further emphasizing an active role of the historical inquirer, Florovskya speaks of the prominent role that the historian’s presuppositions and personal judgments play in the selection and arrangement of source material:

One should not forget that all acts of understanding are, strictly speaking, personal, and only in this capacity of personal acts can they have any existential relevance and value. One has to check, severely and strictly, one’s prejudices and presuppositions, but one should never try to empty one’s mind of all presuppositions. Such an attempt would be a suicide of mind and can only issue in total mental sterility.

Florovskya views historical inquiry as a balancing act between the objective aspect of the source material and the subjective presuppositions of the historian, between the scholar’s receptivity and her sympathetic imagination. In other words, Florovskya acknowledges a range of complex and non-rule-governed mental acts, ranging from the passive reception of data to active imaginative reconstruction and selection leading to a “historical synthesis.”

**HISTORICAL SINGULARISM**

Florovskya sheds more light on the nature of “historical synthesis” in his version of historical singularism (*istoricheskii singularizm*)—a theory about the nature of historical reality developed by one of the leaders of the Russian Religious Renaissance, politician, historian, and economist Petr Struve. According to this theory, the real agents of history are unique and concrete

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42 In his Eurasian period, Florovskya acknowledged Struve’s influence, even calling himself Struve’s student. See “Pis’mo k P. B. Struve o Evraziistve” [“An Open Letter to Struve Concerning Eurasianism”], August 3, 1921, *PRM*, 124. On Struve, see, R. Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Right*,...
individuals, rather than “general historical types,” “classes,” and other aggregate entities, which occupied a central stage in the rationalist, Hegelian, Marxist, positivist, and other accounts of history. Similarly, the real events of history are “singular” (particular) events, for example, the act of writing a specific book, rather than the creation of a school, style, or direction in literature. On this view, it would be erroneous to ascribe concrete, temporal, historical reality and causality to “gothic style,” for only particular gothic cathedrals produced by concrete architects have been ever materialized in history. “Singular” events and concrete individuals are “real” in the sense of having an immediate causal bearing upon historical change. Large-scale historical transformations and communal associations of people causally contribute to history only to the extent to which they are a result of interaction of specific persons and represent an aggregate of “singular” events. Aggregate entities—societies, nations, states, institutions—must not be accorded the causal role that belongs solely to concrete individuals. Florovsky points out that both the idealist and materialist historical schemes have replaced real historical singularities with generalized entities, and what is more problematic, have tended to treat them as if they were singularities—that is, real agents and objects of history. For example, in German Idealism the individual self is absorbed into the dialectical development of the “Absolute Spirit” (Hegel), into the cosmic Self (Fichte), and is ultimately subordinated to the life of the human collective, such as a nation, state, or even universal humanity. For Florovsky, in contrast, the ultimate historical significance belonged to particular human persons, not to the aggregate entities. Historical singularism is philosophical nominalism applied to history.

While Florovsky criticized the “tyranny of abstract concepts” in German and Russian Idealism, his own methodological commitment to historical singularism was not always consistent. It should be recalled that the central category of his patristic theology is the “mind of the Fathers.” Florovsky’s use of the category of “patristic mind” was not purely metaphorical, since he believed that it was possible to “enter” the mind of the Fathers through “ecclesial experience.” Moreover, the Church for him was first of all the mystical organism, the Body of Christ, in some sense capable of perceiving divine reality collectively. It is true that in the vast majority of cases, Florovsky


43 “O tipakh istoricheskogo istolkovaniia,” 537. While the range of possible targets of Florovsky’s critique was wide, perhaps the most likely candidates are Lev Karsavin’s notion of a nation as a “symphonic person” and Mikhail Gershenzon’s “dialectic of psychological types.” See Florovsky, “Mikhail Gershenzon,” PRM, 293–7; cf. Florovsky, Letter to Mr McCaughey, p. 1, July 2, 1946, GFP PUL, Box 12, f. 1: “The crucial problem is Man indeed, not a Society.” In his critique of the Western European rationalism and impersonalism Florovsky likely drew on V. F. Ern, “Osnovnoi khrakter russkoi filosofskoi mysli” (1910), RFO II: 176–80.
steered away from the philosophical hyper-realism of Solovyov, Bulgakov, and their followers. As a rule, Florovsky preferred to dwell on the specific historical realities, rather than on the “cosmic” entities, such as “world Soul,” “collective consciousness,” “divine humanity,” and other categories that were common stock among the Russian Idealists. Yet, the categories of the “mind of the Fathers” and “the mystical body of Christ,” pivotal in his religious epistemology and ecclesiology, could not be readily reconciled with his methodological commitment to historical singularism and the corresponding unwillingness to accord causal significance to corporate personalities. Florovsky was not a consistent nominalist, but a sporadic realist, at least in those instances when he invoked an apparently realist category of the “mind of the Fathers.”

CRITIQUE OF ORGANICISM

Florovsky further clarifies that historical singularism is primarily a claim about historical causality, not a comprehensive claim about the nature of historical explanation. He allows that in the order of understanding and interpretation, the generalizations of different orders are unavoidable and indispensable. He distinguishes three levels of historical generalization: a chronicle, depiction, and what he calls “genetic” history. The chronicle is the lowest level of historical generalization, involving a sequential recounting of singular events without establishing interpretative links between them. The historical depiction is a higher level of generalization, since it involves an activity of linking historical events in imagination. The crucial fallacy to be avoided at this level is that of treating abstractions as if they were real, as if they had an immediate causal impact akin to “singular events” and concrete individuals.

The third level of historical generalization is what he calls “geneticism.” The principal issue for Florovsky is the extent to which it is legitimate to apply the concept of “development” (razvitie) to history. In a peculiarly narrow sense favored by Florovsky, only concrete biological organisms “develop,” since they possess both the requisite substantial unity and the capacity for change from potential to actual. Substantial unity is the ability of an organism to remain a unity throughout change simply by virtue of being what it is, rather than by mechanical aggregation, mental association, or deliberate effort to remain unified. Lifeless objects do not “develop” (in his narrow sense) because they do not have the ability to change themselves, while retaining substantial unity. Likewise, a group of living beings does not “develop,” because it does not possess substantial unity. Within the group, the “real” subjects of development are concrete living organisms, not the group as a whole. While it is a stretch, Florovsky concedes that the concept of development is also applicable to the natural process as a whole.
He maintains that to apply the same organic concept to the historical change is a category mistake, for human societies are not organisms. In rejecting the organicist model of cultural changes, Florovsky was following a view earlier developed by his former professor at Novorossiisky University, who in the emigration became a close friend and collaborator in the Eurasian movement, Petr Bitsilli (1879–1953). Florovsky’s archive at Princeton University contains a pre-publication draft of Bitsilli’s paper that became a part of the second Eurasian volume, *On the Ways*. The draft in question opens with the following thesis: “‘Culture’ does not ‘develop organically,’ like a plant or an animal, but is created; culture is creativity itself. For this reason, a history of culture ought to be regarded as a limitless chain of ‘leaps.’ Each creative act is a unified whole and subjectively there could be no ‘transition’ from one creative act to another.” Remarkably, Bitsilli’s critique of the organicist model of cultural development, so important to Florovsky, was edited out of the published version of his paper, possibly under pressure from N. Trubetskoy and P. Savitsky, whose cultural theories were dominated by the organicist categories.

Following Bitsilli and Charles Renouvier, Florovsky insisted that the historical change was not analogous to the unfolding of latent forms in biological evolution. Human history, as it actually happens, consists of leaps, rifts, crises, turns, and other consequences of free human activity. Here Florovsky found particularly appealing Herzen’s metaphor of the “fan-like parting of the ways” at each historical moment, the metaphor that conveyed the indeterminism of historical events. As Florovsky saw the matter, organicist assumptions had the impact of minimizing the value of individual persons and the causal role that particular human decisions played in history. In affirming the reality of personhood, freedom, spontaneity, and creativity over against the “organic” unity of humankind, the deterministic purposefulness, and “rational transparency” of the historical process, Florovsky sided with the personalism of Shestov, Herzen, Bitsilli, and Renouvier over against the organicism, panlogism, and cosmism of Hegel, Schelling, and their Russian followers. By rejecting organicism Florovsky was also undermining one of the

44 “Vvedenie: russkaia filosofiia kak zadacha”: “history is not development” (p. 3); “The Crisis of German Idealism (II)” (1932), CW XII: 34; “The Predicament of the Christian Historian,” CW II: 49.

45 The manuscript of the paper in GFP PUL, Box 1, f. 1, bears the title “‘Zapad’ i ‘Vostok’,” but does not indicate its author. In my judgment, the comparison of this document with Bitsilli’s paper “‘Vostok’ i ‘Zapad’ v istorii starogo sveta,” *Na putiakh* (Moscow/Berlin: Gelikon, 1922), 317–40, establishes Bitsilli’s authorship beyond reasonable doubt.


major historiosophic presuppositions of the Eurasian doctrine, as expounded by N. Trubetskoy and P. Savitsky.\textsuperscript{48}

Florovsky’s generation shared a common “catastrophic consciousness,” a sense of living in the time of a profound spiritual and political crisis, when human existence was constantly threatened by wars and revolutions. The Romantic concept of “organic life,” adopted by the Slavophiles, had some application to the rural and patriarchal life of old Russia. However, life in the Diaspora was nothing but “organic.” The Russian refugees were powerless, uprooted, dispossessed, scarred by the past, and fearful of the future. Such existence did not inspire confidence in the rationalistic theories of progress, and led many to accept the reason-defying character of history.

Nevertheless, one could justifiably question Florovsky’s restriction of the concept of “development” to the paradigm of organic growth alone. A century before Florovsky, John Henry Newman (1801–1890), in his \textit{Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine} (1845), distinguished at least eight kinds of development: mathematical, physical, material, political, logical, historical, ethical, and metaphysical.\textsuperscript{49} What Newman called “physical” development roughly corresponded to Florovsky’s “organic” development. In practice, although without a consistent theoretical account of the matter, Florovsky also rejected what Newman called “mathematical” and “logical” development of doctrine. For example, in his essay “Two Covenants,” written for the Eurasian volume \textit{Russia and Latinity}, Florovsky observed: “Presently there can be no dogmatic development in the Church: for the dogmas are not theoretical axioms from which one could gradually and sequentially unfold the ‘theorems of faith.’”\textsuperscript{50} In a seminal essay “Theological Fragments,” which generated much debate at Karl Barth’s seminar at the University of Bonn, Florovsky expressed himself even more categorically: “[I]t is a total misunderstanding to speak of ‘the development of dogma.’ Dogmas do not develop; they are unchanging and inviolable, even in their external aspect—their wording. [. . .] Dogma is an intuitive truth, not a discursive axiom which is accessible to logical development.”\textsuperscript{51} In this case, Florovsky reached the same


\textsuperscript{51} “Bogoslovskie otryvki,” \textit{IBS}, 128. The western readers are more familiar with this essay under its German title “Offenbarung, Philosophie, und Theologie” (1931). English translation:
negative conclusion regarding the possibility of doctrinal development by rejecting the mathematical and logical, rather than the organicist model of development.

Despite ruling out organicism as a general paradigm of historical change, Florovsky at times had recourse to the adjective “organic” in order to emphasize a continuity of early Christian doctrine and practice. For example, the New Testament for him was an “organic completion” of the Old Testament.\(^ {52}\)

The stated goal of his patrology lectures was “to demonstrate that Byzantine theology was organically related to the original deposit of the truth of the faith.”\(^ {53}\) According to Florovsky, the theology of the first three centuries had elements of “ambiguity,” which were clarified in the theological controversies of the later centuries.\(^ {54}\) Florovsky understands this change as a movement from lesser to greater terminological precision, rather than an addition to the content of the original deposit of faith.

In his lectures, Florovsky repeatedly characterized the transitions occurring in the patristic and Byzantine periods as “organic.” However, when approaching the history of Russian theology, he saw little that was “organic” in it. For Florovsky, the history of patristic theology was a triumph of orthodoxy over heresy, whereas the story of Russian theology was a saga of rifts and failures due to western influences. He was an ad hoc organicist as a patristic theologian and a more consistent anti-organicist as a historian of Russian theology. He approached the Church Fathers with a hermeneutic of retrieval and applied the hermeneutic of suspicion to the Renaissance “fathers.”

**CONCLUSION**

Florovsky’s philosophy of history has been characterized as an “anti-pantheistic and anti-organicist version of personalism grounded in Orthodox [theology].”\(^ {55}\) There is much truth in this summary, as long as the tensions in his thought are also acknowledged. I have identified two major tensions. First, his critique of organicism in theory did not square with his use of the organicist categories in application to patristic thought. Second, his historical singularism, given its general nominalist cast, left little space for such aggregate entities

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\(^ {53}\) Florovsky, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*, *CW* VIII: 16; emphasis in the original; cf. “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” 190.


as the “mind of the Fathers” and the “mind of the Church,” which were the central categories of his neopatristics.

For Florovsky, Christian personalism was an alternative to the interpretations of history developed by German Romantics and Idealists, and followed by Solovyov and other Russian philosophers. More generally, German Idealism, particularly its metaphysical variations, was Florovsky’s bête noire, when it came to his diagnosis of the intellectual dysfunctions and the “dead ends” of Russian religious thought. At the same time—and this is yet another notable tension in his thought—he accepted some of the assumptions of German Idealist cognitive theory, particularly the appeal to empathy and “imaginative psychologism” in the reconstruction of historical evidence.

I suggest that it is against the background of “imaginative psychologism” that one should read the main hermeneutical desideratum of Florovsky’s historical synthesis, namely, the acquisition of “the mind of the Fathers.” According to Florovsky, “To follow the Fathers’ does not mean simply to quote their sentences. It means to acquire their mind, their phronema.” Properly understood, neopatristic theology was not intended to become a flight into an idealized patristic past from the contemporary theological problems. Rather, such a historical synthesis involved an expansion of the contemporary theologian’s mind beyond the epistemic horizon of modernity into the premodern thought of the Church Fathers.

In Florovsky’s work on the philosophy of history, “synthesis” is not a feature of historical sources themselves, but something that a historian brings to bear upon the historical sources in the act of understanding. For each act of understanding, as a condition of its possibility, presupposes a unity of meaning. Understood along these lines, historical synthesis becomes a theologically informed and judgment-laden integration achieved by the historian.

According to Florovsky, the unity that could be ascribed to the historical process is not a “substantial” unity, which characterizes the growth of individual organisms. The unity of the historical process is an intentional, deliberate synthesis. Such a unity depends on human intentions in two distinct ways: first, human societies maintain unity or become fragmented because individuals bring this unity or fragmentation about; second, the historical process acquires unity in the mind of a historian who intends to understand it. What in temporal sequence has only potential unity and possible intelligibility, acquires actual unity and intelligibility as a matter of human effort at cooperation and explanation. In light of a theory of historical knowledge that Florovsky developed in the 1920s–1930s, the second term of the expression

58 “О tipakh istoricheskogo istolkovaniia,” 529.
“neopatristic synthesis” acquired a dynamic character of an on-going, yet always provisional hermeneutical achievement.

Therefore, it would be misleading to construe the “neopatristic synthesis” as something that inheres entirely in the patristic sources themselves, something that the Church Fathers had provided in a finished form to the contemporary theologians. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the synthesis that could be entirely located in the past as “patristic,” rather than “neopatristic.” Florovsky repeatedly speaks of the patristic project as being unfinished, of the need to “complete the synthesis.” According to Florovsky, modern historical theologians have a responsibility to find a meaningful unity in the history of Christian theology, beginning from the apostolic times up to the present day. The Church Fathers initiated this process; their synthesis was a deliberate theological achievement, rather than a historical given. Neopatristic synthesis is a result of the application of historical synthesis, understood along the lines of Gershenzon’s imaginative psychology, to different instances of a patristic synthesis. While patristic theology supplies the only valid foundation, the patristic synthesis remains incomplete and requires a genuinely new synthesis to be undertaken in each generation. Thus, Florovsky did not complete his synthesis because he could not do so in principle, because the neopatristic synthesis required an ongoing hermeneutical effort.
The Re-evaluation of Solovyov

From Solovyov the way lies back to Schelling and the Neoplatonists, but also to patristics, to the experience of the Great Church, the historical Church, the Church of the tradition and the Fathers.¹

In the emigration, Florovsky came to a comprehensive re-evaluation of Solovyov’s philosophical patrimony. Writing to Bulgakov in 1925, Florovsky made the following revealing confession:

As for me personally, I understand my pulling away from Solovyov in all respects as a personal religious obligation and as the present task of contemporary Russian religious-philosophical thought. By renouncing Solovyov we will be liberated from the whole shadowy tradition, which leads from Masonry to the extra-ecclesial mysticism of the false contemplatives in bad taste. I feel that it is this tradition that has held our creative forces in shackles. We must enter “the Father’s house” divested of worldly wisdom and then be armed anew with the new wealth and medicine of grace. As for Solovyov, instead of singing him panegyrics or even hymns of praise, we should instead offer prayers for his troubled and half-broken soul.²

Florovsky would continue “pulling away from Solovyov” for the rest of his life, in the process creating a sharp dichotomy between the perennial philosophy of the Church Fathers and the religious philosophy of the Russian Religious Renaissance. He hailed the former as “the true source of creative inspiration” and condemned the latter as a series of “dead ends.”

Florovsky’s critique of Solovyov had the overall effect of inoculating the generation of the “grandchildren” of the Russian Religious Renaissance, as well as their followers in the United States and Greece, against treating Solovyov’s system as a fruitful expression of modern Orthodox theology. As for Florovsky himself, the reflection on various aspects of Solovyov’s philosophy, even when it took the external form of resolute rejection, provided at least as much creative stimulus as the thought of the Church Fathers.

¹ Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 494.
² Florovsky, Letter to S. Bulgakov, December 30, 1925, Vestnik RKhD, 196 (2010), 82.
Florovsky’s scholarly career is punctuated by a life-long engagement with Solovyov. It is notable that Florovsky’s scholarly debut was a literature survey of the Solovyovan scholarship, which appeared in 1912, when its author was only nineteen. Florovsky continued writing articles treating Solovyov’s thought directly and indirectly over a span of the next fifty years (1920s–1960s). He published his last article on Solovyov in 1966, while in retirement at Princeton. The first and the last articles dedicated to Solovyov may be regarded as the symbolic “bookends” of Florovsky’s scholarly career.

As a young student in Odessa, Florovsky was a devotee of Solovyov. In the emigration, he turned into Solovyov’s unforgiving critic. The negative judgment concerning Solovyov’s metaphysics that Florovsky reached in the early 1920s remained fundamentally unchanged afterwards. Intellectual “pulling away” from Solovyov fueled Florovsky’s retrieval of patristic theology. The key theological and methodological moves that Florovsky made in articulating his neopatristic synthesis were shaped by his life-long grappling with Solovyov’s thought.

EARLY POSITIVE RECEIPTION OF SOLOVYOV

As a teenager, Florovsky revered Solovyov as his “first teacher of religious philosophy.” By the age of nineteen, Florovsky had not only read a substantial part of Solovyov’s voluminous corpus, but had also mastered a growing body of scholarly literature discussing various aspects of the Russian philosopher’s thought. In his first published article, “New Books about Vladimir Solovyov,”

Florovsky enthusiastically acknowledged Solovyov’s pre-eminence among Russian philosophers.6 Young Florovsky took it upon himself to defend the doctrinal orthodoxy of his intellectual hero, especially against those who with good reasons attributed to Solovyov strong Catholic leanings. As a young man, Florovsky believed that “in the depth of his soul Solovyov was Orthodox, not Catholic, that the spirit of his philosophy was the authentic spirit of Greek-Eastern Orthodoxy, and the ideas of his philosophy—Godmanhood, the Church, ‘integral knowledge,’ ‘free all-unity’—were instilled by patristic thought; these ideas were developed during the time of the ecumenical councils on the pages of the writings of the Fathers of the Greek Church and were held sacred in Byzantine monasticism.”7 Florovsky’s young mind was already working with the criterion that would become so significant for him later: a theological claim is true, if it could be traced to a patristic source of unquestioned orthodoxy. As he would put the matter years later: “the teaching of the Fathers is a permanent category of Christian faith, a constant and ultimate measure or criterion of right belief.”8 As a college student, Florovsky had only a very general notion of the boundaries of patristic orthodoxy. Initially, Florovsky maintained that both Solovyov’s epistemology of integral knowledge and his metaphysics of all-unity faithfully reflected patristic tradition. Years later, in a rare moment of public self-criticism, Florovsky would take pains to retract his early appreciation of Solovyov’s orthodoxy, describing his 1912 article as a “fully incompetent ‘estimate’ of my undergraduate youth.”9

As I mentioned in chapter 2, Florovsky had already raised some red flags during his Odessa years, noting “pantheistic cords”10 in Solovyov’s ontology and indicating the philosopher’s dependence on German Idealism and non-Orthodox forms of mysticism.11 But apparently at this stage, Florovsky’s

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7 Florovsky, “Novye knigi o Vladimire Solov’iove,” 238.
8 Florovsky, “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” 187.
9 Florovsky’s full retraction read: “Some recent writers paid me undeserved honor by quoting my very old bibliographical article, buried in a provincial periodical, to allege my authority for the full conformity of Solov’ev with ‘the genuine spirit of Eastern Orthodoxy;’ see K. Mochulsky, Vladimir Solov’ev. Zhizn’ i uchenie, 2nd edn (Paris: YMCA Press, 1951), p. 119, and Peter P. Zouboff, Godmanhood as the Main Idea of the Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov (Poughkeepsie, NY: Harmon Printing House, 1944), p. 43. The latter author adds, in a footnote, that this estimate of mine ‘has been disputed by at least one contemporary Church authority.’ He could have added that it had been strongly repudiated by me, as one could have learned, for example, from my later (and also bibliographical) article ‘Molodost’ Vladimira Solov’eva,’ in Put’, no. 9 (January 1928). How could it escape the attention of readers that the article they quoted had been written when the writer was still in his teens and therefore should not be imputed to him thirty-five years later? I use this opportunity for a formal ‘retraction’ of my fully incompetent ‘estimate’ of my undergraduate youth,” “Reason and Faith in the Philosophy of Solov’ev,” 297.
11 In his review of N. N. Glubokovsky’s article “Pravoslavie po ego sushchestvu” (November 10, 1914), Florovsky wrote: “All of them, the Slavophiles, Solovyov, prince S. Trubetskoy, take
doubts were not serious enough to alter his general acceptance of Solovyov’s system as reflecting the “spirit of Greek-Eastern orthodoxy.” In his earliest published articles Florovsky maintained that Solovyov’s religious epistemology and speculative metaphysics were foundational for Russian religious philosophy. During his Sofia years (1920–1921), Florovsky continued to hold Solovyov’s religious philosophy in high regard. While beginning to question Solovyov’s theocratic utopianism, Florovsky remained assured of the “fundamental soundness” of the direction chosen by Solovyov’s followers, including Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Florensky, and Ern.12

In his Eurasian essay “On Righteous and Sinful Patriotism,” finished in January 1922, after his move to Prague, Florovsky apparently still considered favorably Solovyov’s metaphysics, describing the Christianization of culture in recognizably Solovyovan terms and speaking of “Christ’s work” as “positive all-unity.”13 In the same essay, he went on to endorse Solovyov’s “sophianicity of the world” as an authentic expression of “Orthodox ecclesial experience.”14 Nothing in this Eurasian essay forebodes the thunder and lightning that Florovsky would hurl at the Russian philosopher only several months later.

A CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

The clouds started to gather when Florovsky, now approaching the age of thirty, undertook an in-depth study of Solovyov’s philosophical heritage. During this period Florovsky’s youthful worries regarding the sources of Solovyov’s metaphysics and mysticism reached a tipping point.

The immediate occasion was an invitation to lecture on Solovyov at the recently founded Russian Institute in Prague over the winter semester of 1922–1923.15 While working in the Florovsky Papers of St Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary Library in August 2012, I found a notebook bearing the title, in Florovsky’s own handwriting: “The Philosophy of VI. Solovyov. Lectures philosophy and Schelling as their point of departure, set the goal of reconciling German Idealism with Christian religion, [and] attempt to fill with Christian content and meaning the accepted set formulas and concepts of idealist philosophy, instead of taking as their starting point the ever living and ecclesial experience, the tradition of the Church,” published by Albert Sobolev, “Prilozhenie. Prof. N. N. Glubokovskii. ‘Pravoslavie po ego sushchestvu’. Saint-Petersburg, 1914,” Issledovaniia (2003), 83.

12 Florovsky, “Chelovecheskaia mudrost’ i Premudrost’ Bozhiia” (1922), PRM, 85. Florovsky later changed his judgment regarding all of these thinkers, with the exception of Ern.
13 “O patriotismze pravednom i grekhovnom,” PRM, 161; also cited in “Pis’mo k redaktoru ‘Russkoi mysl’,” PRM, 169.
14 “O patriotismze pravednom i grekhovnom,” PRM, 164.
read by Privat-Dozent G. V. Florovsky in the Russian Institute. Prague, 1922–1923.” The manuscript contains four lectures and a plan of a more comprehensive study of Solovyov’s philosophy, possibly Florovsky’s projected doctoral dissertation. A typed up stenographic record of Florovsky’s public lecture on Solovyov is attached to the notebook. The lectures have never been published, although some of the material was probably reworked into a section on Solovyov in *The Ways of Russian Theology*. This discovery sheds some new light on Florovsky’s evolving approach to the history of Russian religious thought in general and to Solovyov in particular.

In the first lecture, Florovsky divides the history of Russian philosophy into three periods. He associates the first period with the “philosophical awakening” of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, which was characterized by the reception and critique of German Idealism, especially Hegel and Schelling, by the Slavophiles and others. The second period, which Florovsky dates to the second part of the nineteenth century, was a metaphysical quest characterized by the struggle with materialism, positivism, and Marxism. The most prominent figures of this period were Solovyov’s contemporaries Yurkevich, Debol’sky, Kozlov, and S. N. Trubetskoy. The third period covers the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, coinciding with the Russian Religious Renaissance. Florovsky notes that Solovyov epitomized the philosophical achievement of the first period and became a foundational figure for the Renaissance thinkers. While acknowledging Solovyov’s “pedagogical significance,” Florovsky emphasizes the need to reassess his heritage critically.

Although Solovyov contributed to intelligentsia’s religious awakening, he also “pushed Russian society on the path of fascination with Gnostic mysticism and theosophy.” It cannot be denied that Solovyov had a lasting interest in Gnosticism, Cabbala, German mystical writers, and theosophers. This aspect of Solovyov’s biography particularly troubled Florovsky. As Florovsky later summarized the problem, “Solovyov had attempted to build an ecclesial synthesis out of non-ecclesial experience.” In other words, idiosyncratic forms of western mysticism were not a valid source of Orthodox theology because they did not square with accepted “ecclesial experience.”

To complicate the matter, Solovyov had an ambiguous mystical life of his own. If we are to take his later poetic account at its face value, the figure of the divine Sophia revealed herself to Solovyov personally. She even dictated love-letters to the young philosopher, using him as a medium of automatic writing, when he was studying the Cabbala in the British

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16 The document is miscataloged. Its present location is GFP SVSL, Box 4 (bearing a general title “Notes”), no folder.
18 Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogoslovia*, 316.
Museum. Solovyov’s “love affair with Sophia” fascinated the poets and writers of the Silver Age, who developed her character with much poetic license. Such absence of spiritual sobriety caused Berdyaev to remark: “The Muscovite Orthodox movement had no sense of intimate closeness to Christ. One has an impression that Sophia has replaced Christ, who is almost feared.” Florovsky copied this remark in his Prague notebook and later repeatedly criticized the Renaissance philosophy for replacing Christ with Sophia. Florovsky believed that sophiological mysticism muddled Solovyov’s religious vision and caused him to lose focus on Christ in developing his concept of the Godmanhood. According to Florovsky, “There was undoubted murkiness in [Solovyov’s] religious experience, the murkiness of duplicitous thoughts and double feelings, the murkiness of erotic delusion.” Driving a wedge between the acceptable teaching regarding the Wisdom of God and Solovyov’s version of sophiology, Florovsky wrote to Bulgakov in 1926:

As I said long ago, there are two teachings about Sophia, even two Sophias, or more precisely, two images of Sophia: the true and real one and the false one. The holy temples in Byzantium and Russia were built in the name of the first image of Sophia. The second image inspired Solovyov and his Masonic and Western teachers, going back all the way to the Gnostics and Philo. Solovyov did not know the ecclesial Sophia at all: he knew the Sophia according to Boehme and his followers, according to Valentinus and Cabbala. This kind of sophiology is heretical and schismatic. What you [Bulgakov] are finding in Athanasius has to do with a different Sophia.

A surface reading of this letter produces the impression that Florovsky is making a distinction between Solovyov’s heretical sophiology and Bulgakov’s potentially orthodox sophiology. In actual fact, Florovsky was trying to correct his senior colleague by suggesting to him a way of bringing sophiology in line with patristic teachings. As Florovsky’s correspondence with others demonstrates, privately he clearly considered Bulgakov’s sophiological views as being equally problematic, even verging on heresy.

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21 Florovsky, undated notebook bearing a Prague label on the back, GFP PUL, Box 61, f. 9.
22 Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 498.
24 For the discussion of Florovsky’s approach to Bulgakov’s sophiology, see chapter 8.
In 1924, Florovsky was hoping to write a doctoral dissertation on Solovyov at the bidding of his former advisor at Charles University, P. I. Novgorodtsev. As Florovsky confessed to his wife:

I feel that I must write it [the doctoral dissertation on Solovyov], and that everything else will be in vain until I write it: one must push up in order to jump. This plan must be completed, even if nobody supports it. This would not be a book about Solovyov, it would not be an exposition or interpretation of someone else’s [ideas]. As I see it, the book will present my own ideas, formulated in opposition to the ideas which have been my own for a long time, but are now foreign to me, by means of which I with great difficulty articulated my own point of view.\(^{25}\)

Florovsky admits that Solovyov’s philosophy has held its sway over him for a long time and that he came to formulate his own position by rejecting Solovyov’s ideas. Bulgakov, with whom Florovsky became personally acquainted in Prague, advised him against undertaking this project: “I do not support your decision to write on Solovyov, whom you dislike and disrespect philosophically; you need Solovyov only as a springboard. With such an attitude I would not write about anyone, and I still wish you [wrote on] a patristic topic.”\(^{26}\) Given Florovsky’s own admission, Bulgakov’s judgment about Solovyov functioning as a convenient “springboard” was right on target. Bulgakov’s advice went beyond a friendly concern that Florovsky’s disrespectful attitude would distort Solovyov’s teaching. For Bulgakov also realized that an attack on Solovyov’s philosophy would ricochet at Solovyov’s followers, including himself.\(^{27}\) In a few years, Bulgakov’s recommendation bore its fruit: Florovsky’s first published book-length study was the two-volume set of his patrology lectures.

The projected book on Solovyov had never materialized for reasons probably having more to do with Florovsky being distracted by teaching assignments and less with Bulgakov’s dissuading him. What immediately came out of Florovsky’s pen was a series of essays entitled “In the Realm of Searches and Wanderings” written over the period of July 1922–March 1923, which overlapped with the time of writing and delivering his lectures on Solovyov’s

\(^{25}\) Florovsky, Letter to K. I. Florovskaia, September 1 (14), 1924, emphasis in the original; cf. Florovsky, Letters to N. S. Trubetsky of December 14 (27), 1922 and of February 10 (23), 1924, Istoriia filosofi, 9 (2002), 154 and 172. In the first letter, Florovsky also mentioned his plans for a book in which he would “offer his own philosophical ’system,’” another book-length project that remained no more than a promissory note (Florovsky, Istoriia filosofi, 155).


\(^{27}\) Interestingly, having published a devastating critique of Bulgakov’s sophiology, V. Lossky later tried to make peace with Bulgakov and received the same advice: to concentrate on the positive exposition of the Church Fathers. Like Florovsky, Lossky followed Bulgakov’s advice and produced his celebrated Essay sur la théologie mystique de l’Église d’Orient (Paris: Aubier, 1944). See B. N. Lossky, “Primechniia,” in N. O. Lossky, Vospomnienia, 293 n. XXXV.
philosophy. In these essays, Florovsky rejected the metaphysics of all-unity in no uncertain terms. Florovsky now claimed categorically: “Being is not ‘all-unity,’ it is not ‘organic whole;’ being is marked by the abyss between the absolute and the creature; and these two worlds are causally united by way of freedom.” In this passage, Florovsky spoke in rather confused terms of what he would later call a Christian “intuition of creaturehood”—a topos of structural importance for his neopatristic synthesis.

Distancing himself further from the founder of Russian sophiology, Florovsky went on to claim that Solovyov’s metaphysics was “genetically linked to western European pantheism,” and that, moreover, Solovyov’s “panentheism was indistinguishable from pantheism.” Consistent with the position he had advanced in his lectures on Solovyov’s philosophy, Florovsky pronounced Solovyov’s personal mystical experience “incommensurable with the ecclesial experience of Sophia.” In his later writings, Florovsky clarified that the “ecclesial experience of Sophia” had to do with Christ, not with the mysterious female figure that made Solovyov her medium and revealed herself to him in visions. In his correspondence, Florovsky came close to insinuating that Solovyov’s mystical experiences and dabbling in theosophy were a form of demonic delusion. Despite these serious suspicions or precisely because these suspicions did not cease to disturb him, Florovsky maintained a life-long interest in Solovyov’s mystical side, taking the trouble to request the unpublished archival material that could shed light on this aspect of Solovyov’s life from the USSR.

Florovsky’s overall verdict was damning: “Solovyov has already ceased to be a living treasury of inspiration; he could no longer be taken for a ‘Russian Hegel.’ It has become apparent that we have nowhere to follow him and that many of Solovyov’s ways end up being dead ends. The change of the way is now clear. The first step should be a close examination of the old ‘errors.’” As confident as this assertion sounded, at the time when these lines were written, the change of direction was clear primarily to Florovsky himself, certainly not

28 First publication: “V mire iskanii i bluzhdanii,” Russkaia mysl’, 43 (1923), 120–46; 44 (1924), 210–31. The date of composition was recorded by the author as Prague, Czech Republic, July 1922–March 1923.
29 “V mire iskanii i bluzhdanii,” PRM, 204.
30 “V mire iskanii i bluzhdanii,” PRM, 206.
31 See Florovsky, “An Unpublished Essay by Vladimir Soloviev,” CW XI: 122–31. The archival material for this publication was diligently supplied by the Soviet scholar, P. N. Berkov: see his letter to G. Florovsky, November 20, 1962, GFP PUL, Box 25, f. 4. In his letter to “Iury Pavlovich” of June 3, 1976, Florovsky mentions: “I am gradually gathering the lost Solovyov material, essentially trifles, but curious ones. I also have a few letters of Solovyov to Dostoevsky and after his death—to Anna Grigor’evna [Dostoevsky’s second wife],” GFP PUL, Box 12, f. 3.
to the majority of the leaders of the Russian Religious Renaissance. The unmentioned new direction which Florovsky envisioned was, of course, neo-patristics. The examination of the old “errors” was undertaken in the essays he published after 1923 and reached its crescendo in *The Ways of Russian Theology*.

Florovsky’s later critique of Solovyov ran along the two main trajectories charted already in his “Lectures on Solovyov’s Philosophy” and in “The Realm of Searches and Wanderings.” The first trajectory addressed the general philosophical problems of German Idealism. The second trajectory targeted specific elements of Solovyov’s philosophical system and mysticism. Both trajectories are discussed in the next two sections successively.

### CRITIQUE OF GERMAN IDEALISM

Two general points need to be kept in mind in assessing Florovsky’s critique of the Idealist tradition. First, his critique focused almost exclusively on the implications of idealist metaphysics for theology and history. As noted in chapter 5, Florovsky freely integrated some insights of the idealist cognitive theory into his philosophy of history. Second, Florovsky mostly treated German Idealism as a totality, without differentiating sufficiently between the positions of the major idealist philosophers. Florovsky was not unaware of such differences; his command of the history of western philosophy was considerable, if somewhat idiosyncratic. He occasionally made subtle distinctions between, say, the early and late Schelling, or Kant and the Neo-Kantians. In rare cases he signaled to the reader that he had a particular idealist philosopher in mind, say Fichte or Hegel, but as a rule, it was German Idealism taken as a whole that was the target of his criticism.

Florovsky repeatedly characterized Idealist ontology as monistic, pantheistic and as having ahistorical, impersonalist, and deterministic implications. He was also fond of establishing genetic links between German Idealism and Platonism, differentiating both from the “Christian philosophy” of the Church Fathers. His tendency to reduce Solovyov’s philosophy to a species of German Idealism needs to be seen in light of this cluster of characterizations.

The monistic and pantheistic traits of German Idealist ontology amounted to treating God and the world as complementary aspects of one totality. Fichte and Hegel regarded the relative and the finite as intrinsic aspects, not merely as contraries of the absolute and the infinite. Their fundamental intuition was based on a spatial analogy: the infinite, in order to be what it

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is, could not be bounded by the finite; the infinite encompasses the finite. As Florovsky put it, “The whole pathos of Idealism was aimed at the search for the unchangeable foundations of the world, at the discovery of its eternal ideal carcass or binding scheme.”34 God and the world were intrinsically linked; the world was an “eternal double” of God.35 That is to say, God “needed” the world in order to be what he is, namely, the all-inclusive totality of being. The world was also an indispensable medium of the divine self-disclosure. In these ways, God and the world were mutually co-dependent.36 For Florovsky, panentheism was ultimately reducible to pantheism.

Florovsky believed that pantheistic ontology had a number of highly problematic implications for the understanding of history, human freedom, and personhood. Since the eternal ground or pattern of the world was a part of the divine being, nothing genuinely new could happen in time. The temporal order of things was merely an imperfect unfolding of eternal cosmos. Historical events were reduced to the pale shadows and symbols of realities eternally present to God. Since all aspects of reality were modes of divine self-disclosure, no specific historical event could be claimed to possess a unique revelatory significance. The central notion of divine revelation through particular historical events was thereby eroded. If everything was revelatory, nothing could be revelatory in a special way.37 For Florovsky, in contrast, history was an arena of the tragic events that often defied rational explanations and left an irrational residue.38 Even more importantly, history was a unique medium of divine revelation.

According to Florovsky, the Idealist attempt to reconcile freedom with necessity was unsuccessful. If the world was a logical unfolding of the divine principle, as it was for Fichte and Hegel, then the freedom of concrete persons in such a world could not be genuine. Such a freedom would be illusory, a function of human ignorance regarding the underlying causal determinism. In the final analysis, or when considered from the eternal divine perspective, such a freedom was reducible to a form of a higher rational necessity unfolding itself in the divine being.39 Florovsky also maintained that compatibilism—the coexistence of freedom and necessity in God—was incoherent and amounted to relativizing freedom.

36 Cf. Bulgakov, Agnets Bozhii, 159: “One cannot think of God without the world; the existence of the world is included in the concept of God.”
37 Florovsky, “Spor o nemetskom idealizme,” PRM, 421.
38 Florovsky, “Chelovecheskaia mudrost’ i Premudrost’ Bozhiia” (1922), PRM, 77.
39 Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 491: Solovyov “categorically denied man’s metaphysical freedom and insisted on the unconditional predetermination of events.”
This line of criticism in broad lines followed that of Berdyaev, who also insisted on prioritizing the freedom of the spirit over against any form of necessity. Berdyaev went to the extreme of making freedom a metaphysical principle ontologically prior to God. Florovsky, for his part, preferred to remain within the boundaries of patristic orthodoxy. While refusing to accept Berdyaev’s speculative claim regarding the uncreated nature of freedom, Florovsky regarded creaturely freedom as the irreducible given. Following Berdyaev and Charles Renouvier, Florovsky’s metaphysics emphasized contingency, novelty, and spontaneity of creation.

On Florovsky’s reading, German Idealist historiography did not do justice to personal human agency. Idealist historical analysis tended to privilege the causal significance of impersonal factors, such as social and material circumstances, over concrete personal motivations and intentions. For Hegel, for example, history was a logical unfolding of abstract concepts. For Florovsky, this was paramount to abandoning the proper and immediate subject of history, namely, concrete human persons. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Florovsky formulated his historical singularism drawing on Herzen’s and Renouvier’s personalist critique of Hegel.

Florovsky linked German Idealism to Platonism and characterized it as an “acute Hellenization of German philosophical consciousness.” He contrasted German Idealism with the perennial philosophy of the Church Fathers, whose “intuition of creaturehood” postulated an ontological hiatus between God and creation. The “intuition of creaturehood” made possible a historicist and indeterminist account of personhood. Florovsky’s assessment of German Idealism was based on an earlier and more nuanced critique of monism and anti-personalism advanced by Berdyaev and Ern.

Whether Florovsky’s critique of German Idealism hits the mark in all details is questionable. It could be objected, for example, that the Kantian version of idealism was decidedly non-monistic, postulating an epistemological chasm between the “things in themselves” and appearances. While it may be conceded that the Hegelian version of idealism had impersonalist implications, the views of Kant and Schelling were more complex than Florovsky’s critique allows. From German Idealism the paths lead both in the direction of the deterministic materialism of Feuerbach and Marx and in the direction of phenomenology and existentialism, with their characteristic emphasis on interiority, intentionality, and freedom. Interestingly, the very term “personalism” (German: “der Personalismus”) was apparently coined by Friedrich

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Schleiermacher, whose association with German Idealist thought was well-established.\textsuperscript{43} In other words, the insights of German Idealism were developed along both personalist and impersonalist lines.

The criticism that Florovsky mounted against German Idealism, from the standpoint of “Christian philosophy” was also a matter of internal debate within the Idealist tradition. While on closer examination Florovsky’s bold generalizations prove quite dubious, it cannot be doubted that in criticizing German Idealism he was also aiming his darts at Solovyov and his followers.

\section*{CRITIQUE OF SOLOVYOV}

The revolt against Solovyov’s philosophical patrimony was possibly the single most profound intellectual revolution of Florovsky’s thought. When Florovsky’s attitude changed from fascination to disillusionment, he proceeded to build a historical and philosophical case against Solovyov. Florovsky would overdramatize even the most innocent events of the philosopher’s biography, such as his brief teenage revolt against the Orthodox faith, as a “wound that would not be healed for the rest of Solovyov’s life.”\textsuperscript{44} Florovsky speculated that because of this “wound,” Solovyov later became fascinated by Gnosticism, the Cabbala, theosophy, and other forms of “non-ecclesial” mysticism. Florovsky claimed that “Solovyov’s spiritual genesis was tempestuous, catastrophic, and accompanied by sudden and torturous breaks and rifts.”\textsuperscript{45}

Concomitantly, Florovsky was now inclined to play down Solovyov’s courageous defense of the intellectual integrity of the Christian faith in the face of an overwhelming opposition in Russian academic circles. Florovsky also had to explain away the formative significance of the period that the twenty-year-old Solovyov spent as an auditor at the Moscow Theological Academy, where he attended Alexander Gorsky’s lectures on the Church Fathers and developed a life-long interest in Church history. Without quite ignoring these sides of Solovyov’s career, Florovsky came to see them as peripheral.

By criticizing German Idealism, Origenism, and pre-Christian Hellenism, Florovsky was indirectly attacking Solovyov and his followers. One striking example of this strategy was Florovsky’s critique of the idealist concept of Godmanhood. In Schelling, Godmanhood stood for the divine-human communion that was eternally realized in God. Godmanhood was also an eschatological goal

\textsuperscript{44} Florovsky, “Molodost’ Vladimira Solov’iova,” 84.
\textsuperscript{45} Florovsky, “Molodost’ Vladimira Solov’iova,” 83.
of the ultimate union between God and humanity, to which world history was ineluctably moving. For Solovyov and Bulgakov, Schelling was simply drawing out the metaphysical implications of the divine incarnation.

Florovsky refused to see the concept of the eternal Godmanhood in this light. For him, the idea of eternal Godmanhood and the related concept of the divine Sophia obfuscated the centrality of the historical revelation of the unity between God and man in Christ. Florovsky put the matter sharply: “German Idealism was a teaching about Godmanhood without the Godman.”46 In other words, the abstract philosophical principle of Godmanhood was a distraction from the “historical Christ.”

Solovyov’s presentation of Christ, while not entirely ahistorical, nevertheless at times lacked historical concreteness.47 For Florovsky, the “historical Christ” was certainly not the merely human “historical Jesus” of western biblical scholarship, but rather the Christ of the Church, the Godman confessed in the Chalcedonian definition. On this point, there was more agreement between Florovsky and Solovyov than the former was prepared to admit. More importantly, the problem that worried Florovsky, namely, the Christological focus of the Christian doctrine, was also a matter of debate internal to German Idealist tradition. Even if the conclusion of this debate was not completely acceptable to Florovsky, the criticism that German Idealism was a “teaching about Godmanhood without the Godman” was not entirely fair. It was a matter of debate among the Renaissance thinkers whether such a criticism could be directed at Solovyov. Berdyaev, for example, argued that the lack of Christological focus in the “new religious consciousness” was a misreading of Solovyov. Florovsky, in contrast, held that the temptation to develop a sophiology without Christ was one of the implications of Solovyov’s own system.

Florovsky was more justified in his criticism of Solovyov’s political theology. The attainment of unity between God and humanity was conceived in the idealist philosophy as a goal of history. Solovyov maintained that the form of government required to achieve such a goal was “free theocracy.” In his mind, such a system demanded a political figure, who would control the world empire, joined to a religious figure, who would be in charge of world Christianity. Under this plan, Solovyov dreamed about uniting the Christian East and West under the dual authority of the Russian tsar and the Roman pope. In Russia, the proposal met ridicule, compromising Solovyov’s ecumenical efforts. In Rome, the matter was also received with skepticism. When pope Leo XIII was presented with this plan, he reportedly exclaimed: “Bella idea! Ma

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fuor d’un miracolo è cosa impossibile” (“A nice idea! But, barring a miracle, it is quite impossible”). Towards the end of his life, Solovyov realized that the project was utopian and doomed from the start.

Florovsky studied nineteenth-century Russian political utopianism and even planned to write a book on the subject. He saw Solovyov’s imperialist utopianism as an antidote to the revolutionary utopianism, which was predicated on the destruction of the existing political order. Florovsky also emphasized that freedom in Solovyov’s “free theocracy” was illusory. According to Florovsky, Solovyov’s historical scheme was thoroughly deterministic, promising to achieve a supernatural end (the eventual union with God) by political means. Florovsky was weary of assigning a totalitarian power to the state in promoting “true religion,” since in the process religion became a mere instrument serving the purposes of the state machine, a consequence that Florovsky also criticized in the Eurasian program. Florovsky rightly saw in the militant atheism of the Bolsheviks the same totalitarian impulse and the same suppression of freedom for the sake of the future ideal humanity that he discerned in Solovyov’s theocratic utopia.

Following other Renaissance commentators, Florovsky regarded Solovyov’s last work, his “Legend of the Antichrist,” as a sequel to the famous “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” from Dostoevsky’s Brothers Karamazov, and as such, a renunciation of the philosopher’s earlier theocratic dreams. In the “Legend of the Antichrist,” Solovyov depicted the Antichrist as a ruler who built a world-government along the lines of “free theocracy.” The Antichrist was equally benevolent towards Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Protestants, on the condition that they would worship him, instead of Christ. When a small group of believers from each Christian communion rejected the Antichrist’s offer, the final battle ensued, bringing about the end of the world. According to Florovsky, in the “Legend of the Antichrist,” Solovyov parted not only with his theocratic utopia, but also sought to redress the absence of a strong Christological focus in his whole philosophical system. Other commentators, on the contrary, read the philosopher’s last work as a confirmation that Christ had always remained at the center of his system.

CONCLUSION

The 1920s, Florovsky’s first decade in the emigration, was for him a period of “searches and wanderings.” He wandered geographically: from Odessa to

Sofia, from Sofia to Prague, and, eventually, from Prague to Paris. He also wandered intellectually: he participated in the Eurasian movement and then disowned it; he came to Sofia “disturbed and awakened” by Solovyov, but left Prague with a strong conviction that Solovyov’s philosophy was a dead end of Russian theology; he became personally acquainted with the “fathers” of the Renaissance and struggled to find his own voice. The study of Russian intellectual history became for him a task of “reconstructing the Motherland”49 amidst the chaos of the Revolutions, wars, and cultural dislocations.

Florovsky’s evaluation of Solovyov underwent a profound change during his first years in the dispersion. Up to 1922, Florovsky more or less consistently acknowledged that sophiology was an acceptable expression of Orthodox understanding of the God–world relationship. He also held that Solovyov’s theory of integral knowledge produced a truly original Russian school of religious philosophy. But as his own theological vision matured, Florovsky found Solovyov more and more problematic. As he was making plans to write a monograph on Solovyov based on his Prague lectures of 1922–1923, he observed: “I have outgrown all my old views and I must find the will power to shift in a new direction.”50 This change of mind was partly occasioned by Florovsky’s personal exchange in Prague with the “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance, especially Novgorodtsev, Struve, Frank, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov. In the following years, Florovsky would come to see the sophiological trend in Russian religious thought as the final stage of Orthodox theology’s “western captivity.”

For Florovsky, German Idealist ontology in general and Solovyov’s metaphysics of all-unity in particular, were associated with a cluster of problems: the abolition of the ontological difference between the Creator and creation; the over-emphasis on divine foreknowledge at the expense of genuine creaturely freedom; the relativization of salvation history and a diminished emphasis on God’s saving historical action in Christ. Florovsky charged that these problems were generated by embracing non-Christian Hellenism, which was re-appropriated in German Idealism. As a follower of Schelling and Hegel, Solovyov did little to re-Christianize this revived form of pagan Hellenism.51 Florovsky claimed that the Russian religious philosophers who followed Solovyov fell into the same metaphysical trap. Florovsky believed that the time was ripe to abandon the pagan Hellenism of German Idealism and to return to the Christian Hellenism of the Church Fathers.

49 Florovsky, Letter to N. Glubokovsky, August 8, 1918, Sosud izbrannyi, 244.
51 Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 511.
As John Meyendorff pointed out, Florovsky’s subsequent historical work, including his neopatristic synthesis, was a reaction against Solovyov’s religious philosophy and the speculative trend in Russian theology epitomized in Bulgakov’s work. While lecturing on patristics at the St Sergius Institute, Florovsky stressed that “[t]he Church Fathers theologized most of the time in order to refute the heretics. Taking an ‘incorrect’ expression of the Christian gospel as their point of departure, they found ‘correct’ words, not by ‘inventing’ the Truth, which is the Truth inasmuch as it is divine, but by expressing and explaining it.” In the eyes of some Orthodox churchmen, Florovsky became a contemporary “Church Father,” who engaged in correcting the errors of the present-day Russian “heresiarchs,” such as Solovyov and Bulgakov.

Despite his harsh denunciations of Solovyov’s philosophical heritage, denunciations that did much to turn the next generation of Orthodox theologians in the West away from Solovyov, Florovsky himself maintained a life-long interest in his first philosophical love, no matter how misguided he later believed Solovyov to be. Although Florovsky’s initial fascination in the 1910s turned into rejection in the 1920s, it could not be denied that Solovyov’s philosophical system provided a “springboard” (to use Bulgakov’s metaphor) for Florovsky’s retrieval of the Church Fathers. Reflecting on Solovyov’s significance in The Ways of Russian Theology, Florovsky wrote: “From Solovyov the way lies back to Schelling and the Neoplatonists, but also to patristics, to the experience of the Great Church, the historical Church, the Church of the tradition and the Fathers.” Florovsky categorized the Renaissance philosophers as erroneously pursuing the first way, while reserving the way of the Church Fathers for himself and others who worked in a neopatristic key. Even those who accept this dichotomy have to acknowledge that Florovsky’s own pursuit of patristic theology began and ended with the study of Solovyov.

Florovsky’s intellectual rebellion against Solovyov brought about a paradigm shift in his overall assessment of the historical significance of Russian religious thought. In particular, the devastating critique of the twentieth-century Renaissance thinkers in The Ways of Russian Theology was precipitated by Florovsky’s prior disillusionment with Solovyov. Florovsky’s objections to Solovyov and his followers, especially Bulgakov, make up a polemical subtext of his neopatristics.

52 J. Meyendorff, “Predislovie” to Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosloviia, vi.
53 Florovsky was called a “Church Father,” for example, by A. Schmemann in his Letter to G. Florovsky, April 3, 1951, Alexander Schmemann Papers, SVSL, no box number.
54 Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 494; cf. “[Solovyov had two parents: patristic philosophy and Schelling.” “Filosofija Vl. Solovyova,” 5.
Bulgakov’s Antipode

Father Sergius Bulgakov, daring in his theological explorations, humbly bowed down before the authority of Tradition. Father Georges Florovsky, with all his traditionalism, severely criticized the history of Russian theology. It is quite clear to us that theological research must be utterly free on the one hand and firmly rooted in the Tradition on the other hand.¹

Forced emigration led to what one might call a “non-Euclidean deformation” of the social space: Russian scholars, whose careers at home would have run on parallel, but distant courses, in the drastically changed circumstances of the exile found their life-journeys crossing, parting, and meeting again in unforeseen ways, as they were drawn to the major European cities in search of professional appointments. Florovsky’s European wanderings included long-term stays in Sofia, Prague, Paris, and Belgrade. Lectures and conferences also brought him to Britain, Switzerland, and Greece.

As it happened, during the 1920s–1930s, in Prague and then in Paris, Florovsky came to know personally most of the “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance. No matter how strong was his growing disagreement with the theological ways of the “fathers,” this personal acquaintance and collaboration had made a lasting imprint on his mind.² It was precisely the storms of the refugee existence that had washed Florovsky’s bark out on the shore of patristics, and opened for him a vast network of new international connections that would have been unthinkable, were he to have stayed in Odessa.

A world-famous Russian émigré writer, Vladimir Nabokov, who cultivated a life-long interest in lepidopterology, once noted: “If the Russian Revolution had not happened, I would have pursued butterflies as a career.”³ One could

¹ Kassian Bezobrazov, “Slovo proiznesennoe na torzhhestvennom prazdnovanii iubileia Instituta 30 aprelia 1950” [“Speech at the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the (St Sergius Theological) Institute, delivered on April 30, 1950”], in K. K. Davydov et al., eds, Sviato-Sergievskoe podvor’e v Parizhe: k 75-letiiu so dnia osnovania (St Petersburg: Aleteia, 1999), 84.
³ <http://www.wbur.org/npr/133333682/lolita-author-nabokov-was-right-about-butterflies> (accessed May 9, 2011).
well imagine that if the Revolution had not happened, Florovsky would have continued teaching philosophy in the quiet setting of Odessa, possibly also doing work in philosophy of science. But in the emigration, frequently changing social circumstances and intellectual partnerships provided potent stimuli for him as a scholar. Creatively, he thrived on cognitive dissonances; as a thinker he was at his best when provoked to react polemically against others. In the network of Florovsky’s complex relations with the Renaissance “fathers,” his close acquaintance with Sergius Bulgakov represents a particularly notable chapter. As a historical theologian, Florovsky came into his own by becoming Bulgakov’s antipode.

**FLOROVSKY AND BULGAKOV COMPARED**

The paths of Florovsky and Bulgakov crossed for the first time in Prague, to which Florovsky came from Sofia in December 1921, and Bulgakov arrived from Constantinople in the beginning of 1923. Bulgakov’s old-time friend, Pavel Novgorodtsev, secured for him a position in the Russian Law Faculty at Charles University, where Florovsky was about to defend his thesis on Herzen. In the spring of 1923, Florovsky approached Bulgakov, whose works he read while still a student in Odessa, with an offer to participate in a projected Eurasian journal, which the young scholar conceived as a successor to the three previously published Eurasian symposia. Bulgakov rejected the offer to publish with the Eurasians, whose “belligerent and immature Orientalism” he regarded as quite misguided, but nevertheless took notice of Florovsky’s theological and philosophical interests. Solovyov’s religious philosophy, which was foundational for Bulgakov’s own theological system, provided a common ground for their exchange.

Like Florovsky’s family, Bulgakov’s family belonged to the clerical estate: his father was a humble priest from the provincial Russian town of Livny, whose family counted at least six generations of Orthodox clergymen. Due to his “Levitical” background, Bulgakov was enrolled in a minor seminary (equivalent to high school education in the US), early distinguished himself

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academically, and was being prepared to enter a theological academy. However, at the age of fourteen, he left the Church, dropped out of the minor seminary, completed his studies at a secular gymnasium and went on to study political economy at the University of Moscow (1890–1894). Both Bulgakov and Florovsky had faced a choice between theological and secular undergraduate education and, for different reasons, ended up choosing the latter over the former. Remarkably, this pair of theological autodidacts would come to play a key role in the establishment of the major Orthodox institutions in the West: Bulgakov shaped the academic character of the St Sergius Institute in the first two decades of its existence (1925–1944); Florovsky was at the helm of the St Vladimir’s Theological Seminary in New York during the formative years of 1948–1955.

Bulgakov’s spiritual journey was complex and included a number of detours. As a college student, Bulgakov embraced Marxism, which for a time became his substitute religion. He studied in Germany, distinguished himself as a philosopher and economist, and received his first teaching appointment at the Kiev Polytechnic Institute (1901–1906). It was while teaching in Kiev, where hundreds flocked to his lectures in economics, that Bulgakov would relinquish Marxism for a version of Neo-Kantianism. He traced his evolution in a collection of essays From Marxism to Idealism (1896–1903). Simultaneously, he rediscovered Christianity through the writings of Dostoevsky and Solovyov, beginning his gradual return to the Orthodox Church.

For Bulgakov, as for several other leaders of the Renaissance, Solovyov was a “philosophical guide to Christ.” Bulgakov was captivated not only by Solovyov’s speculative philosophy, but also by his theocratic utopianism and his mysticism. Initially, Bulgakov accepted Solovyov’s mystical side as readily as he embraced his metaphysics of all-unity. In The Unfading Light (1917),

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7 Bulgakov was professor of dogmatic theology beginning in 1925 and officially assumed responsibilities of the dean of students in 1931. He became the academic dean in 1940 and served until his death in 1944. As the dean of students, Bulgakov was preceded by Bishop Veniamin Fedchenkov, who served at this post in the first five years (1925–1930) of the Institute’s history.
8 The first initiative of the Orthodox seminary in the United States was a pastoral school established in Minneapolis in 1905, later transferred to Tenafly, New Jersey (1913–1923), and then to New York in 1938: see J. Meyendorff, ed., A Legacy of Excellence: St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary 1938–1988 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 9. After the war, St Vladimir’s was officially re-opened in 1948. Florovsky officially held the post of the dean from 1951 until his resignation in 1955.
Bulgakov reminisced about the three life-changing religious experiences that led to his return to Orthodox Christianity. The subtle allusions to Solovyov’s “Three Encounters” with the Divine Sophia would not have been lost on Bulgakov’s readers among the literati. Yet, unlike Solovyov’s “Three Encounters,” Bulgakov’s reminiscences should not be read as revelations of Sophia. Bulgakov’s diaries reveal that his spirituality was deeply Christocentric and Mariological, rather than more overtly Sophianic, as was the case with Solovyov.¹¹

In the 1910s, Bulgakov fell under the spell of Fr Pavel Florensky, who became his guide in matters theological and theosophical. Encouraged by Florensky, Bulgakov studied the theosophical “revelations” of Anna Shmidt (1851–1905). This middle-aged provincial school teacher approached Vladimir Solovyov during the last year of the philosopher’s life, declaring herself to be a living incarnation of the divine Sophia and the philosopher—her “bridegroom,” the Logos incarnate.¹² Solovyov sensibly concluded that the woman was mentally ill. Far from encouraging her advances, he pitied her, counseled her to desist and prayed for the salvation of her soul. Undeterred by Solovyov’s diagnosis, Bulgakov published Shmidt’s theosophical work with the approval of Florensky.¹³

While young Florovsky was profoundly impressed with Solovyov the philosopher, in Odessa he was already troubled, even terrified, by Solovyov the mystic. By the time Florovsky and Bulgakov met in 1923, upon further study of Solovyov, Florovsky came to the conclusion that not only Solovyov’s mysticism, but also his whole philosophical system, was a dead end of Russian philosophy. Florovsky and Bulgakov read Solovyov quite differently. If, for Florovsky, Solovyov’s sophiology lacked the Christological focus, for Bulgakov, “contrary to the currents of German philosophical and theological thought, Solovyov placed Christology at the center of his system.”¹⁴ Bulgakov’s repeated attempts to disabuse Florovsky of his “anti-Solovyovism” were in vain: Florovsky would never significantly modify his negative evaluation of Solovyov’s panentheism and dependence on German Idealism.¹⁵ In The Ways of Russian Theology, Florovsky recounted the grotesque details of Shmidt’s encounters with Solovyov, interpreting them as a sign that Russian sophiological

¹¹ S. Bulgakov, Dnevnik dukhovnyi (Moscow: Obshchedostupnyi pravoslavnyi universitet osnovannyi protoiereem Aleksandrom Menem, 2008).
¹² For one account of this story, see, for example, A. P. Kozyrev, Solov’iov i Gnostiki (Moscow: S. A. Savin, 2007); Paul M. Allen, Vladimir Soloviev: Russian Mystic (Blauvelt, NY: Steiner Books, 1978).
¹³ A. Shmidt, Iz rukopisei Anny Nikolaevny Shmidt; s pis’mami k nei VI. Solov’iova (Moscow: Put’, 1916).
¹⁵ Bulgakov wrote in his diary on October 5 (18), 1923: “I cannot give Florovsky a sense of direction,” “Iz pamiati serdtsa,” Issledovania (1998), 171.
mysticism was no more than erotic delusion.\textsuperscript{16} For his part, Bulgakov, during the period coinciding with his first acquaintance with Florovsky, underwent a personal crisis as a result of which he renounced Shmidt’s theosophy and became more critical of Solovyov.\textsuperscript{17}

The relationship of Bulgakov and Florovsky is a paradoxical attraction of near-opposites. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine two types that were more differently built psychologically and philosophically. In Prague, Fr Sergius, who was twenty-two years older than Florovsky, briefly became his father confessor.\textsuperscript{18} One should not read a deep spiritual connection into their relationship: Bulgakov felt Florovsky’s “heterogeneity” rather strongly and despite this, or perhaps precisely because of this, he found in his younger colleague a reflection of his more doctrinally orthodox and spiritually sober alter ego. For these reasons, Bulgakov put up with Florovsky’s proclivity to conflict. Florovsky, to his credit, avoided engaging in a public confrontation with his former spiritual father. It is Bulgakov’s peaceable disposition and patience that accounted for the preservation of their fragile friendship, which was at times severely tested. The age difference could also have an ameliorating impact on the frictions between them.

Trained as a philosopher and political economist, Bulgakov was an ex-materialist, ex-Marxist, ex-Neo-Kantian, ex-member of the Second Duma, and ex-Christian socialist, and a lapsed papal sympathizer. As a young man, Florovsky passionately embraced Bulgakov’s and Berdiaev’s critique of revolutionary socialism in \textit{The Landmarks} (1909). But unlike Bulgakov, Florovsky was never involved in politics and often underestimated the importance of the political and economic factors in intellectual history.

Florovsky’s academic training in Odessa involved a good measure of natural-scientific positivism, which he could never accept and later criticized from the standpoint of Christian personalism. As a metaphysician, Florovsky tended towards nominalism, rather than realism with regard to the status of the universals. As a philosopher of history, he embraced historical singularism, i.e. a claim that only individuals, not aggregate entities, had immediate causal influence in history.\textsuperscript{19} Bulgakov, in contrast, was a thoroughgoing metaphysical realist. According to his own admission, even on a psychological level, he “has never had a taste for the concrete and the mundane.”\textsuperscript{20} Instead of attacking Bulgakov’s position directly on metaphysical grounds, Florovsky

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\textsuperscript{16} Florovsky, \textit{Puti russkogo bogosloviia}, 467–8.
\textsuperscript{17} S. Bulgakov, Letter to G. Florovsky, February 8 (21), 1926, GFP PUL, Box 12, f. 11.
\textsuperscript{18} S. Bulgakov, “Iz pamiati serdtsa,” \textit{Issledovaniia} (1998), 156.
\textsuperscript{19} On Florovsky’s nominalism, see G. H. Williams, “The Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky,” 293. In this regard, it is telling that Florovsky preferred Duns Scotus to Aquinas: see Florovsky, Letter to S. Sakharov, May 15, 1958, \textit{Perepiska}, 79.
\textsuperscript{20} S. Bulgakov, “Piat’ let (1917–1922),” \textit{S. N. Bulgakov: Pro et contra}, 85.
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criticized sophiology for being insufficiently Christocentric and patristic, as well as overly dependent upon the categories of German Idealism.

Florovsky’s primary mode of theological inquiry was intellectual history. Bulgakov, in contrast, was primarily a speculative theologian, for whom theology and metaphysics were fused inseparably. Bulgakov’s temptation was theosophy and fascination with the heterodox forms of mysticism, which were quite fashionable among the Russian literati at the turn of the century. Florovsky, in contrast, from a young age experienced periods of spiritual aridity and even dread of the supernatural.

Both in different ways aimed at “enchurching” their life and thought. Bulgakov repeatedly observed that “theology ought to be drunk from the bottom of the Eucharistic chalice.” This was more than a powerful turn of phrase. His priesthood, especially its sacrificial aspect, was something that had penetrated to the very core of his being. Bulgakov was often distraught when in the dispersion he was deprived of the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist regularly. After a cancer surgery rendered him nearly voiceless, he continued to officiate at the services of the church of St Sergius at the Theological Institute during the years of the German occupation.

Echoing Bulgakov, towards the end of his life, Florovsky wrote: “I did not learn my theology at school, but in the Church, as a worshipper. I derived it from the liturgical books first, and much later, from the writings of the Holy Fathers.” Florovsky wished to see himself not only as an autodidact, but also as a theologian whose thought was decisively shaped by his participation in the life of the Church. The reality was more complex: he was a scholar’s scholar, whose mind was formed by study to a far greater extent than by liturgy.

For Florovsky, priestly vocation had to do with the integration of his scholarship and his life in the Church. The thought of seeking ordination and engaging in missionary work crossed Florovsky’s mind when he was nineteen. But a few years later, he became distraught with the overall atmosphere of the church life in his home town: “Bitter experience of our life in Odessa had made me question even a possibility of being able to live and breathe peacefully and freely, if I were to become a church’s servant ex officis.” Florovsky reacted to the repressive spirit of the church life in the pre-revolutionary Russia with the feelings of a representative of liberal intelligentsia, not with those of a pliant member of the “clerical estate.” He guarded his own spiritual freedom as zealously as he watched the doctrinal orthodoxy of his colleagues.

21 Cf. A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 61.
22 Florovsky, Letter to N. N. Glubokovsky, March 30, 1911, Sosud izbrannyi, 111.
25 Florovsky, Letter to N. N. Glubokovsky, January 1, 1913, Sosud izbrannyi, 128.
26 Florovsky, Letter to N. N. Glubokovsky, November 7, 1915, Sosud izbrannyi, 134.
In the emigration, Florovsky shed his doubts about joining the ranks of the Orthodox clergy. Ordained in 1932, Florovsky at first served at the St Sergius Church of the Theological Institute and in the Church of the Protection of the Virgin, which was affiliated with the Russian Student Christian Movement.  

When he was in Paris, his schedule as a rule included two or more services a week. His concelebrants included Frs Sergius Bulgakov, Sergei Chetverikov, and, after the war, Vasily Zenkovsky and Iury Vernik.  

For Florovsky, becoming a priest was a natural extension of his ministry to the Church as a theologian. As he put the matter to his biographer:

I somehow always knew that one day I would become a priest. I always thought that it was natural for a theologian to be a priest. A theologian wants to teach, to propagate ideas... To do so effectively he must have some position in the Church, not simply that of an ordinary member... In the Church, scholarly authority is not independent of certain recognitions. I did not very early consciously think a lot about becoming a priest, but in retrospect I see it and explain it in this way.

While Bulgakov saw the core of the priestly service in the Eucharistic sacrifice, Florovsky saw his office as a validation of his teaching authority.

The psychological makeup of Florovsky and Bulgakov provided a certain counterbalance to their central philosophical convictions. Florovsky, a theoretical champion of personalism and freedom, as a leader could be harsh and authoritarian; Bulgakov, who saw history as a display of providential necessity, was generous and forgiving, especially when it came to his relations with his junior colleagues. Both, it should be observed, showed extraordinary intellectual tenacity, when upholding their respective standpoints in the face of mounting opposition.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF ST SOPHIA

In the early October of 1923, Florovsky and Bulgakov, along with Vasily Zenkovsky and Nicholas Zernov, took part in the first meeting of the Russian Student Christian Movement at the Pscherov Castle near Prague. According to

27 According to V. Zenkovsky, at first the church was located on 10 Boulevard Montparnasse, but then moved to 91 rue Olivier de Serres: see Zenkovsky, “RSKhD: Istoriia, deiatel’nost’, zadachi,” Sobranie sochenii (Moscow: Russkii Put’, 2008), II: 365.  
28 S. Chetverikov, Letter to G. Florovsky, January 11, 1934, GFP PUL, Box 14, f. 1.  
Zenkovsky, the meeting had the impact of a “little Pentecost,” providing an inspiration for the educational and social initiatives of the Christian leaders of Russia Abroad. Encouraged by his friends, Bulgakov decided to reconstitute the Brotherhood of St Sophia in the Diaspora.

The original Brotherhood began its life in Moscow after the Revolution. The initiative belonged to Anton Kartashev (1875–1960), a prominent historian, philosopher, and church leader, whose thought bore points of contact with Florovsky’s retrieval of patristic tradition. It was Kartashev, not Bulgakov, who proposed to name the Brotherhood after the figure of the divine Wisdom. Contrary to what the name of “St Sophia” in the title might suggest, the members of the Brotherhood did not endorse Bulgakov’s sophiology, which by then had not been fully worked out yet. Kartashev also composed the Brotherhood’s mission statement and rule, which were subsequently ratified by the recently elected patriarch Tikhon in 1918. The stated goal of the Brotherhood was to unite Orthodox intellectuals in a two-fold task of deepening their ecclesial life (“enchurching”) and of Christianizing Russian culture. Thus the Brotherhood provided a specific venue for transmitting and fulfilling the mission of the Russian Religious Renaissance under the circumstances when the Bolshevik government was becoming increasingly hostile towards the church.

In some ways, the Brotherhood formed a philosophical opposition to the decadent expressions of the Russian Religious Renaissance, such as theosophy, anthroposophy, and the sectarian forms of “new Christianity,” which found their outlet in the “new religious consciousness” of the turn of the century. The distance between the Merezhkovsky circle on the one hand and the religious philosophers on the other hand had already begun to grow in Russia and only widened in the emigration. Florovsky, it should be repeated, was from the beginning opposed and over the years grew increasingly more critical of the “new religious consciousness,” which he saw as morally duplicitous and spiritually misguided.

The St Sophia Brotherhood was to advance its mission through informal gatherings, lectures, disputes, and publications. The members of the original Brotherhood included A. V. Kartashev, S. N. Bulgakov, N. O. Lossky, L. P. Karsavin, and V. A. Ternavtsev (1866–1940), most of whom resided in St

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32 According to the entry in Bulgakov’s journal, the decision was made on September 26, 1923, before the Psherov meeting.
33 Bulgakov’s own choice was to name the Brotherhood “Uspenskoe,” after the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos: see Bulgakov, “Iz pamiati serdtsa,” Issledovaniia (1998), 156; Florovsky, Letter to Iu. Ivask, April 8, 1965, Vestnik RKhD, 130 (1979), 47.
Petersburg. The Brotherhood’s activities were encumbered by the scattering of the members all over Russia during the Civil War, and had been brought to a halt when most of them were banished from Soviet Russia in the early 1920s. In order to revive the Brotherhood in the exile, Bulgakov asked Kartashev to compose a new charter. Bulgakov also simplified and shortened Kartashev’s original mission statement and added a rule of daily prayer. The founding members of the Brotherhood who lived in Prague—Bulgakov, Florovsky, Novgorodtsev, Struve, and Zenkovsky—were able to meet regularly. The rest of the founding members settled in France and Germany: N. S. Arsenev (Konigsberg), N. A. Berdyaev (Berlin, later Paris), S. L. Frank (Berlin), and G. N. Trubetskoy (Paris).

The overwhelming majority of the founding members belonged to the generation of the “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance. As the youngest founding member and Bulgakov’s protégé, Florovsky hoped to attract more participants from his own generation. With this goal in mind, he persuaded Bulgakov to extend an invitation to his fellow-Eurasians, N. S. Trubetskoy and P. Suvchinsky. This project suffered the fate of Florovsky’s earlier proposal to enlist Bulgakov to publish with the Eurasians. In a public letter on behalf of the Eurasian “troika”—which implied that Florovsky was no longer regarded as belonging to the core Eurasian group—Trubetskoy rejected Bulgakov’s invitation on the grounds that the Brotherhood was structured along the lines of a Roman Catholic religious order and aimed at introducing alien practices into the Orthodox Church. Underlying these charges was Trubetskoy’s unstated conviction that Bulgakov was a heretic, rather than any specific activities of the Brotherhood. Unlike Kartashev’s original charter of 1918, which had among one of its aims “the study of the ways of the restoration of the separated great Churches of the East and West,” the new charter of 1923 mentioned nothing about fostering unity with the other Christian communions. Some Catholic-sounding language of the charter could indeed give pause to those who, like Trubetskoy, were suspicious of the Brotherhood’s confessional loyalty.

Shortly before his expulsion from Russia, Bulgakov, recently ordained an Orthodox priest and serving in Crimea, befriended a Jesuit under whose

35 According to Antoine Nivière, Pravoslavnye sviaschennoslushiteli, bogoslovy i tserkovnye deiateli russkoi emigratsii v zapadnoi i tsentral’noi Evrope (1920–1995) (Moscow: Russkii Put’, 2007), 88, Nikolay Afanasiev (1893–1966) was also a member of the Brotherhood at some unspecified period, possibly after his move from Belgrade to Paris in 1930.


37 After the Sophia controversy, N. S. Trubetskoy called Bulgakov a heretic in his Letter to P. Savitsky, June 2, 1937, in A. Sobolev (ed.), O russkoi filosofii, 475.

influence he had nearly converted to Roman Catholicism, or rather to his own version of catholic Christianity redolent of Solovyov’s theocratic utopianism. Fr Sergius even started secretly commemorating the ruling pope during the Divine Liturgy, an unprecedented move for a Russian Orthodox priest. However, having encountered some morally dubious forms of Catholic proselytism in the emigration, Bulgakov shed his Catholic predilections. In 1923, this ecumenical de-conversion became for him a source of much internal anguish. It should be recalled that in the same year Florovsky published his essay in the fiercely anti-Catholic Eurasian volume *Russia and Latinity* (1923).

As those who would soon be involved together in the ecumenical dialogue, Florovsky and Bulgakov came to the table from two opposite sides. Florovsky maintained what could be regarded as a rather typical Orthodox attitude of guarded caution vis-à-vis the non-Orthodox, whereas Bulgakov came as a tortured soul, as a lapsed philo-Catholic, and, more importantly, as a metaphysician whose sophiological system postulated church unity as a matter of ontological necessity, as already obtaining in the sophianic realm of the ideal humanity. In contrast, Florovsky’s personalism, historicism, and particularism could more naturally account for the tragic reality of the long-standing Christian divisions.

When the Eurasians began “hounding” Bulgakov in press for his alleged pro-Catholic leanings, Florovsky minced no words in convincing them to desist from slandering Fr Sergius and at the same time, again unsuccessfully, attempted to seize control of the Eurasian publication agenda. By trying to forge an impossible alliance between the Eurasians and the members of the St Sophia Brotherhood, Florovsky had inadvertently exposed Bulgakov’s undertaking to allegations verging on slander, thereby jeopardizing the Brotherhood at the beginning of its émigré existence. For his part, Bulgakov, who was a seasoned warrior when it came to literary battles, took the Eurasian attack stoically and proceeded undeterred with his plans to secure the official endorsement of the Brotherhood. The new charter of the Brotherhood was ratified by the metropolitan Evlogy in February 1924.

At one of the early meetings, the founding members were asked to comment on their motives for entering the Brotherhood. In his opening statement, Bulgakov expressed his hope that the Brotherhood would serve the Church and would oppose the forces of alienation among the Christian intellectuals in the Diaspora. Bulgakov’s hope was soon put to the test when several members, most notably Berdyaev, N. Lossky, and Florovsky, attempted to leave the Brotherhood.

In his opening comments, Florovsky shared that he joined the Brotherhood in order to overcome the “fatal bifurcation” between the secular pursuits of everyday life and holiness found in the experience of the Church. Florovsky also spoke of returning to the experience of Pentecost through “deepening and enlivening historical heritage. May the images of the nineteenth century become less important for us so that we turn to the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, perhaps to early Christianity... Ivan Kireevsky was the first who called us back to patristic writings. The time has arrived to fulfill this task.”

These words, stenographically recorded at the March 14 (27), 1924 meeting of the Brotherhood, reflect Florovsky’s developing intellectual habit of comparing modern Russian theology unfavorably with patristic theology. The rejection of Solovyov’s metaphysics of all-unity prompted Florovsky to fall back on the dormant interest of his youth, namely, the study of patristics. A casual mention of Ivan Kireevsky (1806–1856) in this context indicates that Florovsky, at an early stage of studying patristics, aligned himself with the nineteenth-century Slavophile thinker who was the first to call for a retrieval of the “Christian philosophy” of the Church Fathers in Russian theology.

Another distinguished member of the Brotherhood, whom Florovsky came to know briefly in Odessa during the Civil War, and with whom he closely associated in Prague and then in Paris, was Vasily Zenkovsky. When in early 1926, Florovsky briefly organized an informal reading group in Prague to study the Church Fathers, Zenkovsky and N. Lossky participated in the endeavor.

The reading group provided a framework for Florovsky’s first sustained study of patristics undertaken outside Russia.
For his part, Zenkovsky had the following to say concerning his reasons for joining the Brotherhood of St Sophia: “Our way in the Brotherhood lies through combining sound traditionalism with creative activity, which are essentially not two, but one and the same path, since sound traditionalism calls us not to merely repeat the recent past, but to return to the first centuries, to the patristic mindset (myshlenie) creatively.”46 In these words, we hear a leitmotif of the Russian Religious Renaissance, namely, the integration of two principles that were in tension with each other: the faithfulness to tradition on the one hand, and the cultivation of spiritual freedom and creativity on the other hand. These two principles were emphasized with great variation by different Renaissance figures. For some, like Berdyaev and Vsheslavtsev, adherence to tradition was optional and even constraining, whereas freedom and creativity mattered most. For others, like Florovsky and V. Lossky, freedom without faithfulness to the tradition was a rebellion, rather than genuine spiritual freedom within the tradition.

Zenkovsky’s second principle—that the study of the Fathers should not become a slavish repetition of patristic citations, but should be a return to the patristic mindset—gave Florovsky a blueprint for articulating how freedom could be maintained within, rather than outside the patristic tradition. The theme of acquiring the “patristic mind,” so important to Florovsky later, was likely discussed at the informal patricks reading group, which Zenkovsky and Florovsky ran together in Prague.

Judging by his often impatient and biting remarks at the meetings of the St Sophia Brotherhood, Florovsky tended to exaggerate his disagreement with Zenkovsky, who boldly defended both faithfulness to tradition and freedom within the Church. When reacting against Zenkovsky at the meetings, Florovsky defended the side of tradition and wondered whether freedom and creativity belonged to the life of the Church at all.47 If one takes such remarks in the context of his developing hostility towards Zenkovsky, registered by Bulgakov and others,48 one realizes that the very points Florovsky opposed—creativity...
and freedom—will be afterwards integrated into his emerging neopatristic theology.

Whatever their real or imagined disagreements, the two historians shared much in common. Zenkovsky was also from Ukraine and before the revolution had a successful career teaching philosophy at the University of Kiev. In the years following upon the Bolshevik Revolution, Zenkovsky briefly served as a minister of religious confessions in the independent government of Hetman Skoropadsky. Because of his considerable organizational skills and pedagogical talent, in the emigration, Zenkovsky served as a lifetime president of the Russian Student Christian Movement since its inception in 1923. He was also Bulgakov’s right hand in handling the day-to-day financial activities of the St Sergius Institute.

Both Florovsky and Zenkovsky had a life-long interest in patristics, Russian philosophy, and interconfessional dialogue. But Zenkovsky did not correlate his study of Russian thought with patristic theology in the manner of Florovsky. For Zenkovsky, as well as for Bulgakov and Fedotov, the patristic paradigm was a successful, yet time-bound instance of the Christianization of Hellenistic culture. The cultural circumstances of the twentieth century required a different paradigm, not merely a repristination of the ancient one. Florovsky, in contrast, was convinced that the patristic paradigm of cultural transformation was a permanent, transcultural norm of Orthodox theology. The application of patristic norm to Russian theology would become a trademark of Florovsky’s historiography. Whatever his surface disagreement with Zenkovsky, they shared much of the conceptual framework that informed Florovsky’s emerging program of a “return to the Fathers.”

We have a record of Florovsky’s attendance and participation in the discussions of at least thirteen meetings of the St Sophia Brotherhood. The topics addressed included various questions of pressing importance for the life of the church in the dispersion, such as the religious significance of monarchy; the relationship between the Soviet state and the church; the possibility of schism between the Diaspora church and the Moscow Patriarchate in response to what was perceived to be a growing cooperation of the Patriarchate with the Soviet government in Russia; and the attitude of the Orthodox Church to other Christian communions, especially Roman Catholicism. It was not always easy for Florovsky to find his own voice in these discussions and he rarely took the initiative to speak first. When he spoke, his comments usually sounded a contrarian note to the perceived modernism of his colleagues.

nothing to do with the substance of things; they have a personal dimension,” Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii, 72.

For personal reasons, Florovsky began to have increasing doubts about continuing his affiliation with the Brotherhood. He shared his doubts in his letters to Bulgakov, after the latter moved from Prague to Paris. Bulgakov took Florovsky’s attempt to distance himself from the Brotherhood personally:

Why do you have such unconscious need to turn a difference into an opposition, non-congeniality into hostility? I must tell you honestly that I value your part in the Brotherhood and in the academy—and love you in your idiosyncrasy—exactly as you are, although I feel your alterity in some fundamental ways, not only as somebody who cares for you as your pastor, but also as a human being and thinker.50

With a pastoral insight, Bulgakov divined an incorrigible trait of Florovsky’s character that cast its long shadow on his relations with his peers and also accounted for the excessive censoriousness of his judgments. As Bulgakov repeatedly stressed, Florovsky was valuable to him precisely as his alter ego: “I value your participation, opinion, word, criticism; your advice, seriousness, responsibility, and so on.”51 Sparing no words to convince Florovsky to change his mind, Bulgakov spoke of his young colleague’s possible exit from the Brotherhood as a “spiritual divorce, or at least as an act of non-love.”52 In subsequent years, the onus of preserving their fragile friendship would fall largely on Bulgakov’s shoulders.

INVITATION TO TEACH AT THE ST SERGIUS INSTITUTE

Although Florovsky continued to have doubts about his participation in the Brotherhood—a psychological pattern of association-followed-by-alienation that also marked his relation with the Eurasians and others—what ultimately prevented him from formally leaving the group was Bulgakov’s warning that such a move could have an adverse impact on their professional relationship. At the time, metropolitan Evlogy, Bulgakov, Kartashev, and Zenkovsky were exploring the possibility of establishing a graduate theological school for training

50 S. Bulgakov, Letter to Florovsky, August 18 (31), 1924, Issledovaniia (2001–2002), 197. In his letter to Florovsky of October 1, 1936, touching upon the Sophia Affair at the St Sergius Institute, Fr Sergei Chetverikov put the matter similarly: “I disagree with your tendency to exacerbate the conflicts; such an attitude leads to alienation, rather than a solution,” GFP PUL, Box 14, f. 5.
the church leaders in the Dispersion. The fund-raising efforts of Mikhail Osorgine and Prince Grigory Trubetskoy, as well as the financial help of such leaders of the YMCA as John R. Mott (1865–1955), Paul Anderson (1894–1988), Donald Lowrie (1889–1974), and other benefactors made this dream a reality.\textsuperscript{53} The newly established St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute opened its doors for the first time in April 1925, with four professors and about fifteen students.\textsuperscript{54} The American, British, and European financial aid was supplied regularly, accounting for more than two-thirds of the school’s operational budget and continuing even during the difficult years of the Great Depression and WWII.\textsuperscript{55}

The meetings of the St Sophia Brotherhood provided an important forum for brainstorming ideas about the future theological school. There was a tacit understanding that some members of the Brotherhood, including Kartashev, Bulgakov, and Zenkovsky, would become a part of the new school’s faculty. Hence, by leaving the Brotherhood, Florovsky could potentially jeopardize his future position at the projected Parisian Institute. As early as August 1924, Bulgakov proposed that Florovsky teach patristics and apologetics at the future school.\textsuperscript{56}

When the new Institute began its operation in spring 1925, Florovsky hesitated to accept Bulgakov’s offer for several reasons. First, he was recently married, and feared that the move from Prague to Paris would be financially precarious for his family, which now consisted of his wife, Kseniiia Ivanovna.

\textsuperscript{53} One benefactor deserves a special mention. A prominent Jewish philanthropist, Moisei Akimovich Ginzburg, saved those who initiated the acquisition of the estate for the Institute from defaulting on the purchase agreement by issuing an interest-free loan in the amount exceeding 25% of the total cost of the transaction. Such an act was absolutely unprecedented, given that Ginzburg was an unbaptized Jew, whose people in the Russian Empire suffered from centuries of anti-Semitism, often fueled by the sentiments within the Orthodox Church: see M. M. Osorgin, “Vospominaniia o priobretenii siergievskogo podvor’ia,” Svijato-Siergievskoe podvor’e v Parizhe, 48–9.

\textsuperscript{54} Although more students wished to study at the Institute, the enrolment was in the first decades limited by the institution’s ability to provide accommodation and financial aid to the students. On the history of the school, see K. K. Davydyov et al., eds, Svijato-Siergievskoe podvor’e v Parizhe; Donald A. Lowrie, Saint Sergius in Paris: The Orthodox Theological Institute (London: SPCK, 1954). The Russian name of the school was changed in 1940 to “Orthodox Theological Academy” by the metropolitan Evlogy. Both “Institute” and “Academy” indicate that the institution functioned as a graduate school of theology and a research center, rather than a minor seminary, providing basic pastoral training. For the present-day activities of the Institute, visit <http://www.saint-serge.net> (accessed March 7, 2012).

\textsuperscript{55} On the history of the YMCA’s substantial and underappreciated support of the Orthodox émigré scholarship, see Matthew L. Miller, The American YMCA and Russian Culture: The Preservation and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity, 1900–1940 (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2013).

\textsuperscript{56} S. Bulgakov, Letter to G. Florovsky, August 18 (31), 1924, Issledovaniia (2001–2002), 199: “To the extent to which my opinion might matter here, I think of you as a candidate for the patristics chair.”
Simonova, and his widowed mother-in-law. Unfortunately, Bulgakov could not promise a regular salary and satisfactory housing accommodations in Paris for Florovsky’s family, because even a short-term financial stability of the Institute could not be guaranteed. Second, Florovsky was concerned about being treated as a conservative outsider by those who shared the modernist vision of the Russian Religious Renaissance. As it turned out, Florovsky had correctly foreseen the source of his future disagreements with the majority of the St Sergius faculty. Third, he understandably felt “utterly unprepared for the task” of teaching patristics, since all of his previous academic training and teaching experience were in other fields, such as philosophy, history of philosophy, and history of Russian literature. At the time, he saw himself as a “philosopher of culture” par excellence. Nevertheless, Bulgakov assured him that lack of formal training was not a problem, since the expected teaching level was very basic. To further persuade Florovsky that he was fit for the job, Bulgakov shared that he himself was teaching a subject in which he could claim no expert knowledge, namely, the Old Testament exegesis.

Despite Bulgakov’s encouragement, Florovsky was uncomfortable with Bulgakov’s offer and at the time would have preferred teaching philosophy instead of patristics. However, the philosophy post had already been given to Zenkovsky, who was more academically accomplished, eminently qualified, and functioned as Bulgakov’s right hand in running the daily affairs of the new Institute. Florovsky was disappointed, hesitated to accept Bulgakov’s offer, and, as a result, could lose the patristics post to a new potential candidate, Lev Karsavin. In order to nudge Florovsky to make up his mind, Bulgakov wrote to him imploring, “I have always desired for you to become a patrologist” and adding, “I stood like a dragon protecting your patrology post” against Karsavin, who made attempts to take it.

In Prague, after living for a year in a room at Hotel Savoy, the Florovskys moved into a two-room cooperative apartment. The first room was occupied by his mother-in-law, in the second room lived his wife and her sister, while Florovsky himself had to sleep and work in the kitchen: see M. Vorobiova, “Notes of Florovsky’s Table Talk, July 28, 1971,” p. 107 (unpublished typescript).

Bulgakov’s Antipode

57 In Prague, after living for a year in a room at Hotel Savoy, the Florovskys moved into a two-room cooperative apartment. The first room was occupied by his mother-in-law, in the second room lived his wife and her sister, while Florovsky himself had to sleep and work in the kitchen: see M. Vorobiova, “Notes of Florovsky’s Table Talk, July 28, 1971,” p. 107 (unpublished typescript).


60 Florovsky, “Razryvy i sviazi,” PRM, 56; A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 153.


Persuaded by Bulgakov in the end, Florovsky and his wife relocated from Prague to Paris in September 1926. During the same period, Florovsky also appears to have reinstated, however tentatively, his membership in the Brotherhood of St Sophia, which now moved the center of its activities to the French capital. For a time, Florovsky attempted to sit on two stools at once: teaching at the St Sergius Institute and residing in Paris, while also retaining his post and the associated stipend at Charles University in Prague. This kind of maneuvering was prudent, since the financial future of both institutions was uncertain. In fact, the Russian Law Faculty at Charles University had to close several years later due to the termination of state funding. But whatever Florovsky’s initial doubts about teaching patristics had been, Bulgakov’s offer proved to be career-defining for him. Zenkovsky wryly noted in his memoirs that “Florovsky, who wanted to teach philosophy, instead was given a patristics chair, for which offer he should have been grateful for life.” As Florovsky acknowledged himself, in Paris he discovered that patristics was his “true vocation.” His lectures on the Greek Fathers would be published in two volumes in the 1930s, making his antebellum Parisian years (1926–1939) the acme of his scholarly career. It is ironic that Florovsky owed the discovery of his vocation in patristics to the very theologian whose sophiological system he was determined to displace with his neopatristic synthesis.

63 At the meeting of September 21, 1926 the Brotherhood passed a cryptic resolution to “still count Florovsky as a member of the Brotherhood,” Bratstvo sviaoti Sofii, 112, implying that there were reasons to review Florovsky’s standing in the Brotherhood. Florovsky’s name was then mentioned among those present at the meeting of October 5, 1926, which was the last published protocol of the Brotherhood’s meetings. In his brief history of the Brotherhood, Zenkovsky noted that “Florovsky stopped attending the meetings of the Brotherhood rather early, without leaving it formally,” Bratstvo sviaoti Sofii, 7. According to Zenkovsky, the Brotherhood continued its existence until the beginning of WWII, when its activities were halted by the war and Bulgakov’s death in 1944. Having briefly resumed its meetings under the leadership of the newly ordained Bishop Kassian (Bezobrazov), the Brotherhood lingered for the first two post-war years, after which point the meetings ended and the Brotherhood terminated its activities for good: see Bratstvo sviaoti Sofii, 12.
64 The Russian Law Faculty terminated its educational activities in 1929 but continued as a research institute until 1933: see Catherine Andreyev and Ivan Savicky, Russia Abroad: Prague and the Russian Diaspora, 1918–1938 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 89–92.
66 A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 49.
The story of Florovsky’s collaboration with Bulgakov is a paradoxical attraction of near-opposites. Among the “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance, nobody did more than Bulgakov to promote Florovsky. Yet, among the “children” of the Renaissance, perhaps only Vladimir Lossky could rival Florovsky in leading the minds away from Bulgakov’s theological direction. But if Lossky waged an open literary war on Bulgakov’s sophiology, Florovsky tended to avoid criticizing Bulgakov directly in public or in print. Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated in chapter 8, Bulgakov’s system provided the main polemical subtext of Florovsky’s neopatristics.
Nobody is capable of distorting a heritage of the men of genius as readily as the men of talent.¹

In the dispersion Florovsky became a “planet,” orbiting around such “stars” as P. Novgorodtsev, P. Struve, S. Bulgakov, and N. Berdyaev. While experiencing their “gravitational pull,” Florovsky was never drawn to any one of them sufficiently to make one thinker’s position a permanent center of his own intellectual world. After his move from Sofia to Prague in 1921, as his ties with the Eurasian Group began to weaken, he found himself involved in several new émigré undertakings, which in some cases were in tension with each other.

The pattern of his associations is quite revealing. By advocating “the priority of spiritual culture over politics” he was able to transcend some of the ideological divisions in the politically charged atmosphere of the dispersion. This explains why he could remain on the periphery of the Eurasian movement and at the same time hesitantly maintain his membership in Bulgakov’s Brotherhood of St Sophia, all the while being acutely aware of the head-on collisions the leaders of the two groups had been having with each other.

Florovsky also wrote both for Berdyaev in *The Way (Put’)* and for Struve in *The Russian Thought (Russkaia Mysl’)*, despite the fact that these sometime collaborators could no longer find common language when addressing the all-important question of the “meaning of the Russian Revolution.” Struve, originally a liberal democrat, in the exile, drifted to the right and came to support intervention. Berdyaev, remaining an aristocrat of the spirit, towards the end of his life became more positively disposed towards the Soviet experiment. It is remarkable how Florovsky, who was psychologically prone to conflict, often managed to hold his head high above what seemed to be a

continuous sequence of painful clashes in the émigré community. This attitude caused some Renaissance leaders, like Berdiaev, to criticize Florovsky for his apparent indifference to social and political issues.

In Paris, Florovsky associated primarily with the representatives of the modernist trend in Orthodox theology, not with the numerically stronger and ideologically more monolithic traditionalist front. This does not imply, of course, that he saw eye to eye with his modernist peers, such as Berdiaev and Bulgakov. Clearly, he was quite critical of them. But he was preoccupied with the same questions, interiorized the same problems, pursued similar goals, and received a comparable academic training, following the train of the Renaissance thought as far as he could without betraying himself. This does not mean at all that in the early 1920s he was a “modernist,” but then became a “traditionalist.” In theology Florovsky was nobody’s man; he was perceived as a traditionalist by some modernists and as a modernist by some traditionalists. He was as weary of modernist philosophical revisionism as he was critical of the traditionalist “theology of repetition.”

It is crucial to break down the facile distinction between modernism and traditionalism in order to do justice to the complexity of intellectual stimuli that shaped Florovsky’s neopatristics and ecumenical vision. To this purpose, in this chapter I problematize the “Paris school” label, which may connote a homogeneity that different currents of Russian émigré theology did not possess. More importantly, I show how Florovsky’s historical theology was shaped by his polemical reaction to sophiology.

THE “PARIS SCHOOL” LABEL

In terms of the literary output of the émigré authors, towards the end of the 1920s, Paris emerged as the cultural capital of Russia Abroad. In the most immediate way, the designation “Paris school” referred to the St Sergius Theological Institute. In his speech marking the tenth anniversary of the Institute, Bulgakov observed that in Paris:

There gathered a distinctive group of theologians, who despite the differences of their individual outlooks, were marked by common destiny and calling: to serve the Church with their theological thought and scholarly work—such is our Russian Oratory. Docendo discimus [We learn by teaching]; new Russian theology is being born in conjunction with our teaching needs. Out of these daily labors

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3 The moniker “Paris school” is also used in reference to Russian émigré literature, especially to the circle of Georgii Adamovich: see Leonid Livak, How It Was Done in Paris: Russian Émigré Literature and French Modernism (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 40.
there have grown a whole theological literature, a peculiar school of Parisian theology, which, despite its difficult and dissonant harmony, has a certain common face and constitutes a united whole. This theology did not wish to forget its ancestry and to neglect its tradition, but it was torn out of its path and cut out of its native soil. This theology grew in the spiritually foreign land, as the leaders of Israel in the Babylonian exile.4

Seneca’s lapidary turn of phrase, docendo discimus, here invoked by Bulgakov, was directly applicable to Florovsky, who mastered patristics precisely by teaching the subject for the first time at the St Sergius Institute.

As Bulgakov stated, the Paris school of Russian theology was Orthodox theology in exile. This theology was permanently marked by the trauma of Russian intellectual uprooting and the resulting spiritual homelessness. Similar to the Babylonian exile for the Jews, the post-Revolutionary exile was not only a disaster, but also a providential opportunity. It was an opportunity for Russian Orthodoxy to speak with a voice never heard as powerfully before in the western world. Russian Orthodoxy was also offered a chance to break out of its nationalist isolation and provincialism in a sustained encounter with the Christian West. The exilic theology was also marked by a greater freedom of inquiry than that afforded at the state-run schools of the tsarist Russia. As Bulgakov put the matter: “We possess the ecclesial freedom of the faithful and loving sons of the Church, not that of the rebellious slaves. We desire to be freely faithful to the Church—faithful to its tradition, but faithful creatively.” 5

Bulgakov’s weaving together of faithfulness to tradition with freedom and creativity expressed a vision that united several members of the St Sophia Brotherhood, especially Zenkovsky and Kartashev. Insofar as Florovsky also shared this general vision, he was a “son” of the Russian Religious Renaissance and a contributor to Parisian theology. If the Renaissance “fathers” tended to emphasize freedom and creativity, Florovsky, in contrast, was more inclined to underscore faithfulness to patristic tradition.

At the St Sergius Institute two conflicting pre-revolutionary currents of Russian religious thought met each other. The graduates of theological academies, such as metropolitan Evlogy, Bishop Veniamin Fedchenkov,6 and Nikolai Glubokovsky taught side by side with the leaders of the Renaissance, such as Bulgakov, Fedotov, Kartashev, and Zenkovsky, who were generally

4 Bulgakov, “Pri reke Khovare” (1935), Put’ parizhskogo bogoslovia, 429; emphasis in the original.
5 Bulgakov, “Pri reke Khovare,” Put’ parizhskogo bogoslovia, 431.
6 This bishop, who was a man of meager academic accomplishments, became the first Dean of Students (inspektor) at the St Sergius Institute. When metropolitan Evlogy switched his affiliation from the Patriarchate of Moscow to the Patriarchate of Constantinople because of the political troubles in Moscow, Bishop Veniamin, who retained his allegiance to the Moscow Patriarchate, left the school: see V. Fedchenkov, Na rubezhe dvukh epokh (Moscow: Otchii Dom, 1994), 384.
critical of “school theology.”⁷ Although Bulgakov’s influence upon the general atmosphere of the St Sergius Institute could hardly be overestimated, the school was not theologically homogenous.

In the after-war period the leaders of the St Sergius Institute attempted to distance themselves from Bulgakov’s legacy. For example, archimandrite Kiprian Kern (1899–1960), who was one of the leaders of the St Sergius Institute after the war, disowned the notion of “Paris theology” in no uncertain terms:

It must be stated directly, confidently, and publically: the Theological Institute has never regarded the speculations of Fr Sergius [Bulgakov] as its official theology. Fr. Sergius has not succeeded in establishing his own school. Moreover, he did not leave a single disciple among his former students, who are now instructors. There is no such a thing as ‘Paris theology!’ For those who have proper ecclesial ears to hear and theological taste this expression strikes an unbearably false note and bespeaks provincialism. Such expression could exist only in the imagination of the obscurantists who are suspicious of everything.⁸

While Kern’s claim that Bulgakov “did not leave a single disciple” was an exaggeration, the archimandrite’s more general point that sophiology had never become the official position of the St Sergius Institute was accurate.⁹ While staunchly opposed to sophiology, Kern, like Florovsky, had a great respect for Bulgakov as a man of prayer, a church leader, and an intellectual. Trained at the graduate school of theology of the University of Belgrade, Kern became interested in the Church Fathers at about the same time as Florovsky did and seemed equally eager to “bury” the Russian Religious Renaissance in the name of patristics, thereby reinforcing the polarizing account. When Florovsky left for Yugoslavia during the war years, Kern was hired to teach patristics at the St Sergius Institute instead of him.

After the war, Florovsky expected the patristics chair to revert to him. But the expectation proved unrealistic, because his former colleagues were not keen to see him return, given his proclivity to generate conflict.¹⁰ Rightly or wrongly, Florovsky regarded the theological agenda of the Institute, even

⁷ This point is emphasized by archimandrite Kassian (Bezobrazov), “Slovo rektora episkopa Kassiana,” Sviato-Sergievskoe podvor’e v Parizhe (St Petersburg: Aleteia, 1999), 84.
⁸ Kiprian Kern, “Chetvert’ veka” (1950), Sviato-Sergievskoe podvor’e v Parizhe, 87.
¹⁰ Maria Vorobiova, “Notes on Florovsky’s Table Talk,” July 28, 1971: “Cyprian was against admitting G[eorges] V[asilievich] F[lorovsky] to [the] faculty meetings when he returned from Prague in 1945 on [the] grounds [that he was] not really [a full-time] member (volno-naemnyi), but Kartashev and Zenkovsky felt this was too much, simply indecent,” p. 105, n. 10.
under the new leadership, to be antithetical to his program of a “return to the Fathers.”

The notion of the “Paris school” is somewhat restrictive, since many important Russian scholars worked elsewhere—for example, N. Glubokovsky in Sofia, N. Lossky in Prague, F. Stepun in Berlin, D. Chizhovsky in Heidelberg, and V. Ivanov in Rome. Some of those who did work in Paris eventually left France and spent the remaining part of their lives in the United States, as did, for example, N. Lossky, G. Fedotov, A. Schmemann, J. Meyendorff, and, of course, Florovsky himself. A few returned to the Soviet Union, as did L. Karsavin and V. Fedchenkov. Besides, such prominent figures as, for example, N. Berdyaev, N. Lossky, and L. Shestov, while residing in Paris or its suburbs, were not formally affiliated with the St Sergius Institute. Vladimir Lossky, Evgraf Kovalevsky, and Leonid Ouspensky opened their own St Denis Theological Institute and would have nothing to do with the St Sergius Institute, especially during the time of Bulgakov’s deanship.

If the number of students is any indication, over the period of thirteen years from 1925 to 1938, the St Sergius Institute enrolled a total of 168 registered students, which came down to roughly thirteen new students on average each year. In comparison, Berdyaev’s Religious-Philosophical Academy often attracted hundreds, sometimes nearly a thousand attendees during one evening. This undertaking apparently had such a considerable public visibility, that Florovsky later emphasized that the life of Russian religious intelligentsia in Paris revolved around “two centers:” Berdyaev’s Religious-Philosophical Academy and Bulgakov’s St Sergius Institute. Before WWII, Florovsky was occasionally invited by Berdyaev to give public lectures at the Religious-Philosophical Academy.

Outside France, the émigré Russian scholars found teaching posts at the Orthodox theological faculties of Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia, and Warsaw. The theological departments of the University of Sofia and the University of Belgrade, on a lesser scale than the St Sergius Institute, contributed to educating the future Russian émigré church leaders and theologians. For example, a prominent Russian patrologist, Mikhail Posnov (1873–1931), fled to Bulgaria after the Revolution and from 1919 to the end of his life taught church history at the Sofia Theological Academy and the University of Sofia. Such prominent members of the faculty of the St Sergius Institute as Florovsky’s compatriot

11 Florovsky, Letter to S. Sakharov, February 7, 1959: “The Church Fathers are obfuscated or replaced by the traditions of Russian religious-philosophical thought at the Theological Institute in Paris,” Perepiska, 128.
12 Lowrie, Saint Sergius in Paris, 27.
13 Florovsky, untitled transcript of an unpublished lecture, beginning with the words: “… Actually about two major groups,” pp. 2–3, GFP PUL, Box 5, folder “Reviews without date or place of publication.”
Fr Nicholas Afanasiev (1893–1966) and archimandrite Kiprian Kern did their graduate work at the theological department of the University of Belgrade. Florovsky himself taught at various Russian schools in Yugoslavia during WWII. Given his ecumenical and international reach, it would be unduly restrictive to associate him with the “Paris school” alone.

Nevertheless, the role of Paris as the European capital with the highest concentration of Russian refugees should not be underestimated. Indeed, the exchange between Russian religious thinkers and French intellectuals was intense and mutually enriching. But Russian émigré theology produced in Paris was not a distinctly or exclusively French epiphenomenon. It would be inaccurate to reduce the western European influences upon Russian émigré thought to those of the French capital alone, as the designation “Paris school” could connote. For example, the philosophical capital of the Diaspora in 1922–1924 was Berlin, with the center of publications activities shifting to Paris in 1925.

The primary forum of intellectual cooperation among the literati both in Russia and in the Dispersion was an informal circle (Russian: kruzhok), rather than a school. Among the Russian émigrés, the most important literary ventures—such as new publishing houses, path-setting journals, and landmark symposia—were conceived and brought into existence as a result of the informal, spontaneous activity of the circles. The “school” presupposes the transmission of knowledge in a formally structured academic environment. But in the émigré communities, the possibilities for such an exchange were quite limited. For the abovementioned reasons, the expression “Paris school” is less accurate and comprehensive, in my judgment, than the description “Russian theology in the exile” or “theology in the Russian Diaspora.” The character, identity, and ecclesiastical loyalties of Russian theology in the dispersion were severely tested in the Sophia Affair.

THE SOPHIA AFFAIR

In 1935, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), launched an inquiry into Bulgakov’s

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theology. For this purpose, a summary of Bulgakov’s teaching was compiled by Aleksei Stavrovsky (1905–1972), who in the 1920s left the St Sergius Institute in protest against Bulgakov’s sophiology and organized the Brotherhood of St Photius in 1925. The metropolitan also approached Vladimir Lossky, then the Vice-President of the Brotherhood of St Photius, which was canonically affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate, to offer a critique of Bulgakov’s theological system, especially his recently published book on Christology, *The Lamb of God* (1933). Upon reviewing the reports of Stavrovsky and Lossky, in September 1935 metropolitan Sergius issued an official ukase cautioning the faithful of the Orthodox Church that Bulgakov’s teaching contained serious distortions of the Orthodox teaching. Without directly accusing Bulgakov of heresy, the metropolitan urged him to retract some of his most controversial sophiological views.

The metropolitan’s ukase landed in a canonical limbo. The ukase did not rely on Bulgakov’s own writings, but on the excerpts and scholarly commentary prepared by others. Bulgakov was ostracized in absentia, without being given a proper hearing or a chance to defend his position. The canonical status of the metropolitan’s personal reprimand, as opposed to the disciplinary action of the Holy Synod, was unclear. As a priest, Bulgakov was no longer a subordinate of the metropolitan Sergius. In Paris, Bulgakov served under metropolitan Evlogy Georgievsky, who, in order to avoid a schism with Moscow, transferred his diocese to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In other words, the Moscow Patriarchate issued a warning against its former cleric, who at the time did not belong to its jurisdiction, thereby overstepping its canonical prerogatives.

The situation soon grew worse, when the Synod of the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), residing in Sremski Karlovci (Yugoslovakia), which broke communion both with Moscow and with metropolitan Evlogy, within a month issued a more damning statement, declaring Bulgakov’s sophiology heretical and advising metropolitan Evlogy to cause Bulgakov to publicly renounce his teachings. Thus the ROCOR joined the Moscow Patriarchate in delivering a blow not only to Bulgakov personally

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but also to the reputation of the St Sergius Institute, which was perceived in the traditionalist camp as a bastion of theological modernism.\textsuperscript{21}

In Paris, the situation had very quickly deteriorated into a veritable storm in an émigré teacup, which polarized the already divided Diaspora even more. A solid majority of the religious intelligentsia sided with Bulgakov. For people like Berdyaev and Vysheslavtsev, the condemnation of Bulgakov was an attack on free theological inquiry by a corrupt and repressive ecclesiastical establishment. In the eyes of some emigrants, Vladimir Lossky became a disgraceful informer, who sided with the Church that was “loyal” to the blood-stained Bolsheviks. While such a perception had little to do with Lossky’s intentions, his reputation among the émigrés suffered grievously as a result of the Sophia Affair.\textsuperscript{22}

The passions in the Sophia Affair could run very high indeed. For example, one open debate on sophiology at the meeting of Berdyaev’s Religious-Philosophical Academy on Montparnasse escalated into a politically charged rally in support of Bulgakov. At the end of the meeting, a member of the St Photius Brotherhood and V. Lossky’s friend, Maxim Kovalevsky, publicly insulted Berdyaev’s colleague, Boris Vysheslavtsev. The latter defended his honor by punching his offender in the nose.\textsuperscript{23} Although most sophiological disputation ended without shedding blood, speculative theological problems at times sparked deep-seated hostilities, and philosophical disagreements deteriorated into personal attacks, so that a sober examination of Bulgakov’s theological views became extremely difficult.

Meanwhile, metropolitan Evlogy realized that he could not sit this tempest out and needed to respond. For this purpose, he appointed a theological commission composed of the members of the St Sergius Institute faculty, which could offer its resolution regarding Bulgakov’s sophiology. The commission produced a report acquitting Bulgakov of heresy, but raising a few minor theological concerns. After some hesitation, Florovsky refused to sign the resolution on the grounds that it did not convey his view of Bulgakov’s teaching.\textsuperscript{24} This decision was extremely difficult for Florovsky, for it antagonized the rest of the Institute’s faculty against him as well as strained his relationship with Bulgakov. Still, Florovsky thought that to offer Bulgakov a theological carte blanche was to go against conscience. Florovsky had become

\textsuperscript{21} The attacks against the Theological Institute in general and Bulgakov in particular began early in the Russian émigré press. See, e.g., the Open Letter of Bishop Tikhon, published in the newspaper \textit{Rus’}, issue 1384, dated November 22, 1927 in which the bishop criticizes metropolitan Evlogy for assembling a “motley modernist bucket, consisting of Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Kartashev, whose orthodoxy is under investigation.”

\textsuperscript{22} For Vladimir Lossky’s side of the story, see N. O. Lossky, \textit{Vospominaniia}, 266–74.

\textsuperscript{23} N. O. Lossky, \textit{Vospominaniia}, 271.

\textsuperscript{24} In his letter to his wife of May 6, 1936, GFP PUL, Box 55, f. 6, Florovsky mentions strong reservations that he expressed during the meetings of the Commission.
convinced that most errors of Solovyov’s religious philosophy were also present in Bulgakov’s system.\(^{25}\)

In an attempt to preserve objectivity, metropolitan Evlogy asked Florovsky and Fr. Sergei Chetverikov (1867–1947), who also refused to sign the resolution, to prepare a separate written opinion. Alexis Klimoff showed in his penetrating study of this episode that Florovsky did everything he could to sabotage this assignment.\(^{26}\) In the end, Florovsky reluctantly co-signed the separate opinion, composed primarily by Chetverikov. Although the co-signers of the separate opinion did not charge Bulgakov with heresy, they nevertheless raised several serious concerns.

The immediate result of the Sophia Affair was inconclusive and further inquiries into the matter collapsed. Bulgakov was left to teach at the St. Sergius Institute, continuing to write his major trilogy “On Godmanhood,” developing further his sophiology, and conceding nothing to his theological opponents. On a personal level, Florovsky would have regretted the psychological toll that the controversy took on Bulgakov. On a socio-political level, Florovsky preferred to stay out of the Sophia Affair as much as he reasonably could. But on a theological level, which mostly concerns us here, Florovsky found himself more often agreeing with V. Lossky’s critique of sophiology than with Bulgakov’s defense of it.

**METHODOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES**

At the St. Sergius Institute, Bulgakov was perceived as a modernist and owned up to the title. Florovsky was in turn caricatured as a staunch traditionalist, a guardian of orthodoxy, and generally did not protest against such a designation. However, the labels “modernism” and “traditionalism,” convenient as they may be, explain little in both cases. As an intellectual historian, Florovsky rarely criticized Bulgakov’s sophiology on purely philosophical grounds, but preferred the territory of patristics and of the history of ideas instead. Under the guise of fighting the ancient heretics, particularly Origen, whether during his lectures or in print, Florovsky often aimed his darts indirectly at Bulgakov. As Florovsky related to his biographer, “in my teaching of Patristics, though I never mentioned Father Bulgakov, the students could understand right away that Father Bulgakov was not in line with the tradition. I never specified it, but

\(^{25}\) In his letter to his wife of August 28, 1937, GFP PUL, Box 55, f. 7, Florovsky spoke of the “sophianic heresy,” a label that he avoided using in a public setting.

\(^{26}\) Klimoff reconstructs the historical circumstances of Florovsky’s involvement in the Sophia Affair with painstaking detail and objectivity: see his article “Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy,” *SVTQ*, 49 (2005), 67–100.
it became clear, and there was some agitation that I am attacking him.”

Apparently, Florovsky did not regret having provoked “some agitation.” Given his target audience of Orthodox seminarians, the strategy proved rhetorically powerful: Florovsky became associated with the Church Fathers, whereas Bulgakov ended up in the unenviable company of the heretics. Serious differences of theological method were lurking behind such *ad hominem* considerations.

Florovsky continued battling Bulgakov under the guise of Origen decades later, when he taught at Harvard Divinity School. As one of his former students recalled:

> When Florovsky turned to discussing Origen, one could see both how fascinated he was by him, but at the same time how distasteful Origen’s theology was to him. His excitement and engagement in the issues he raised were infectious (regardless of whether one agreed with the evaluations on Orthodoxy/deviance in his conclusions), for few people since the Middle Ages have felt that debating and in Florovsky’s case overcoming Origen’s ideas was still a major issue for the Church.\(^{28}\)

Since Florovsky regarded sophiology as a species of Origenism, he continued to oppose it long after its proponents, including Florensky and Bulgakov, were dead. What immensely attracted his students in the US, who could not always grasp the polemical subtext, was the sense that the vision of the Church Fathers was existentially relevant for dealing with contemporary theological problems.

Bulgakov and Florovsky understood the authority of the patristic tradition differently. Bulgakov distinguished between the obligatory dogmatic definitions and the less authoritative doctrinal statements. On his view, strictly speaking, only two dogmas—the incarnation and the trinity—were universally binding and theologically non-negotiable.\(^{29}\) All other theological teachings, including, for example, ecclesiology, atonement, and eschatology, had to cohere with the two major dogmas, but did not possess an equally authoritative status. For Bulgakov, *consensus patrum*—the consensus of the Church Fathers—was pastorally useful, rather than dogmatically normative. Bulgakov was not afraid of going against the *consensus patrum* and siding with the patristic minority report instead, when he believed he had good theological grounds for doing so. For example, he sided with Origen’s and Gregory of Nyssa’s teaching regarding universal salvation against the majority of patristic authorities, who held that hell is eternal.

\(^{27}\) A. Blane, *Georges Florovsky*, 63.


Bulgakov also ingeniously adopted some elements of Apollinaris’ Christology, despite the fact that Apollinarianism was condemned by the Church. More specifically, he took the claim that the hypostasis of the Son was divine to mean that the Son only had a divine center of self-consciousness and did not have a human center, since the human rationality of Christ constituted the ideal humanity, the aspect of the divine Sophia. While Bulgakov’s Christology was not straightforwardly Apollinarian, it is clear that he could prefer a heterodox teaching to the consensus patrum, if such a teaching elucidated his sophiology.\(^{30}\) Needless to say, the Orthodox Church officials found such doctrinal flexibility disturbing. More importantly, in interpreting Apollinaris, Bulgakov showed himself a more nuanced exegete than his orthodox critics.

Florovsky rejected dogmatic minimalism in favor of an approach that he called dogmatic maximalism.\(^{31}\) He jettisoned Bulgakov’s distinction between the obligatory dogmatic definitions and the less authoritative doctrinal statements.\(^{32}\) Florovsky was also opposed to widespread dogmatic indifferentism, especially in Liberal Protestant theology.\(^{33}\) He revolted against the nineteenth-century tendency to evaluate dogmatic issues in light of their moral utility, a moralistic rationalism that he found depleting. As a result, he often minimized and even neglected the moral function of doctrine. He also opposed dogmatic indifferentism in the ecumenical movement, especially when after the war the energies of the movement began to be channeled in the direction of joint social work, not church doctrine.

Florovsky’s dogmatic maximalism accorded greater importance to the consensus patrum than Bulgakov’s dogmatic minimalism. For Florovsky, it was essential to interiorize the patristic consensus in order to penetrate the mind of the Church. This was not merely a matter of siding with the majority, but of acquiring a catholic consciousness, an ability to think as a member of the Church, rather than as an autonomous religious philosopher. In this process, the acceptance of the patristic consensus was a premise of the neopatristic synthesis. In practice, this meant that Florovsky mostly took the

\(^{30}\) S. Bulgakov, Agnets Bozhii (Moscow: Obshchedostupnyi Pravoslavnyi Universitet, 2000), 39–41.


\(^{32}\) Florovsky, Letter to his wife, August 4, 1937.

\(^{33}\) Florovsky, “Published Oral Comments,” in L. Hodgson (ed.), The Second World Conference on Faith and Order (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1938), 74–5: “I do not myself follow Father Boulgakoff in believing that one can separate dogma and doctrine absolutely. Certainly there is dogma implied in definitions, but words imply conceptions and conceptions imply systems; definitions must be understood in some terms of philosophical meaning. It is simply futile to say that we can take dogma as something, which can only be interpreted in one sense, but we must avoid the danger of substituting something new for the traditional and venerable doctrine of the past.” Both Bulgakov’s position and Protestant dogmatic indifferentism were the target of Florovsky’s critical remarks at the conference.
side of the orthodox patristic authors against both the ancient heretics and the common opinion of modern theologians. As a historical theologian, he accepted the Church’s judgment upon Origen and Apollinaris as non-negotiable. Florovsky also respected a broad patristic consensus on the eternity of hell. He believed that modernist Orthodox theologians, such as Florensky and Bulgakov, despite paying lip-service to sobornost, were more preoccupied with articulating their own religious teachings than with expressing the mind of the Church.

In response to Florovsky, Bulgakov stressed that sophiology was by no means his private religious teaching. On the contrary, it was a teaching that was grounded in scripture, tradition, and even church art. Most fundamentally, sophiology, qua teaching about Godmanhood was a positive exposition of the Chalcedonian definition. Among other things, Bulgakov pointed to the figure of Sophia both in the Old and the New Testaments, to the discussion of the relevant biblical texts during the Arian controversy, as well as to the admittedly rare depictions of the female figure bearing the inscription “Divine Wisdom” in medieval Russian religious art. Florovsky responded that the only legitimate expression of Sophia was Christ and that the iconographic images in question were influenced by medieval German mysticism.

To reinforce his argument from tradition, Bulgakov also claimed that sophiology was a creative contemporary reworking of the teaching of Gregory Palamas. More specifically, the divine Sophia was a repository of uncreated divine energies. Unlike Vladimir Lossky, Florovsky did not take issue with Bulgakov directly on this point. In general, Palamite theology did not play in Florovsky’s retrieval of the Fathers the prominent role accorded to Palamism by Vladimir Lossky, John Meyendorff, Christos Yannaras, and other neopatristic theologians.

Both Florovsky and Bulgakov held that patristic theology involved using the categories of Hellenistic philosophy in order to express the truths of divine revelation. Bulgakov maintained that although the Church Fathers provided a

35 For the discussion of Florovsky’s epistemology of catholic transformation, see chapter 13.
36 S. Bulgakov, Agnets Bozhii (Moscow: Obschchedostupnyi Pravoslavnyi Universitet, 2000; first published in 1933), 15.
37 “O pochitanii Sofii, Premudrosti Bozhiei, v Vizantii i na Rusi” (1932), VK, 472–6. Florovsky was aware of the OT background of the female representations of Sophia, but chose to focus on the western analogues of such representations instead.
38 Bulgakov, Agnets Bozhii, 147.
39 Lossky argued that Bulgakov misinterpreted Palamas by identifying Sophia both with the divine essence and with the divine energies: see Spor o Sofii, 26, 37–9.
useful paradigm, it was the task of contemporary Orthodox theology to recast patristic teaching using the categories of modern philosophy.\textsuperscript{40} Florovsky objected that in the absence of proper grounding in history and ecclesial experience, such a recasting could distort the content of divine revelation. He maintained that patristic theology was perennial Christian philosophy and that its categories were unchangeable.\textsuperscript{41} In the debate between Florovsky and Bulgakov, the nature of Christian metaphysics was at stake.

Each in his own way, Bulgakov and Florovsky appropriated Florensky’s account of theological antinomies. Florensky extended the technical Kantian notion of an antinomy to cover a much wider range of paradoxes, including those of religious language.\textsuperscript{42} When pondering the mystery of God, the human mind becomes involved in seeming contradictions stemming from its creaturely limitations. For Florensky, as for Bulgakov, the antinomies characterized every aspect of God’s relation to the world: the paradoxical balance of the divine transcendence and immanence; the correlation between the eternity of divine nature and divine agency in time; the reconciliation of the divine omni-properties, such as omnipotence and omniscience, with creaturely freedom. While there was a history of grappling with these pairs in Christian thought, it was Florensky who revived the subject in Russian theology.

Bulgakov’s early theological work, The Unfading Light, was written during a period of his close friendship with Florensky and reflects their common interest in theological antinomies.\textsuperscript{43} Under the influence of the Renaissance theologians, early in his career Florovsky also held that antinomies were inescapable.\textsuperscript{44} Later, without denying the validity of antinomies, Florovsky began to stress the God-given and permanent character of the categories of Christian Hellenism, defining dogma as a “logical icon” of Divine Reality.\textsuperscript{45} Claiming that “there are no antinomies for the divine Logos,” Florovsky wondered whether the overemphasis on antinomies in Russian religious thought sufficiently reflected the definitive character of the divine revelation.

\textsuperscript{40} Bulgakov, “Dogmat i dogmatika,” 23; “Bez plana,” S. N. Bulgakov: Pro et contra, 230.
\textsuperscript{41} The treatment of Florovsky’s understanding of “perennial philosophy” will be postponed until chapter 12.
\textsuperscript{42} P. Florensky, Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny, 2 vols (Moscow: Pravda, 1990), vol. I, part 1: 143–65. In a Kantian fashion, Florensky formulated an un-Kantian theological categorical imperative of discursive reason: “You must always reason in such a way that each violation of the church dogma in one direction could be annulled by the corresponding violation in the opposite direction; all of your rational operations over a dogmatic statement must be executed in such a way as to preserve the major antinomy of the dogmatic statement,” Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny, 160.
\textsuperscript{44} “Chelovecheskaia mudrost’ i Premudrost’ Bozhiia,” PRM, 82–4 (“Human Wisdom and the Great Wisdom of God”), CW XII: 119.
\textsuperscript{45} “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology,” CW III: 29.
and the transformation of human rationality.\textsuperscript{46} For different reasons, Bulgakov was also unable to consistently uphold the antinomic character of religious language in his later theological works.\textsuperscript{47}

**BULGAKOV’S PANENTHEISM VS FLOROVSKY’S “INTUITION OF CREATUREHOOD”**

Since Bulgakov was the author of the most monumental theological system in Orthodox theology since John of Damascus (fl. eighth century),\textsuperscript{48} it would not be possible to do justice to his creative genius in a brief section. Bulgakov’s sophiology may be understood as addressing the following cluster of interrelated questions: What is the nature of the God-world relationship? What metaphysical system could serve as an antidote to the systems of meaning that explain the world with no reference to God? In addition to these general philosophical questions, there was a related cluster of issues prompted by the revealed content of the Christian faith, such as: What is the nature of God’s union with humanity in the incarnation? Does the incarnation have any implications for metaphysics? Is there a connection between the union of God and humanity in Christ, and the union that each human person will enjoy with God in the eschaton?

Before we turn to Bulgakov’s answers, it is important to stress that, like Florovsky, he was searching after a metaphysic that would capture in the fullest possible way the truth of the divine revelation in Christ, the truth of the divine-human communion. For Bulgakov, the answer came in the form of panentheism, for Florovsky, in that of a classical doctrine of creation out of nothing. We shall consider both alternatives in turn.

For Bulgakov, as for Florovsky, there is an infinite ontological gap between God and creation. They also agree that the finite creature cannot bridge this gap apart from God. They diverge, however, on how to unpack the implications of the fact that God has bridged the gap in the incarnation. For Bulgakov, the divine incarnation is possible as a historical event because human nature is eternally united to the second person of the Trinity. The divine incarnation is a universal paradigm of any divine action in the world. On this assumption, an act of creation is an instance of God’s uniting himself to his other, to the

\textsuperscript{46} Florovsky, Letter to S. Sakharov, May 15, 1958, Perepiska, 78: “The antinomianism of the dogmas is beyond dispute (bessporna). But there remains a question of the transfiguration of reason. There are no antinomies for the divine Logos, whose rationality should not be minimized. For this reason antinomianism in theology—in Russian theology for the first time announced by Fr. P. Florensky—has always perplexed me, even in [V.] Lossky.”

\textsuperscript{47} For the discussion of Christological antinomy, see Bulgakov, Agnëts Božhii, 43.

\textsuperscript{48} I owe this insight to a personal conversation with Aristotle Papanikolaou.
non-God, to the world. God did not create out of anything external or independent of him. According to Lev Zander, it is the central thesis of Bulgakov’s system that God creates the world out of himself, out of the eternal divine world that pre-exists temporal creation.\(^{49}\) The world is able to receive God, only because God eternally contains the conditions of the possibility of such a reception. Put less cryptically, God eternally wills and thinks the creation of the world in time. God’s eternal thought and volition constitute the eternal foundation of the world.

The angelic and human Fall violate the unity between God and the world. Since the Fall occurred in time, God also provides the means of restoration in time, by acting in the history of Israel and by accepting the consequences of human sin in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Because the world is never completely “outside” God, the history of salvation also becomes a part of the divine life. In other words, God’s eternal being has a direct bearing upon God’s agency in history. There is a close connection between the hidden and the revealed side of the divine nature.

As I mentioned earlier, Florovsky did not offer direct philosophical arguments against Bulgakov’s panentheism. Instead, Florovsky’s criticism of Bulgakov took a veiled form of expounding on the patristic doctrine of creation out of nothing and directing his ire at Origen and his followers. Florovsky’s seminal essay on creation was first presented at Berdyaev’s Colloquium in Paris, then published in French and later issued in a definitive Russian version under the title “Creation and Creaturehood” (1928). As Florovsky confessed years later:

> It was Florensky who directed my thought to the problem of creation. In this way, I became radically opposed to any “sophianism” (sofianstvu). See my article “Creature and Creaturehood” in the first issue of The Orthodox Thought. At the time, only Fr Sergius [Bulgakov] and, to some extent, Fr Vasily Ženkovsky realized that the article was directed against sophiology. Others (such as, for example, Professor A. P. Dobroklonsky) concluded instead that I was a “sophiologist” myself.\(^{50}\)

This revealing statement establishes several points. First, it was reading Florovsky’s *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, not the works of the Church Fathers, that prompted Florovsky to produce what he later recognized as one of his most significant theological works. The creative stimulus came from one of the Renaissance “fathers,” not the Church Fathers. Second, it was Florensky’s version of sophiology that shook Florovsky’s faith in the broader sophiological trend in Russian thought. Third, and perhaps most pertinent here,
Florovsky’s essay “Creature and Creaturehood” was intended by the author, and understood by Bulgakov and his supporters, as an attack on sophiology.\footnote{See also Florovsky, Letter to S. Sakharov, April 8, 1958, \textit{Perepiska}, 67: “My article ‘Creature and Creaturehood’ was silently ignored, because it was seen (not without foundation) as opposing sophianism, which attitude at the time would have been regarded as unpardonable boldness in Paris.”}

In early 1936, in the midst of the Sophia Affair, Florovsky wrote to his Anglican friend A. F. Dobbie-Bateman, seeking refuge from the Parisian tempest by lecturing in Britain. For his course of lectures, Florovsky proposed a seemingly benign topic, “the Christian doctrine of creation.” His insightful addressee immediately perceived trouble, responding: “Not ‘the Christian doctrine of creation.’ If you will let me yet once again exercise the friend’s privilege of candour, this subject is too near current disputes and I fear that it will tempt you to forget George Florovsky in order to assume your role as anti-Bulgakov!”\footnote{V. I. Dobbie-Bateman, Letter to G. Florovsky, February 24, 1936, GFP PUL, Box 14, f. 4. On Dobbie-Bateman, see A. B. Gallaher, “Georges Florovsky \textit{On Reading the Life of St Seraphim},” \textit{Sobornost} 27/1 (2005), 58–70.} Thus, we have both Florovsky’s own confession and an equally strong perception of his contemporaries, that his work, which on the surface dealt with the patristic doctrine of creation and the heretical deviations from this doctrine, was directly aimed at Bulgakov and, more broadly, at Russian sophiology.

To criticize Bulgakov’s system publicly would be to provoke a storm. Instead, Florovsky chose to assert his theological standpoint by grounding it positively in his reading of the Church Fathers. Patristic theology, according to Florovsky, is uniquely marked by the fundamental “intuition of creaturehood,” or the recognition of the ontological divide between the Creator and creature.\footnote{As H. A. Wolfson pointed out to Florovsky, the doctrine of creation out of nothing was strictly speaking not unique to Christian theology, since it was a part of the Jewish and Islamic theological traditions: see Wolfson, Letter to G. Florovsky, August 12, 1957, p. 2, GFP PUL, Box 2, f. 1.} Creation is not made “out of” God, or out of something “in” God, or out of the world eternally existing in God, or out of something “outside” God, but precisely out of nothing. God and the world belong to the two different orders of being. The spatial imagery, elicited by the application of the propositions “in” and “outside” to God, obscures this basic truth. Contrary to Bulgakov, there could be no tertium quid in which both uncreated and created natures are united.\footnote{“Tvar’ i tvarnost’,” \textit{IBS}, 39–40.}

Florovsky also expressed these insights in historical terms, by contrasting the erroneous cosmologies of Origen and Arius with the orthodox doctrine of creation, particularly as articulated by Athanasius of Alexandria. In Florovsky’s scheme, both Origen and Arius in different ways confused the eternal generation of the Son with the creation of the world. Origen compromised the
contingency of the world by collapsing creation into the eternal generation of the Son. According to Florovsky, Origen espoused a “Greek understanding of the world” as necessary and eternal.  

Florovsky describes Origen’s view in terms deliberately echoing Bulgakov’s theology: “Now, according to Origen, in the very subsistence of Wisdom the whole of design of creation is already implied. The whole creation, universa creatura, is pre-arranged in Wisdom.”

In contrast to Origen, Arius compromised the divinity of the Son by interpreting the eternal generation of the Son by analogy with the creation of the world out of nothing.

Athanasius, in contrast, avoided these two errors by clearly distinguishing between the eternal generation of the Son out of the Father’s essence, from the contingent creation of the world by the Father’s will. On the orthodox view, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, sharing the divine essence with the other two persons of the trinity in the eternal perichoresis. God cannot be God without the Son and the Holy Spirit. The generation of the divine Son is an eternal act, internal to the divine being and attributable to the divine essence, while the creation of the world is a free act of the divine will. God is under no constraint to create. 

Creation is not a necessary expression of the divine being, for it is entirely conceivable that the world could not have been created. God does not need the world as a necessary medium of his self-disclosure and activity. God would still remain God without the creation of the world. The existence of the world does not complete God’s perfect being in any way.

God is eternal and unchangeable, whereas the creaturely state is time-bound and changeable. Because creatures have a beginning in time, they fall short of the eternity that uniquely characterizes divine existence. Florovsky underscores that in contrast to Platonism and other forms of idealism, “Christianity is the justification of time, the philosophy of creaturehood, the teaching about creation out of nothing and entering eternity—it is a teaching about becoming eternity. This is the meaning of Christian metaphysics. This meaning is being revealed through contemplating the historical Christ.”

According to Florovsky, Christian metaphysics must offer a framework for a number of crucial truth-claims, grounded in revelation. These claims include the following: God and the world belong to the two different orders of being; creatures are time-bound and contingent; history is not a deterministic and rationally transparent process, but an arena of genuinely new events and unpredictable, free human agency; God chooses history as a medium of his unique revelation through Christ. On Florovsky’s reading, the panentheist framework distorted

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57 Florovsky, Vostochnyi Ottsy IVgo veka, 43; cf. Florensky, Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny, I (i): 144.
these aspects of the Christian doctrine of creation. Florovsky also noted that the idealist systems tended to view the world from an “absolute perspective,” thereby implicating the philosopher’s mind in an impermissible epistemic overreaching.

While Florovsky’s objections to panentheism were quite serious, his own position also raised a number of questions. First, how does one differentiate between an act of divine essence resulting in the generation of the Son and an act of divine will resulting in the creation of the world? In other words, what distinguishes a divine action that results in that which is divine (e.g. the generation of the Son) and a divine action that results in something non-divine (e.g. the creation of the world)? More generally, how should one conceive of a boundary between the uncreated God and the created order: as something entirely uncreated, or entirely created, or both? A plausible response, consistent with what Florovsky held regarding the doctrine of creation out of nothing, would be to argue that the very concept of a “boundary” was a category mistake, a spatial analogy that was not applicable to God and the world, because they did not belong to the same order of being.

Such a defense, while consistent, did not help to resolve another set of remaining aporias. What precisely is the metaphysical status of God’s thought, will, or plan about the world? It would be odd to deny that God has any such plan. But is this plan itself created or uncreated, contingent or eternal? If the divine plan is created, it is itself a part of creation, not a plan about creation as a whole. Here one also needs to point out that a deferral to patristic authorities resolves very little. Many patristic authorities associate the divine plan of creation with the activity of the divine Logos, although they do so with different metaphysical assumptions, either conceiving the Logos as less than fully divine (as do some Apologists, for example), or making the plan a part of the divine creation of the intelligible world, preceding the sensible world (as do Basil of Caesarea, Augustine, and Maximus the Confessor, for example). If the divine plan of creation is an eternal thought of God, then it is eternally present to God, and therefore in some sense subsists eternally, which was exactly the panentheist claim regarding the “ideal world” and “ideal humanity.”

On the eschatological side of history, one could also ask what Florovsky meant exactly by “becoming” or “entering eternity” in the passage quoted earlier. If it was the case that “created nature remains created,” as Florovsky insisted, then one would need to introduce a category of “creaturely,” or “created” eternity to capture his point about “entering eternity.” But the language of “entering

59 Florovsky discussed the relevant passages from Basil of Caesarea in Vostochnye ottsy IVgo veka, I: 65; cf. Florovsky, Letter to S. Bulgakov, July 22 (August 4), 1926, Simvol, 29 (1993), 206. On the concept of “divine logoi” in Maximus the Confessor, see Bulgakov, Agnets Bozhii, 154 n. 3.
60 Florovsky, “Dom Otchii,” IBS, 17.
eternity” implies a sequence in which a time-bound state is in some sense followed by an eternal state. Such a transition could not be merely a temporal sequence, for that would lead to a nonsensical conclusion that eternity was in some sense “preceded” by time. Such a transition has to be of a different ontological order altogether, grounding all temporal events, which is exactly the point of Bulgakov’s panentheism. Fr Sergius insisted that the conditions of the possibility of “entering eternity” had to be present in eternity.

Presented with such or similar aporias, Florovsky proceeded to distinguish between two kinds of eternity: the eternal divine being that excluded contingent existence and the eternal divine knowledge about contingent beings. But such distinctions only led to a conceptual muddle that he was trying to avoid by rejecting panentheism.

More generally, Bulgakov’s panentheism and Florovsky’s account of creation out of nothing tended to prioritize one side of theological antinomies at the expense of the other side. This is to be expected, since the antinomic language is inherently unstable and it is nearly impossible to maintain a consistent balance between both sides of the antinomies. Bulgakov prioritized the union of Creator and creation at the expense of their ontological difference; the connection between the eternal nature of God and the divine self-manifestation at the expense of the uniqueness of the historical divine revelation; divine providence at the expense of human freedom; the fullness of divine life at the expense of human creativity, and so on. Florovsky, with his “intuition of creaturehood,” on the contrary, prioritized the ontological difference between God and the world at the expense of the divine–human communion; the uniqueness of the historical divine revelation in Christ at the expense of the eternal divine counsel regarding human salvation; the indeterminate character of human freedom at the expense of divine providence; the genuine novelty of contingent historical events at the expense of the divine omniscience.

GODMANHOOD AND THE “HISTORICAL CHRIST”

For Florovsky, the central organizing principle of Christian history is the event of the incarnation. More precisely, it is not the event, but the person of the incarnate Christ that provides the meaning and center of history. Florovsky makes this point in many of his works, but most forcefully in his essay “The

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61 On the divine world as eternal ground, content, and purpose of the created world, see Bulgakov, Agnets Bozhii, 155.
62 Florovsky grappled with these aporias in his letter to Bulgakov, July 22 (August 4), 1926, Simvol, 29 (1993), 206.
Predicament of the Christian Historian,” published while he was teaching at Harvard in 1959. This essay could be viewed as summarizing Florovsky’s mature theology of history. The essay recapitulated the main points of his early philosophy of history—personalism, imaginative psychologism, and historical singularism, but abandoned the a-teleological view of history. Indeed, any trace of Herzen’s nihilism vis-à-vis the ultimate meaning of history has disappeared from Florovsky’s account.

In addition, Florovsky expanded his frame of reference to include western historians, such as Marc Bloch, Gerhard Kittel, Robin George Collingwood, Benedetto Croce, Leopold von Ranke, Henri-Irenée Marrou, Rudolf Bultmann, and Charles Harold Dodd, with the result that the earlier references to his Russian authorities—Petr Struve and Alexander Herzen—had altogether disappeared.63 In one instance, Florovsky baptized Struve’s historical singularism by means of Gerhard Kittel’s “scandal of particularity,” accentuating the historical specificity of divine revelation.

Going beyond Kittel, Florovsky opposed the Idealist attempts to de-historicize Christianity: “Christianity consists of nothing but events. Christianity cannot be accepted and understood other than in the real progress of concrete historical time. One cannot exclude empirical time from Christian consciousness. One could say: only Christianity reveals history; only through Christianity does one obtain the feeling and understanding for history.”64 For Florovsky, it is not enough to hold that the most distinctive Christian truth-claims (e.g. “God became man”) are grounded in the divine manifestation through specific historical events. Florovsky goes a step further and asserts that “only Christianity reveals history,” in other words, that the historical dimension of reality is not only the medium, but also the datum of Christian revelation. This stronger claim is demonstrably false, for it leads to an implausible conclusion that historical reality could not be known as such outside the framework of Christian tradition. In making the claim that “only Christianity reveals history,” Florovsky was engaging in a kind of epistemic overreaching that was also characteristic of his claim that early Christian theologians “discovered” personhood.

History acquires its full meaning with reference to the events of salvation history, especially to that of the axis event of the divine incarnation. Florovsky poignantly characterizes Bultmann’s demythologization project as an attempt to de-historicize Christianity—that is, to disentangle the Christian message from history interpreted a-theologically. The Russian theologian protested

63 The references to his own earlier essays, “O tipakh istoricheskogo istolkovaniia,” “Evolution und Epigenesis” (1930), “Die Krise des deutschen Idealismus” (1932), as well as the references to G. Shpet and V. V. Bolotov are buried in the footnotes to this article. It is significant that Florovsky does not mention his work on Herzen’s philosophy of history in this context.
64 “The Crisis of German Idealism (II),” CW XII: 35.
against all interpretations of Christianity which sought to disengage its “perennial essence” from its historical expression.

Florovsky was equally suspicious of Bulgakov’s speculative elaboration of the doctrine of the trinity at the expense of Christology. For Florovsky there could be only one starting point in theology, namely, the historical revelation in Christ. Bulgakov reasonably objected that his doctrine of the Godmanhood indeed began with Christ and that one could just as well “start” with the trinity, since the doctrine of the trinity was in equal measure based on revelation. Florovsky was never persuaded by this move, although his critique of speculative trinitarianism applied more directly to the system of Lev Karsavin and Hegel, than to that of Bulgakov. As a consequence, Florovsky’s a-systematic historical theology lacked a developed trinitarian doctrine. Bulgakov approached the matter of a theological starting point with greater flexibility.65

Florovsky maintained that “one can evolve the whole body of Orthodox belief out of the Dogma of Chalcedon.”66 A similar view was previously expressed by Russian patristic scholar Vasily Bolotov, for whom “the early history of theological thought was a commentary on the word ‘Godman.’”67 The Chalcedonian Definition, affirming that Christ is one person in two natures, guided Florovsky’s reflection on the “historical Christ.” For Florovsky, the Chalcedonian Definition was an important hermeneutical starting point, a “theological key both to the New Testament and to the experience of the Church” and a “theological fence around the Mystery.”68 Chalcedonian Christology avoided the pitfalls of both the “anthropological minimalism” of the Apollinarians and the “anthropological maximalism” of the Nestorians. According to Florovsky, the Apollinarian and Monophysite Christologies accorded to Christ’s humanity an incomplete and passive role. These Christologies reflected a distrust of the human potential to cooperate with God in salvation.69 Nestorian Christology did not sufficiently recognize the brokenness of the human condition and did not do justice to the priority of divine action over human effort in salvation. Bulgakov’s position was more nuanced: having rejected Monophysitism, he was prepared to acknowledge

66 Florovsky, “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” 194. I should note that the idea of a doctrine that could be “evolved” or deduced from one central concept does not square with Florovsky’s equally central claim that theological knowledge is a form of intellectual intuition or spiritual vision.
67 V. V. Bolotov, Lektsii po istorii drevnei tserkvi IV. iii. 1. 1 (Valaam: Izdadel’stvo Spaso-Preobrazhenskogo Valaamskogo Monastyria, 1994).
69 In “Problematika khristianskogo vossoedineniiia,” IBS, 176, Florovsky averred that “Protestantism was born out of the spirit of anthropological minimalism.”
certain strong aspects of the Apollinarian position, especially in emphasizing one center of consciousness in Christ.

The Chalcedonian Definition expressed the *consensus patrum* and prepared the ground for the Christological synthesis undertaken by Leontius of Byzantium (c. 485–c. 543) and Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662). Leontius emphasized the assymetrical character of Chalcedonian Christology: while Christ had two complete natures—human and divine—he had only one divine hypostasis. The Byzantine theologian proposed that Christ’s human nature was enhypostasized. Christ’s humanity did not exist “in” the eternal Son of God before the incarnation, but was eternally united to Him after the incarnation.\(^70\) Florovsky described Leontius’s Christology as “assymetrical dyophysitism,” an expression that was subsequently adopted by John Meyendorff.\(^71\)

The polemical subtext of these Christological reflections is the idea of God-manhood in Russian sophiology, as the general metaphysical principle according to which God and ideal humanity are united prior to the creation of the material world.

In Florovsky’s judgment, Maximus attempted a “transformative synthesis” of Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, Evagrius, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.\(^72\) Maximus’s synthesis was no mere compilation of the authoritative patristic opinions, but a creative integration informed by ascetic practice and mystical experience.\(^73\) With the earlier Church Fathers, such as Evagrius and Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus acknowledged the need for ascetic struggle and deification of the mind in the process of coming to know God.\(^74\) Maximus taught that Christ possessed two wills, divine and human, always operating in a coordinated and unified way. This doctrine is commonly taken to be a corollary of the teaching about the two natures in Christ, affirmed by the Council of Chalcedon. Florovsky emphasizes the soteriological dimension of this teaching: the integrity of Christ’s human will safeguards the voluntary character of human salvation.\(^75\)

Florovsky states that similarly to Leontius of Byzantium, Maximus categorically denied the Origenist hypothesis that the humanity of Christ pre-existed the incarnation.\(^76\) However, Maximus also taught about the intelligible world that was eternally present to God in the form of God’s volitional thoughts. The

\(^{71}\) J. Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975), 156.
\(^{73}\) Florovsky, *Vizantiiskie ottsy V–VIII vekov*, 220.
\(^{75}\) Florovsky, *Vizantiiskie ottsy V–VIII vekov*, 220.
concept of a “volitional thought” allowed the Byzantine theologian to align the intelligible world with the divine will, rather than the divine essence. Maximus was not always clear about the mode of existence of the ideal world, although he distinguished it from the contingent act of creation of the material world. God thinks and wills his thoughts from eternity, but actualizes them in time in the form of contingent things. In the eschaton all things will participate in the divine life and nothing will remain “outside” God.  

Following Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus saw the created world as a locus of divine theophanies. For Maximus, incarnation was a paradigmatic divine action with cosmic repercussions. It could be said that divine action becomes incarnate every time God acts in the material world. Maximus’ metaphysical extrapolation of the incarnation finds parallels in Solovyov’s and Bulgakov’s teaching about Godmanhood. For Maximus, as for the Russian sophiologists, Christological union of human and divine provided an explanatory framework for God’s manifestation in creation. But unlike Bulgakov, Maximus aligned the ideal world with the divine will, rather than the divine essence, thereby avoiding emanationism—a point that was especially appreciated by Florovsky. Both Bulgakov and Florovsky could claim different aspects of Maximus’s theological heritage in support of their positions.

SOTERIOLOGY

Along with his essays on creation, Florovsky counted his essay on redemption with its multiple revisions as his “best achievements.” The earliest version of the essay on redemption was written in Russian under the title “Of the Death on the Cross” in 1930. Florovsky subsequently worked this material into the three lectures he gave in English at the University of London in November 1936. Later he made a failed attempt to publish these lectures as a book under the Latin title In Ligno Crucis (On the Tree of the Cross). His articles “In Ligno Crucis” (1947) and “The Lamb of God” (1949) drew from the original Russian essay, “Of the Death on the Cross.” A reworked and expanded version of the original Russian essay appeared in the third volume of Florovsky’s Collected Works under the title “Redemption” (1976).

77 Florovsky, Vizantiiskie ottsy V–VIII vekov, 225.
78 Florovsky, Vizantiiskie ottsy V–VIII vekov, 209.
80 “In Ligno Crucis,” unpublished typescript, GFP PUL, Box 2, f. 1. On the page preceding the title page, the dates of the lectures are given as November 5, 10, and 12, 1936. The first surviving draft is dated 1939 and the revision is dated 1948.
81 “Redemption,” CW III: 95–159. Also relevant for the study of Florovsky’s soteriology is his article “Cur deus homo? The Motive of the Incarnation” (1957), CW III: 163–70.
Florovsky notes that in the Greek patristic literature, the reflection on Christ’s death was inseparable from the reflection on his birth and life. He also emphasizes a close link between the incarnation and atonement, since they both have the same purpose, namely, deification. The purpose of the incarnation is succinctly captured in the so-called “exchange formulas”: “God became what we are in order to make us what he is” (Irenaeus of Lyons) and “God became man in order to make us divine” (Athanasius of Alexandria). These loci classici provided important starting points for later patristic theology of the incarnation. Florovsky’s sketch of the patristic doctrine of deification relied on the pioneering essays of his Parisian friend, Russian Byzantinist Myrrha Lot-Borodine (1882–1957).

In “Cur deus homo? The Motive of the Incarnation,” Florovsky pondered the relationship between the incarnation and the Fall with great speculative depth. Would God have become man if the Fall had not happened? With the exception of Maximus the Confessor, the patristic authors rarely addressed this question systematically. The western medieval theologians were divided on the issue. Maximus maintained that the union of God and humanity was a part of the unchangeable divine plan before the creation of the world. If humanity had not sinned, incarnation still would have happened, although it would not have involved crucifixion. Florovsky notes that this view was favored by Maximus, a number of medieval theologians, and in recent times, by Bulgakov and an Anglican theologian, Brooke Foss Westcott. Bulgakov held that redemption was the primary, but not the exclusive reason of the incarnation. Despite the lack of a clear patristic consensus, Florovsky accepted the view as a plausible theological opinion.

Florovsky’s work on the death of Christ reflects a cautious acceptance of certain ideas that Florensky and Bulgakov articulated with greater speculative boldness. For instance, Florovsky accepts their claim that the creation of free human beings involved a measure of divine self-limitation or kenosis. It would be a stretch to ascribe such a view of kenosis to the Church Fathers. In patristic thought, kenosis, or divine self-emptying refers predominantly to Christ’s acceptance of the limitations of human condition, especially his suffering and death. For the Church Fathers, kenosis does not extend to the act of creation, since God allows the exercise of creaturely free will without giving up any of his omni-properties, including omnipotence. By accepting a kenotic
account of creation, Florovsky showed his willingness to follow his Russian contemporaries, rather than the Church Fathers.\footnote{Florovsky, “Redemption,” CW III: 97; Florensky, Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny, I (part i): 289; Bulgakov, Aгnets Бачii, 157–8. For a discussion of Bulgakov’s kenoticism, see P. Gavrilyuk, “The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov,” STJ, 58 (2005), 251–69.}

Florovsky follows Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Cyril of Alexandria, who taught that the suffering and death of Christ were not restricted to his human nature. The “assymetrical Christology” requires that one ascribes the experience of suffering to the single hypostasis of God incarnate, rather than to the human nature taken separately. In the divine life, human suffering and death were defeated and overcome once and for all. Here Florovsky cautions against what he calls somewhat loosely a “Docetic” understanding of suffering—a claim that God was shielded from suffering by Jesus’ human nature—and what he calls “kenotic overemphasis”—a claim that in the incarnation the Son divested himself of his divinity.\footnote{Florovsky, “Redemption,” CW III: 137.} Although Florovsky does not name his opponents, Bulgakov, for whom kenosis affected the inner life of the trinity and every aspect of the incarnation, is a likely target here. Florovsky interprets kenosis in a more limited way.\footnote{Florovsky, “Redemption,” CW III: 97.} He also rejects Bulgakov’s view that the psychological anguish of Christ in Gethsemane was more soteriologically important than his physical suffering on Golgotha. As far as Florovsky was concerned, such a speculation was an inadmissible “psychologism,” not sanctioned by scripture or tradition.

Florovsky’s account of the incarnation and atonement is eclectic and contains little that is particularly original. He engages western medieval theologians without either endorsing or rejecting their views, and in some instances suspends his broader historiosophic assumption that western theology after the Great Schism was a massive departure from the Greek Church Fathers. While some aspects of Bulgakov’s thought, such as his speculation concerning the motive of the incarnation and his kenoticism, seem to have functioned as a “springboard,” Florovsky did not reject all of Bulgakov’s conclusions. This is an indication that while psychologically and rhetorically Florovsky continued distancing himself from the Renaissance “fathers,” the theological matrix that the Russian thinkers had established remained his enduring reference point.

CONCLUSION

Aleksei Khomiakov said: “Nobody is capable of distorting the heritage of the men of genius as readily as the men of talent.”\footnote{A. Khomiakov, “O sovremennych iavleniakh v oblasti filosofii (1-e pis’mo k Iu. F. Samarinu),” Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (Moscow: Tipografia P. Bakhmet’eva, 1861), I: 302–3.} Could this observation be
applied to Florovsky’s reading of Bulgakov? More precisely, was panentheism indeed a species of pantheism, as Florovsky charged, or was sophiology a legitimate expression of Christian theism, as Bulgakov insisted?\(^{90}\) A comprehensive adjudication of competing metaphysical frameworks would require a separate monographic treatment. Even a selection of considerations relevant for making such adjudication is a complex matter. Such factors as simplicity, cogency, orthodoxy, beauty, scope, explanatory power, experiential backing, and so forth, could be used as important criteria. Florovsky, however, did not appeal to any such factors, but preferred to meet Bulgakov on the battlefield of the history of ideas, where Florovsky conveniently aligned his position with the orthodox patristic view and Bulgakov’s position with Origenism and German Idealism. But such a *reductio ad heresim*, whatever its rhetorical merits, achieves little philosophically. Besides, some aspects of Bulgakov’s philosophical theology could be aligned with the ideas of Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas. The argument from tradition, indispensable in Orthodox theology, would in this case have the effect of stacking one list of patristic authorities, favoring Bulgakov, against the other list, favoring Florovsky, with no obvious resolution in sight.\(^{91}\)

While the debate on the nature of Christian metaphysics between Bulgakov and Florovsky requires further investigation, the following points have been established in this chapter. First, Florovsky’s discussion of patristic “intuition of creaturehood” and the associated doctrine of creation out of nothing was prompted by his reading of Florensky, not of the Church Fathers. Second, Bulgakov’s sophiology was shown to be a major polemical subtext of Florovsky’s historical theology. Third, the facile dichotomy between Florovsky’s faithfulness to patristic tradition and Bulgakov’s overreliance on German Idealism is misleading. John McGuckin recently cautioned against turning Florovsky and Bulgakov into the ideal types, one calling back to the Fathers, and the other going beyond the patristic tradition.\(^{92}\)

\(^{90}\) For Bulgakov’s response to the charge that panentheism is a species of pantheism, see *Agnets Bozhii*, 150, 162. For a nuanced treatment of Bulgakov’s reworking of Solovyov’s pantheism, see B. Gallaher, ”Antinomism, Trinity and the Challenge of Solov’ëvan Pantheism in the Theology of Sergij Bulgakov,” *Studies in Eastern European Thought*, 64 (2012), 205–25.

\(^{91}\) My own preference is for a metaphysical vision that is more consistently attentive to the antinomic character of religious language: see my essay ”God’s Impassible Suffering in the Flesh: The Promise of Paradoxical Christology,” in T. J. White and J. Keating (eds), *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 127–49.

Florovsky’s rhetoric notwithstanding, Bulgakov has not abandoned the Church Fathers altogether, although he felt less bound by patristic theology alone. Florovsky adhered more closely to the *consensus patrum* and was in theory, although not always in practice, against recasting the patristic categories in modern terms. Bulgakov, however, was equally prepared to draw on patristic tradition, tending to stress more the major dogmas of the Church, rather than the less well-defined patristic consensus. Besides, Bulgakov’s explorations of the theological trajectory associated with Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor anticipated similar developments in *la nouvelle théologie*. In the end, Bulgakov could lay almost as strong a claim to a “return to the Fathers” as did Florovsky. One should not forget that it was Bulgakov who persuaded Florovsky to make a career change from the study of Russian intellectual history to patristics. As we shall see in chapter 9, this change also had major consequences for Florovsky’s magisterial reinterpretation of the history of Russian theology.

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Florovsky also expressed his reservations concerning the juridical application of the category of *consensus patrum* in his Letter to A. F. Dobbie-Bateman, December 12, 1963, in B. Gallaher, "Georges Florovsky On Reading the Life of St Seraphim," 62.
How The Ways of Russian Theology Came to Be Written

You [Georges Florovsky] have followed “the paths of Russian theology” from the Greek Fathers to the twentieth century, from the spirituality of Mount Athos to the novels of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, from the East to the West. In you the ancient tradition, “Ex oriente lux,” has found its most articulate modern spokesman, and ecumenical Christianity its most valuable Orthodox interpreter.¹

Florovsky’s road to the publication of his magnum opus, The Ways of Russian Theology, included many unforeseen delays, sharp turns and even dead ends. From the beginning of his scholarly career he was in search of an interpretative framework that would determine the main focus and the chronological boundaries of his studies in Russian intellectual history. As a student he passionately embraced what may be called the “originality narrative” of Russian religious thought, but as his outlook matured, he became persuaded by the “pseudomorphosis narrative.” While The Ways of Russian Theology reflect his lingering attachment to the “originality narrative,” the “pseudomorphosis narrative” dominates the book. In order to understand a complex constellation of creative impulses that shaped The Ways of Russian Theology, it is essential to recapitulate his intellectual evolution.

A BRIEF RECAPITULATION OF FLOROVSKY’S INTELLECTUAL EVOLUTION

A born scholar, Florovsky had already begun reading in Russian history in his teenage years. As a university student, he shared in his letter to Pavel

Florensky: “My dream is to study the whole of Russian thought in its history, genesis, development, and present state.” The fulfillment of this dream would become one of his major preoccupations for the next quarter of a century.

Awakened by Solovyov and the Slavophiles in his Odessa years (1912–1920), young Florovsky associated the future direction of Russian religious philosophy with what he called the “school of integral knowledge,” which counted among its major protagonists Ivan Kireevsky, Aleksei Khomiakov, Vladimir Solovyov, and their twentieth-century followers. At the beginning of his scholarly career, Florovsky was convinced that this school expressed the spirit of Russian thought in unique and deeply original ways. At this stage, he embraced a positive evaluation of the philosophical achievement of the Russian Religious Renaissance offered by Nicholas Berdyaev, Vladimir Ern, and Evgeny Trubetskoy, among others. If Florovsky were to embark on writing a survey of Russian religious thought with such a framework in mind, The Ways of Russian Theology would have had a different scope and perspective.

As far as the scope is concerned, the work would have focused primarily on the nineteenth-century religious philosophy, rather than on a thousand years of Russian Orthodox theology. As for the book’s perspective, Florovsky would have emphasized the themes original to Russian religious thought, rather than the extent to which it continued an intellectual trajectory of western European thought. One may describe these two different perspectives as the “originality narrative” and the “pseudomorphosis narrative.”

As a student in Russia, young Florovsky was intellectually invested in the “originality narrative.” After the Bolshevik Revolution, he hoped to produce monographic studies of the lesser-known Russian idealist philosophers, in particular, Nikolai Debolsky (1842–1918), Pamfi Iurkevich (1826–1874), Mikhail Karinsky (1840–1917), and Sergei Trubetskoy (1862–1905). Florovsky explained his choice by stressing precisely the originality of these Russian philosophers, who had the distinction of engaging the western philosophical tradition without losing their own voice.

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2 Florovsky, Letter to P. A. Florensky, July 20, 1912, Isledovaniia (2003), 59. As Florovsky shared with his biographer: “I was considering writing a book on the ways of Russian theology even when I was a boy, because I wanted to find out and understand for myself what was actually happening in the Church,” A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 182 n 31. This retrospective statement is not entirely accurate, since Florovsky’s project had changed considerably over the years.

3 Florovsky, “Iz proshlogo russkoi mysli” (1912), PRM, 26.


5 Cf. K. Mjët, Reformulating Russia, 154.

6 Florovsky, Letter to N. Glubokovsky, August 8, 1918, Sosud izbrannyi, 244.

7 Florovsky, “Russian Philosophy at the Turn of the Century,” p. 10, transcription of an impromptu talk given at the conference “La Philosophie Idealiste en Russie,” Aix-en-Provence, March 25–29, 1968, GFP PUL, Box 54, f. 3: “But when a man like Boris Yakovenko, who was anti-metaphysically minded in a certain sense, surveyed the [development] of philosophy in Russia, he said that for everyone he could find some certain pattern. Even Blonskii depended on western influences at that time, but in three cases he [Yakovenko] could not find anything. Well,
written these monographs, the associated research formed a background to *The Ways of Russian Theology*.

In the emigration, the drama of the exile and the association with the Eurasians caused Florovsky to rethink the “originality narrative.” Although he eventually rejected Eurasianism, his participation in the movement provided an important testing ground for developing his own account of Russian intellectual history. The Eurasians, it should be recalled, attached a negative value to the western influences in Russian cultural history, going so far as to identify westernization with denationalization and the loss of the “Russian soul.” While Florovsky did not share the isolationist agenda of his Eurasian colleagues, the binary opposition between the East and the West would permanently remain on Florovsky’s culturological radar.

As a philosopher of culture, Florovsky internalized the Eurasian sensitivity to the western influences in Russian thought. Florovsky became convinced that such influences had stifled the creative abilities of the “Russian mind” and had in the long run led to the earth-shattering deformations of Russian society, even providing the conditions for the Bolshevik Revolution. However, unlike the other Eurasians, who directed their anti-western pathos against Russian social and political thought, Florovsky shifted his focus to Orthodox theology. Still, his main direction remained Slavophile and Eurasian in inspiration: the western influences were responsible for virtually all rifts, distortions, and dead ends in the history of Russian thought. Thus, in the early 1920s, Florovsky began to develop the “pseudomorphosis narrative.”

The “pseudomorphosis narrative” received further support in the philosophy of history which Florovsky worked out while writing his dissertation on Herzen. Florovsky rejected the organicist view of historical development and instead emphasized the discontinuous and tragic character of historical change. As he re-read Solovyov, he became more critical of the sophiological direction in Russian theology. According to a new narrative, which began to take shape as early as 1922, Solovyov’s philosophy became the ultimate “dead end,” joining the long line of other dead ends, all genetically linked to various western influences. To interpret Solovyov in this manner was to cast a long shadow over the intellectual achievements of the Russian Religious Renaissance. For this reason, a perceptive Anglican observer, Arthur Dobbie-Bateman, aptly characterized Florovsky’s attitude to the history of Russian

of course, people were in the tradition, but they were so original, that you cannot find any source, any single source. And it were precisely these people who were blacklisted or simply ignored. One was Yurkevich, another was Karinskii (and Karinskii’s dissertation on logic was recently published in the Soviet Union), and the third was a man whose name is not known outside of Moscow circles, Debolskii.” Interestingly, a similar selection principle, based on the originality of a given philosopher, was sketched out by Vladimir Ern, whose book on the history of Russian philosophy was not written because of his untimely death.
theology as “not so much ‘anti-Solovyov’ as ‘post-Solovyov’; or, even better, post-exilic.”

Florovsky’s assessment of Solovyov would continue to waver over the years. His interpretation of Russian intellectual history would also vacillate accordingly between the “originality narrative” and the “pseudomorphosis narrative.” Both the studies that he was able to finish and those that he did not complete indicate this vacillation. The last chapter of his Herzen dissertation, published under the title “The Dead Ends of Romanticism” (1930), as well as the essays “The Contradictions of Origenism” (1929) and “The Controversy over German Idealism” (1930) indirectly attacked Russian sophiology and laid the groundwork for the “pseudomorphosis narrative.”

During the same period, Florovsky also wrote, but left unpublished his essay, “Russian Philosophy in Emigration” (1930), which offered a different perspective, contrasting the creativity of Russian émigré philosophy with the ideologically constrained philosophizing that continued in Soviet Russia. This survey of the creative achievement of what Florovsky called a “Russian philosophical colony in Europe” was more in line with the “originality narrative” that Florovsky espoused before 1922. As his alienation from the émigré community grew in the years leading up to the publication of The Ways of Russian Theology, the “pseudomorphosis narrative” became more prominent in his historiography.

THE SCHOLARLY FORERUNNERS OF THE WAYS OF RUSSIAN THEOLOGY

Writing in 1911, young Florovsky began one of his first published essays with an observation that a “history of Russian thought had not been written yet.”

8 Dobbie-Bateman, Letter to G. Florovsky, May 27, 1937, GFP PUL, Box 15, f. 2.
10 “Russkaia filosofia v emigratsii” (date finished: March 15, 1930), GFP PUL, Box 2, f. 4.
11 “Russkaia filosofia v emigratsii,” GFP PUL, Box 2, f. 4, p. 2.
12 “Iz proshlago russkoi mysli,” 382. It is possible that Florovsky drew on V. F. Ern’s paper “Osnovnoi kharakter russkoi filosofskoi mysli i metod ee izuchenia,” RFO II: 172–91, presented
During the following decade, the wars, the Russian Revolutions, and the associated dramatic social changes all became catalysts for intense history writing and re-writing for Florovsky and other leaders of the Renaissance. History became a medium not only for thinking about the past, but also for finding the resources to shape Russia’s future identity. A history written with a view of history-making was a strategy that Florovsky had already deployed in his Eurasian writings.

In 1937, the year when Florovsky published The Ways of Russian Theology, the field of Russian intellectual history no longer remained as virginal as it was back in the 1910s. It is indicative of this period that in 1922 alone, three surveys of the history of Russian philosophy by Boris Iakovenko, Matvei Ershov, and Gustav Shpet appeared in print. These three publications marked the end of an era in Russian intellectual history. They appeared as the Civil War was about to end, the Soviet regime was about to remove the last obstacles to its control over Russia and as the “philosophical ships” sailed from Russia carrying the expelled leaders of the Russian Religious Renaissance out of the country. As the old Russia was being destroyed, taking stock of her religious-philosophical achievements became an exercise in “reconstitution of the Motherland,” as Florovsky put it. Such a “reconstitution” was a form of spiritual opposition to the forces that were brutally destroying Russian religious culture and replacing it with Soviet ideology.

On a somewhat dispiriting note, all three authors, Iakovenko, Ershov, and Shpet, concluded that Russian philosophy was a western European transplant and that its achievements paled in comparison with the ancient Greek, German, and other European philosophical traditions. According to Iakovenko, “originality suffused with tradition and tradition suffused with

at the November 22, 1910 meeting of the Religious-Philosophical Society of St Petersburg. In his paper, Ern observed: “We still do not have a single book on the history of Russian philosophy and just a few studies or even articles dedicated to particular Russian thinkers.” (RFO II, p. 173). The only available survey was M. M. Filippov, Sud’by russkoi filosofii: ocherki (St Petersburg: N. Glagolev, 1900).


14 Florovsky, Letter to N. Glubokovsky, August 8, 1918, Sosud izbrannyi, 244.

15 Ershov, Puti razvitiia filosofii v Rossii, 8, citing the opinion of K. D. Kavelin, “Filosofiiia i nauka v Evrope i u nas” (1874); Iakovenko, Ocherki russkoi filosofii, 5–8; Shpet, Ocherk razvitiia russkoi filosofii, 53–5. Russian philosopher Petr Chaadaev was the first to assert the derivative character of Russian intellectual tradition in his Filosoficheskie pis’ma (1829–1831). On Chaadaev, see B. Grois, “Poisk russkoi natsional’noi identichnosti,” Voprosy filosofii, 9 (1992), 52–60, at 53–4.
originality” were necessary for bringing about a philosophical awakening. These conditions obtained in Russia only towards the beginning of the twentieth century, allowing for the future “authentic philosophical tradition” to emerge in Russia. After an extraordinary surge of philosophical activity in the 1910s, Iakovenko also hoped for an emergence of a “new, comprehensive and all-penetrating philosophical synthesis,” the shape of which remained somewhat obscure. Iakovenko, who in the emigration edited Der russische Gedanke journal in Germany, corresponded with Florovsky in 1928–1931 and commissioned an important article, “Evolution und Epigenesis,” from his addressee. In an unpublished oral communication, entitled “Russian Philosophy at the Turn of the Century” (1968), Florovsky acknowledged Iakovenko’s pioneering role in tracing the western influences in Russian philosophy. 

Gustav Shpet interpreted Russian intellectual history as a process of philosophy’s gradual emancipation from its national and religious pedigree. Florovsky expressed his opposition to this approach in his unfinished work, An Introduction to the History of Russian Philosophy (1925) and his dissertation on Herzen. The express purpose of An Introduction to the History of Russian Philosophy was “to portray Russian philosophy as a moment and stage of the national self-consciousness and self-definition, as a certain event in the ‘spirit of the people.’ One must first of all reject a misconception that philosophy stands above and beyond national limitations.” Florovsky sided with Hegel against Shpet in emphasizing the historical and cultural rootedness of philosophical reasoning.

Having subjected Iakovenko’s, Ershov’s, and Shpet’s path-breaking studies to harsh criticism, more than a decade later, in The Ways of Russian Theology, Florovsky nevertheless followed their tendency to exaggerate the Russian intellectual tradition’s dependence on the western influences. For Florovsky, these studies had the cumulative effect of undermining the “originality narrative.” Florovsky gave his own expression to Iakovenko’s and Ershov’s insight that creativity and tradition were mutually reinforcing and enriching. For Florovsky, the only theological tradition that could serve as a source of creative inspiration for contemporary theology was that of the Greek Church Fathers. In the years leading up to the publication of The Ways of Russian Theology, new surveys taking stock of Russian and Ukrainian intellectual histories continued to appear in print. For example, Florovsky studied and reviewed

16 B. Iakovenko, Ocherki russkoi filosofii, 4. Ershov put the matter in similar terms, probably drawing on Iakovenko’s earlier essay, “O polozhenii i zadachakh filosofii v Rossii” (1915), Moskvi filosofii (St Petersburg: Nauka, 2000), 120–80.
17 Ershov, Puti razvitiia filosofii v Rossii, 5.
19 Iakovenko, Letter to Florovsky, November 1, 1929, GFP PUL, Box 13, f. 1.
Alexandre Koyré, *Philosophy and the National Problem in Russia in the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century* (1929), and Dmitry Chizhevsky, *Outlines of the History of Philosophy in Ukraine* (1931). Florovsky and Chizhevsky maintained a scholarly exchange over nearly forty years (1926–1964), periodically consulting each other on various topics of mutual interest.

Unlike his predecessors in the field of Russian intellectual history, Florovsky eschewed an in-depth discussion of philosophical systems. He focused rather on what he called the “historical-psychological” climate of the time, following the approach of Mikhail Gershenzon. As a consequence, Florovsky’s exposition was sketchy and demanding, requiring the reader’s basic acquaintance with the religious and philosophical views of the figures he discussed, since he rarely took pains to elaborate on these views himself. The “historical-psychological” method made his generalizations about the “deeper movements of the spirit” rather tenuous.

Up to 1926, most of Florovsky’s research focused on the Russian intellectual history of the nineteenth century. But with his move to Paris, as his teaching responsibilities shifted to theology and patristics, he gradually changed the overall focus of his survey from the history of Russian philosophy, which by then had become a rather crowded area of study, to the history of Russian theology, an area which was comparably less researched. Thus, what began as an *Introduction to the History of Russian Philosophy* in 1925, was in the 1930s recast as *The Ways of Russian Theology*. While Gustav Shpet’s *Outline of the Development of Russian Philosophy* covered some ground in this arena, the only comparable work was Glubokovsky’s *Russian Theological Scholarship in Its Historical Development and Newest Interpretation* (1928). The latter book was an extensive literature survey, which covered the scholarly works


25 Although Florovsky knew Mykhailo Hrushevskyi’s work, it is not clear whether he also read his important monograph, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraïni* [On the History of Religious Thought in Ukraine] (Lviv: Drukarnia Naukovo ho Tovarystva im. Shevchenka, 1925), which was not mentioned in the otherwise extensive bibliographic notes to *The Ways of Russian Theology*, 521–74.

26 N. Glubokovsky, *Russkaia bogoslovskaia nauka v ce istoricheskom razvitii i noveishem istorikovani* (Warsaw: Sinodal’naia Tipografia, 1928). Among the studies listed in a copious
produced in the nineteenth-century Russian Theological Academies discipline by discipline. Apparently, Florovsky penned a negative review of Glubokovsky’s work and sent the review to Berdyaev to be published pseudonymously in The Way. But fearing that the identity of the reviewer would be discovered, Florovsky withdrew his review “in order not to subject the [St Sergius] Institute to Glubokovsky’s indignation.”27 On other occasions, Florovsky followed the same two-fold strategy, either expressing his criticism in the strongest terms possible, or withholding any public comment altogether. His ability to exercise caution and moderation was quite limited.

More ambitious in scope than Glubokovsky’s literature survey, Florovsky’s historical narrative of Russian theology began in the late tenth century with the conversion of Kievan Rus’ to Christianity under Prince Vladimir and ended in the first decades of the twentieth century. Painting on a broad historical canvas, Florovsky nevertheless accorded to the nineteenth century a disproportionately larger space—more than a half of his volume.28 In contrast, he treated the first six centuries in a rather cursory manner, covering this formative period in a thirty-page introductory chapter. Later, Florovsky planned to redress this imbalance by producing an expanded and corrected second edition of the book, but the project was never brought to fruition.29 The English translation, which took decades to complete, was eventually made from the first Russian edition of 1937 and published only posthumously in 1979.30

Another peculiar feature of The Ways of Russian Theology was that the book covered the “school theology” of Russian Orthodox seminaries and the religious philosophy of the Renaissance in one historical narrative. None of Florovsky’s predecessors had undertaken such an ambitious project. In order to explore these broader currents of Russian thought, Florovsky’s presentation often strayed from more narrowly defined history of theology into the discussion of philosophy, social thought, and literature. Both the overconcentration on the nineteenth century and multiple detours into philosophy reveal the contours of Florovsky’s earlier plans for a book of a very different kind, one that would be chronologically limited to the last hundred years of Russian

bibliography of The Ways of Russian Theology, E. Golubinsky’s History of the Russian Church provided an especially relevant historical framework.

27 Florovsky, Letter to K. I. Florovskaia, September 18 (October 1), 1928, p. 2 (pagination absent in the original), GFP PUL, Box 55, f. 2. The manuscript of the review has not yet surfaced in the archives.

28 As also noted by K. J. Mjör, Reformulating Russia, 165.

29 In the letter to D. Lowrie, August 12, 1945, Florovsky wrote: “At the moment I am revising my ‘[Ways of] Russian Theology’—‘for the second edition’—there are many Addenda et Corrigenda,” Issledovaniia (2007), 593.

30 As early as July 31, 1934, Florovsky wrote to F. Lieb: “This year I am hoping to complete the English version of The Ways of Russian Theology,” Issledovaniia (2007), 590.
intellectual history. The Ways of Russian Theology would have told a very
different story had it not been preceded by an impressive number of new
historical studies of philosophy in Russia, especially those focusing on the
problem of western influences. The study was also steeped in the on-going
debate among the leaders of the emigration concerning the role of religion in
forming Russian émigré identity and the future of Russian intellectual
tradition.

As Florovsky put the matter himself in the preface to The Ways of Russian
Theology: “The past destiny of Russian theology has always been for me a
history of emerging present in which I had to find myself. This does not
impinge on historical impartiality. For impartiality does not mean disinter-
estedness, indifference, or refusal to judge.” The critics pointed out that
Florovsky judged Russian intellectual history far too readily and that his
judgment often amounted to condemnation. For Florovsky personally, the
publication of The Ways of Russian Theology signaled his own parting of the
ways with the “fathers” of the Renaissance. In the epigraph to the book, he
pointedly cast the historical choice of Russian theology in biblical terms: “For
the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish”
(Ps 1: 6). The way of the wicked was that of modern Russian theology with its
western enticements, whereas the way of the righteous was that of following
the Church Fathers.

THE IMAGE OF THE “WAYS” IN THE TITLE

The image of puti (“ways” or “paths”), with which the title of Florovsky’s book
began, also had important precedents in the Russian literary world. As a minor
detail, this word has already been claimed by M. Ershov in the title of his Ways
of the Development of Philosophy in Russia (1922). More importantly, The

31 The German publisher of the translation of The Ways of Russian Theology, proposed the
title “The Ways of Russian Religious Thinking;” Chizhevsky, who assisted Florovsky with the
translation, proposed “A History of Russian Spirit from a Theological Point of View” (“Russische
Geistesgeschichte in theologischer Sicht”): see Chizhevsky, Letter to G. Florovsky, November 26,
1948, p. 1, GFP PUL, Box 61, f. 1.
32 See V. Zenkovsky, ed., Pravooslavie i kul’tura: sbornik religiozno-filosofskikh statei (Berlin:
Russkaia kniga, 1923); N. Berdyaev, Russkaia ideia: osnovnye problemy russkoi mysli XIX veka i
33 Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogoslovia, xv.
34 V. I. Dobbie-Bateman, Letter to G. Florovsky, November 10, 1935, p. 2, GFP PUL, Box 14,
f. 3: “In all humility I suggest that you [Florovsky] carry your denunciation of your fellows to an
extreme. It seems to me that many of the things which you hold dear, they also hold dear. They
badly need criticism but hardly condemnation.”
Way was the name of a premier Parisian émigré journal, published with the help of the YMCA Press under the editorship of Berdyaev and Vysheslavtsev, from 1925 to 1940.\textsuperscript{35} It should be recalled that Florovsky served on the editorial board of The Way and published a number of his essays and book reviews in the journal. This trend-setting journal served as a major channel of the Russian Religious Renaissance in emigration and was regarded as a successor of the two important pre-revolutionary undertakings, namely, Merezhkovsky’s The New Way journal and Morozova’s The Way publishing house.

The image of the “way” or direction also had a prominent spot in the agenda of the Eurasian movement. The title of the first Eurasian volume, Exodus to the East, conveyed a sense of cultural orientation towards Asia, away from Western Europe. In The Ways of Russian Theology, Florovsky, a lapsed Eurasian, proposed his own version of the “exodus to the East:” namely, out of the “Egyptian slavery” in which Russian theology presently found itself in the West into the “promised land” of the Eastern Church Fathers.\textsuperscript{36} The second Eurasian volume, On the Ways, continued this direction by analyzing Russian history.

By the end of the 1920s, the metaphor of the “way” was so firmly settled in Florovsky’s mind, that he contemplated publishing his revised dissertation on Herzen under the new title, Herzen’s Spiritual Way. Despite the significance of the image of the “way” for Florovsky’s European period, there is a tension between his a-teleological philosophy of history and the general teleological thrust of The Ways of Russian Theology. The concept of the “way” is implicitly teleological, for the “way” usually leads somewhere. However, as I discussed in chapter 5, in the 1920s Florovsky embraced Herzen’s view that “history leads nowhere.” Herzen held that only individual human life had an overarching purpose, whereas history as a whole had no direction and no larger purpose. Since intellectual history was a part of general history, the “ways of Russian theology”—or any theology for that matter—were bound to “lead nowhere.” By seeking to uncover the historical aims of Russian theology and at the same time a priori rejecting the very possibility of large-scale historical “ways,” Florovsky was from the start setting his investigation on a crash course.

One could argue, perhaps, that Florovsky simply suspended the a-teleological assumption of his philosophy of history, when considering the directions of Russian theology. After all, he did entertain a possibility that Russian theology could return on the right path by following the way of the Church Fathers. This means that Florovsky’s historiographic scheme was either

\textsuperscript{35} For a meticulous and penetrating study of the history and impact of this journal, see A. Arjakovsky, Zhurnal “Put” (1925–1940): Pokolenii russkikh religioznykh mysliitei v emigratsii, trans. D. Vlasov (Kiev: Feniks, 2000).

\textsuperscript{36} The theme of the return to “the land of the fathers” and to the “Father’s house” became important to Florovsky as he found himself turning to theological subjects in his scholarly publications: see “Dom Otchii” (1925–1927), IBS, 9–36.
doomed from the start, or at best inconsistent, when it came to considering the overarching telos of history.

The first written announcement of the present title of his future magnum opus came in April 1930 in conjunction with his travel to Britain as a member of the Russian delegation to the conference of the Russian–English Christian Student Movement. Sharing his plans with the German theologian and supporter of the Movement, Fritz Lieb (1892–1970), Florovsky observed: “I am hoping to read a paper about ‘the ways of Russian theology’ for the Russian Academic Group in London.”37 Less than a year later, Florovsky informed the same addressee: “Presently I must finish The Ways of Russian Theology book for the YMCA Press and an article on Sophia.”38 Although he hoped to publish The Ways of Russian Theology by Easter 1933, several other important scholarly projects claimed his attention, delaying these plans considerably.39 In December 1934 he still had only seven out of nine chapters written, hoping, again in vain, to finish the project by Christmas of the same year.40 The concluding ninth chapter was written in a burst of inspiration in one day. However, the eighth chapter proved to be a more demanding undertaking. Entitled “On the Eve”—perhaps an allusion to Turgenev’s novel of the same name—the chapter dealt with the events of the most recent history, including the Russian Religious Renaissance. As Florovsky shared with his wife in August 1935:

It is most difficult to write about the things “On the Eve” sine ira et studio, without anxiety and passion. To write about Anthony [Khrapovitsky] as a theologian, and about the dogmatic confusion of the previous generation, about the “religious-philosophical societies” and meetings, about the “return” of the intelligentsia to the faith and the Church, about Solovyov’s school, and so on. How painful all of this

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40 Florovsky, Letter to F. Lieb, December 8, 1934, Issledovaniia (2007), 576–7. The reason for this was that the YMCA Press began typesetting and printing the first chapters of the book with the expectation that the last chapters would be delivered in time: see A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 182–3, n. 41.
is for me, especially now! In the last chapter many things are stated quite sharply, more sharply than they need to be stated in order to be convincing.\footnote{Florovsky, Letter to K. I. Florovskaia, August 8, 1935, p. 1 (pagination absent in the original), GFP PUL, Box 55, f. 5.}

Florovsky’s anxiety was soon intensified by the sophiological controversy which broke out in the fall of the same year. Florovsky’s unwillingness to publicly take sides with either the defenders or the opponents of Bulgakov was also reflected in _The Ways of Russian Theology_. The last pages of the eighth chapter contain a number of cursory references to Bulgakov’s theological works but nothing substantive on his sophiology. Florovsky’s silence about Bulgakov’s sophiology in _The Ways of Russian Theology_ was the book’s most conspicuous omission.

As 1935 drew to a close, Florovsky continued to linger over chapter eight, hesitating to release it for publication. Since by then he had broken all conceivable deadlines, the Board of Directors of the YMCA Press issued him the following ultimatum: “The Wednesday morning, February 5th [1936], is the last date at which we can accept any further material. If the MS for your chapter 8 is in our hands by that date, we will include it in the book. If it cannot be, please, give us, also by that date, the necessary material to make the book hold together, using your present chapter nine as chapter eight and end of the book.”\footnote{D. Lowrie, Letter to G. Florovsky, January 30, 1936, GFP PUL, Box 14, f. 4.} But Florovsky broke this deadline too, continuing to hold on to chapter eight well into the summer of 1936.

The last part to be completed was the Preface, written in Berkshire, England, on September 2 (15), 1936.\footnote{Florovsky, _Puti russkogo bogoslovia_, xvi; A. Blane, _Georges Florovsky_, 70.} The book was finally published during the following year. The business letter from Paul Anderson, the managing director of the YMCA Press in Paris, reveals that the book was in effect self-published by the author, with the initial printing costs assumed largely by Fritz Lieb and Anderson, while the Press became responsible for the book’s advertisement, storage, and distribution.\footnote{See P. Anderson, Letter to G. Florovsky, November 4, 1930, GFP PUL, Box 13, f. 2.} It appears that copy-editing was also undertaken by the author himself, considering the alarming amount of typographic errors in the first edition and the fact that the authorial ellipsis often served in lieu of paragraph divisions. Unfortunately, the bulk of the book’s first printed copies perished before the war.

**CONCLUSION**

During the years leading up to the publication of _The Ways of Russian Theology_, Florovsky was like a train attempting to run on several tracks at
the same time, as a result arriving to his scheduled destinations with significant delays, but reaching them nevertheless. Florovsky began the project of interpreting Russian intellectual history in the 1910s, initially favoring a narrative that emphasized the original character of Russian philosophy. As he began to mature as a thinker in the emigration, his alienation from the Eurasian movement, his work on Herzen, his re-reading of Solovyov, all made significant dents in the “originality narrative.” In the 1920s, we find Florovsky vacillating between the “originality narrative” and the “pseudomorphosis narrative,” with the former gradually giving way to the latter. The studies of Iakovenko, Shpet, and Ershov, which emphasized the problem of western influences, had the cumulative effect of undermining the “originality narrative.” By comparison, Florovsky’s own narrative of the western pseudomorphosis was more ambitious in scope and even more radical in its negative conclusions. Florovsky has set out to alter the course of Russian intellectual history by calling Orthodox theology back to its patristic foundations.
The Patristic Norm and the Western Pseudomorphosis of Russian Theology

Florovsky attained his acme as a scholar in the 1930s. The inner dialogue between Florovsky the student of Russian intellectual history and Florovsky the patristics scholar reached its crescendo precisely during this time. Yet these two sides of his career are often separated, with the result that some scholars treat only his work on Russian history, while others concentrate on his retrieval of the Church Fathers. Connecting them will illuminate the central aspect of his neopatristic synthesis: the use to the patristic norm in order to evaluate the historical contribution of modern Russian theology.

THE VARIETIES OF PATRISTIC SYNTHESIS

During 1930–1933, Florovsky was actively pursuing the publication of his patristics lectures, delivered at the St Sergius Institute. A friend of Berdyaev, Elizaveta Skobtsova (1891–1945), helped to type up the lectures. Having secured financial support from Ilia Fondaminsky (1880–1942), Florovsky published two volumes of the lectures, as The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century (1931) and The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth–Eighth Centuries (1933). According to Florovsky, the volumes were intended to be a “synthesis and survey” rather than a piece of original scholarly research, as they are sometimes approached today. The originally proposed title of the work was

1 “The desire to destroy is also a creative desire,” Mikhail Bakunin, “Die Reaktion in Deutschland,” Deutsche Jahrbücher (October 1842), 11–21, at 21.
simply a “Course in Patristics.” The immediate reason for publishing the lectures was to provide Russian-speaking students with a useful survey of patristic authors, since the older Russian textbooks were apparently out of print, although not necessarily out of date.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, patristics became a flourishing field in Russian theological scholarship, thanks to the contributions of such scholars as Vasily Bolotov (1853–1900), Sergei Epifanovich (1886–1918), Aleksandr Katansky (1836–1919), Aleksandr Ivantsov-Platonov (1835–1894), Aleksei Lebedev (1845–1908), Anatoly Orlov (1879–1937), Ivan Popov (1867–1938), Viktor Nesmelov (1863–1937), Anatoly Spassky (1866–1916), and Ivan Troitsky (1832–1901). Despite Florovsky’s claim to have relied primarily on the original sources, his patrology lectures drew heavily on these studies, as well as on the work of the western church historians. Florovsky particularly valued Bolotov’s four-volume Lectures on the History of the Early Church (1907–1918), for its masterful handling of complex doctrinal questions and sensitivity to historical development. As late as 1958, more than fifty years after the publication of Bolotov’s lectures, Florovsky still regarded them as “the best general presentation of the doctrinal life in the Eastern Church,” unsurpassed even by his own patrology.

Florovsky’s lectures combined two prevailing approaches to patristics: one was an author-by-author review of the ancient Christian literature; the other was Dogmengeschichte, a history of ideas with a view of discovering the main directions of patristic thought. Precisely because Florovsky was working on his lectures in tandem with The Ways of Russian Theology, the patrology

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6 Florovsky also refers to the works of B. M. Melioransky, N. P. Vinogradov, A. V. Govorov, A. V. Martynov, L. A. Tikhomirov, M. F. Oksiiuk, S. V. Troitsky, D. A. Lebedev, N. P. Kudriavtsev, V. I. Ekzempliarsky, A. A. Kirillov, A. K. Sokolov, A. A. Smirnov, and numerous others. It is not clear why Florovsky never mentions the important work of Nikolai Sagarda (1870–1942) and Mikhail Posnov (1873–1931). One possible explanation is that their work was outside of the chronological limits of Florovsky’s two-volume patrology, which covered the fourth through the eighth centuries.
7 Towards the end of his life, Florovsky wrote: “My method of study was very simple. In the first two years of my professorship in Paris I read systematically the works of the major Fathers, partly in original, partly in translations. I studied primary sources before I turned to learned literature,” A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 153.
9 Florovsky, “Author’s Preface (1978)” in the revised and expanded English edition of the first half of Vizantiiskie ottsy V–VIII veka. The revision included new chapters on the NT, second–fifth century Fathers and councils, and surprisingly ended with the chapter “The Rise of Monophysitism.” Given the book’s contents, its English title, The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century (1987), CW VIII, was a misnomer. The second part of the second patrology volume was published as The Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Century (1987), CW XI. Both parts were published posthumously. In the post-Perestroika Russian editions, the title of the second volume is given as The Eastern Fathers of the Fifth–Eighth Centuries (Vostochnye ottsy V–VIII veka),
volumes, besides their expository function, also provided a historical foundation for his theological program. In the introduction to the first volume, The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century, Florovsky declared: “I believe and know that only it [patristic theology] opens the right and true way towards a new Christian synthesis, craved and sought after in our time.”10 The general thrust of a “return to the Fathers” program was in evidence in this declaration. However, despite this tantalizing introductory announcement, he did not return to the topic of a “new Christian synthesis” again in the patrology volumes.

Instead, in the patrology lectures, he located the synthesizing activity entirely in the past by attributing the achievement of a synthesis either to an individual Church Father or to a specific period in Church history. For example, the theology of Basil of Caesarea was a “theological-metaphysical synthesis,” involving the early trinitarian thought formulated with greater terminological precision by means of Greek philosophy.11 In Ephraem the Syrian, Florovsky found an “artistic synthesis” of pastoral rather than doctrinal significance.12 The eschatological teaching of Gregory of Nyssa provided a synthesis of the previous explorations of Origen of Alexandria and Methodius of Olympus regarding the problem of the preservation of personal identity in the afterlife and the nature of the resurrected body.13 Maximus the Confessor synthesized the thought of Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, Evagrius of Pontus, and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, on the basis of ascetic experience.14 In addition, Emperor Justinian had achieved what Florovsky called a “short-lived theocratic synthesis,” which involved a tension between the “holy Empire” and the monastic Desert.15 In some cases, a synthesis involved a modicum of cultural and philosophical translation; in other cases, a synthesis was closer to an integration of the different strands of doctrine, or of religion apparently to retain the thematic unity with the first volume. Such unauthorized change of the original title is misleading.

11 Vostochnye ottsy IV veka, 60, 75. But on p. 77, Florovsky, apparently contradicting what he said earlier, contrasts a “theological synthesis” with a “metaphysical synthesis,” observing that Basil intended the former, not the latter. On the absorption of Platonic elements into a “Christian synthesis” see “Redemption,” CW III: 115.
12 Vostochnye ottsy IV veka, 233.
and politics. In most cases, a synthesis was attributed to a patristic author, in one case, to a Christian emperor.

Florovsky also spoke of a synthesis as achieved during a specific historical period. Painting on a larger historical canvas, he presented patristic theology as a synthesis of the apostolic kerygma with Greek philosophy. *Consensus patrum*, formal or informal, was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of a synthesis. For example, the consensus achieved by the council of Nicaea (325) was short-lived: the trinitarian controversy raged until the council of Constantinople (381), and, in some locales, lasted for centuries afterwards. Similarly, the Council of Chalcedon (451) was a landmark event in the battle between the Alexandrian and the Antiochean theological traditions, ushering in an “integral synthesis” (*tselostnyi sintez*) to be fully achieved in the Byzantine period.  

For the sake of clarity, I will call such instances of a synthesis “patristic,” to distinguish them from what Florovsky called a “new Christian” or “neopatristic” synthesis, to be achieved by the contemporary historical theologians.

Florovsky did not always make it clear whether the concord of patristic voices was a historical reality, or whether *consensus patrum* was something that the contemporary historical theologians had to bring out in the patristic texts, or both. Whatever the case might be, the theological synthesis thus envisioned inevitably went beyond what had happened in the past. The synthesis already inherent in the patristic sources and the one established by means of a modern historical investigation were not value-neutral hermeneutical enterprises. Both presupposed a complex set of theological, historical, and philosophical judgments. As a rule, Florovsky had a tendency to smooth out the differences between the individual Church Fathers in order to emphasize the coherence and unity of their thought.

It bears repeating that Florovsky rarely, if at all, speaks of the operation of a synthesis with any methodological precision. In fact, some aspects of his philosophy of history seem to be antithetical to a broadly conceived historical synthesis. For example, his advocacy of historical singularism and his rejection of trans-personal historical teleology render any large-scale historical generalizations and synthetic judgments inherently problematic, if not altogether impossible. The patrology lectures did not offer a neopatristic synthesis, but considered different cases of patristic synthesis, achieved by early Christian authors individually or collectively.

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THE PATROLOGY VOLUMES AND THE WAYS OF RUSSIAN THEOLOGY AS A “TRILOGY”

It is revealing to compare the introduction to the first volume of the patrology lectures, quoted earlier, to the preface of The Ways of Russian Theology, where Florovsky wrote:

The study of the Russian past has convinced me that an Orthodox theologian today can find the true norm and the living spring of creative inspiration only in the heritage of the Holy Fathers. I am convinced that the intellectual separation from patristics and Byzantinism was the main cause of all interruptions and spiritual failures in Russian development. A history of these failures is narrated in this book.18

In a move reminiscent of the moral pathos of Eurasianism, in The Ways of Russian Theology, Florovsky called for a thorough re-examination and rejection of the western theological “failures” in order to embrace with new creative vigor the forgotten “ways of Byzantine theology,” which incidentally was the title of the introductory chapter of his second patrology volume, The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth–Eighth Centuries.19 In this chapter, Florovsky observed that, as a consequence of the Christological debates of the fifth century, “almost the entire non-Greek East broke away, dropped out of the Church, and retired into heresy.”20 Meanwhile, the Latin West, without altogether “retiring into heresy” after the manner of the Armenians, the Copts, and the Church of the East in the fifth and sixth centuries, nevertheless began to drift away from Byzantium culturally and theologically. Because of this mutual alienation, Byzantine theology, especially its Christological center, remained largely misunderstood. The second volume of patrology was conceived as a historical rehabilitation of Byzantine Christian thought. The adherence to the Greek patristic and Byzantine theological norm would become Florovsky’s preoccupation; the consequences of a departure from this norm would be laid bare in The Ways of Russian Theology.

Similar to his patristic volumes, The Ways of Russian Theology was based on the lectures that he read at the St Sergius Institute.21 When Florovsky studied

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20 Florovsky, The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century, CW VIII: 15.

21 As Florovsky told his biographer: “Puti |russkogo bogoslovia| is not a unity. It was based on my lectures at St. Sergius. Some I elaborated in the book, others not. Some interests I pursued, some I did not. Much is out of date now [1978],” A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 152.
the theology of the Church Fathers, he had the “dead ends” of Russian theology on the back of his mind. In turn, when he read the Russian authors, he put them on trial, judging them against the standard of Byzantine theology. Thus, Florovsky’s two volumes of patristic lectures and *The Ways of Russian Theology* constituted a peculiar trilogy: the “right and sure” way was charted in the first two volumes; the ways of errors and failures, the ways of interruptions and distortions, and the dead ends were criticized in the last volume. It is also telling that Florovsky’s exposition of Byzantine theology broke off in the eighth century, right at the point when the story of Russia’s conversion to Christianity was about to begin.22

These two main impulses of Florovsky’s “trilogy”—the liberation of Orthodox theology from its “western captivity” and the return to the “land” of the Church Fathers—are summed up in the two terse programmatic communications that he delivered at the First International Congress of Orthodox Theologians held in Athens in November–December 1936. The first paper, entitled “Western Influences in Russian Theology,” was a synopsis of *The Ways of Russian Theology*, which had been finished by then and was being prepared for publication. The second paper, “Patristics and Modern Theology,” offered a solution to the problem, namely, a return to the properly understood Christian Hellenism of the Greek Church Fathers, which alone was capable of liberating Orthodox theology from its intellectual captivity in the West.23 It is ironic that a Russian-Ukrainian theologian residing in France would come to Greece to deliver his first communication in German and his second communication in English only to protest the “western captivity” of Orthodox theology. One would be inclined to think that such a theologian “doth protest too much.” The more Florovsky’s daily habits of mind inclined him to the west, the more his theological imagination pulled him to the east.

Florovsky’s appearance produced a lasting impression on the international participants of the conference. Some Greek theologians especially welcomed his zeal for Christian Hellenism. To his surprise, Florovsky also discovered a resistance to his proposal in the traditionalist camp: “In a private conversation, some Congress participants expressed a considerable worry concerning my appeal to return from scholasticism to patristics. Strangely, precisely the

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zealots of traditionalism did not want to acknowledge the normative importance of patristic theology."\(^{24}\) While modernist Russian theologians tended to paint Florovsky as a retrograde, the “zealots of traditionalism” were equally apprehensive of his proposal, evidently fearing that the investigation of dogmatic theology in its historical context would cast doubt on the validity of the a-historical “theology of the manuals.” A similar concern was expressed by some leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. For his part, Florovsky positioned his project as neither modernist nor traditionalist, advocating a renewal of Orthodox theology (viewed with suspicion by the traditionalists) by means of returning to the patristic sources (received without enthusiasm by the modernists).

**OSWALD SPENGLER’S CONCEPT OF PSEUDOMORPHOSIS**

Crucial for understanding Florovsky’s analysis of the western influences in Russian intellectual history was the concept of pseudomorphosis, which he adopted from Oswald Spengler. In *The Decline of the West*, Spengler wrote: “By the term ‘historical pseudomorphosis’ I propose to designate those cases in which an older alien Culture lies so massively over the land that a young Culture cannot get its breath and fails not only to achieve pure and specific expression-forms, but even to develop fully its own self-consciousness.”\(^{25}\)

Applying the concept of pseudomorphosis to Russia’s westernization, Spengler observed:

> This Muscovite period of the great Boyar families and Patriarchs, in which a constant element is the resistance of an Old Russia party to the friends of Western culture, is followed, from the founding of Petersburg in 1703 by the pseudomorphosis which forced the primitive Russian soul into the alien mould, first of full Baroque, then of the Enlightenment and then of the nineteenth century. The fate-figure in Russian history is Peter the Great.\(^{26}\)

It is possible that Slavophile cultural analysis is behind Spengler’s observations.\(^{27}\) The German historian’s work, *The Decline of the West*, was widely

\(^{24}\) “S’ezd pravoslavnykh bogoslovov v Afinakh (29. XI.–4. XII. 1936),” p. 9, unpublished manuscript, GFP PUL, Box 61, f. 6. While Florovsky did not mention any specific names, it is possible that the objection came from the associates of the Greek theologian Panayiotes Trembelas.


\(^{26}\) Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 271.

\(^{27}\) On Spengler’s possible dependence on the Slavophiles, see Susanne Pocai, “Das deutsche und das russische Sonderbewußtsein: F. Nietzsches und F. Dostoevskij’s Einfluß auf die
discussed in the emigration and noticed by the Eurasians. Florovsky was familiar with the concept of pseudomorphosis both in the broad culturological sense proposed by Spengler and in a related sense to denote the process of Orthodox theology’s succumbing to the western influences and the consequent alienation of theological thought from the life and worship of the Orthodox Church.  

**THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN THEOLOGY AS A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS**

For Florovsky, the history of Russian theology was a drama in three main acts, each act representing a different type of pseudomorphosis, with a drawn-out prelude and a brief interlude. The prelude concerned Russian history from the tenth to the sixteenth century, the three acts corresponded approximately to the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, with an interlude taking place in the early nineteenth century.

In the prelude, appropriately called “The Crisis of Russian Byzantinism,” the medieval Russia made a momentous decision to embrace Eastern Orthodox Christianity, but failed to creatively engage Byzantine theology, remaining theologically inarticulate for more than half a millennium (tenth–sixteenth centuries). In the essay written during his American period, “The Problem of Old Russian Culture” (1962), Florovsky explained that the reason Byzantine theology had not been able to “awaken the Russian soul” for such a long time was because “Byzantium had offered too much at once—an enormous richness of cultural material that simply could not be absorbed at once... The heritage was too heavy and too perfect.”  

While Russia was able to appropriate Byzantine piety, asceticism, and iconography, the Church failed to draw creatively upon Byzantium’s theological riches. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Russia gradually began changing its cultural orientation from the Byzantine East to Western Europe, a move which had fatal consequences for the development of Orthodox theology. Florovsky concluded that the “crisis of Russian Byzantinism of the sixteenth century was also a departure of the Russian thought from the patristic tradition.”

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28 Cf. A. V. Cherniaev, G. V. Florovskii kak filosof i istorik russkoj mysli, 116.


30 Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 506 (cf. 24, 29).
Another influential interpreter of Russian intellectual history, Gustav Shpet, in *An Outline of the Development of Russian Philosophy* (1922), spoke in even more disparaging terms of the “voicelessness” (*neveglasie*) of Russian intellectual culture during the same period. But unlike Florovsky, Shpet especially emphasized Russia’s failure to engage the philosophical heritage of antiquity, which provided such a significant intellectual boost to western medieval scholasticism. According to Shpet, Russia’s adoption of Byzantine Christianity did little to stimulate the philosophical activity in the country, which was linguistically cut off from the Latin-based scholarship of the Middle Ages. In other words, Shpet saw Byzantium’s cultural influence as, in effect, stifling original philosophical thought, rather than benefitting Russia intellectually. While essentially conceding Shpet’s point regarding medieval Russia’s philosophical “voicelessness” or, as Florovsky put it himself, “intellectual silence,” Florovsky did not accept Shpet’s view that the country’s linguistic isolation from the Latin West and its cultural alignment with Byzantium were responsible for this phenomenon.31

In the first act of Florovsky’s historical drama, which took place in seventeenth-century Kiev, western Russian thought experienced the first major pseudomorphosis, consisting of the “acute Latinization” of its theological education under Polish Catholic influences. Florovsky described the impact of the Kievan metropolitan Petro Mohyla (1596–1647), the founder of the first theological school in Eastern Europe, somewhat grotesquely:

> Under Mohila, the Western Russian Church comes out of its disarray and disorganization from which it suffered from the time of the Union of Brest. Yet everything is suffused with a foreign, Latin spirit... This was an acute Romanization of Orthodoxy, a Latin pseudomorphosis of Orthodoxy. A Latin and Latinizing school system is built on an empty spot; not only ritual and language, but also theology, worldview, and religious psychology become Latinized. The very soul of the people comes to be Latinized.32

This passage is replete with the disavowals of Latinity reminiscent of the Eurasian pamphlets, especially *Russia and Latinity*. In his own way, Florovsky integrated the Slavophile disparagement of the western influences on Russian culture with the Westernizers’ tendency to berate Russia’s ability to appropriate the western ideas in a genuinely creative manner. Florovsky assumed that nothing good whatsoever could come to Russia (more precisely, to Ukraine) from adopting the Jesuit educational paradigms.

Thus, on Florovsky’s reading, the process of academic theology’s alienation from the “organic life” and the “time-transcending” experience of the

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31 *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, 5–6; cf. A. Cherniaev, G. V. Florovsky kak filosof i istorik russkoi kul’tury, 99.
32 *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, 49; ellipsis in the original.
Orthodox Church—the fatal pseudomorphosis—occurred in the seventeenth century, and went back to the cultural drifting away from Byzantium that started a century earlier. The thesis that the “western captivity” of Orthodox educational institutions came about in the seventeenth century and continued for more than two hundred years had been previously maintained by E. E. Golubinsky (1834–1912).\footnote{E. E. Golubinsky, Istoriia russkoi tserkvi (Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografia, 1912).} In ecclesiastical circles, the matter was also of special concern to metropolitan Anthony KhраМovitsky, who even before the revolution urged curriculum changes in Russian seminaries to address the problem of dependence on the western educational patterns.\footnote{Florovsky cited the metropolitan’s position with approval in “Western Influences in Russian Theology,” CW IV: 157. On the reform that metropolitan Anthony proposed, see Vera A. Tarasova, Vysshia dukhovnaia shkola v Rossii v kontse XIX–nachale XX veka (Moscow: Novyi khrонograf, 2005), 332–43.} Shpet and Chizhevsky also pointed out that the first graduate school of theology on the territory of Eastern Europe—the theological Collegium of the Kiev Mohyla Academy—was originally based on a Jesuit educational model of education, although they did not chastise metropolitan Mohyla for his Catholic leanings as ferociously as did Florovsky.\footnote{See Chizhevsky, Narysy, 33; Shpet, Ocherk razvitia russkoi filosofii, 85–6.} It was probably Chizhevsky’s work that first suggested to Florovsky the concept of “Kievan pseudomorphosis.”\footnote{Florovsky mentioned the “Kievan pseudomorphosis” in print for the first time in 1929 in his review article of D. Chizhevsky’s Filosofia na Ukraini in Put’, 19 (1929), 118–19 at 119. Chizhevsky himself did not see western influences in a negative light.} In ecclesiastical circles, the matter was also of special concern to metropolitan Anthony KhраМovitsky, who even before the revolution urged curriculum changes in Russian seminaries to address the problem of dependence on the western educational patterns. Shpet and Chizhevsky also pointed out that the first graduate school of theology on the territory of Eastern Europe—the theological Collegium of the Kiev Mohyla Academy—was originally based on a Jesuit educational model of education, although they did not chastise metropolitan Mohyla for his Catholic leanings as ferociously as did Florovsky. It was probably Chizhevsky’s work that first suggested to Florovsky the concept of “Kievan pseudomorphosis.” In the second act, ushered in by Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century, Russia experienced a “Protestant pseudomorphosis of ecclesiastical life.” Unlike the Slavophiles, who tended to idealize the pre-Petrine Russia, Florovsky saw the Petrine Reforms as continuing the corrupting process that had begun nearly two centuries before. Among the symptoms of this new pseudomorphosis was the tsar’s abrogation of the office of the Patriarch of Moscow and Bishop Feofan Prokopovich’s corresponding endorsement of government absolutism. The westernization of Russian theological education now took the form of Protestant influences. In 1948, in his address at the official reopening of the St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary and Academy in New York after its reorganization, Florovsky summarized the story of the first two pseudomorphoses thus:

The first theological schools in Russia, in the same 17th century, were Latin by language and rather Romanizing in spirit—Aquinas and Cardinal Bellarmine were for a time regarded as one supreme authority. Later on came a sudden change and for the whole 18th century the theological teaching in Russian seminaries and academies was based on Protestant authorities [. . .] It was an abnormal “pseudomorphosis” of the Orthodox Theology. But we have to keep in
mind that it was the school theology that went astray—the worshipping Church kept close to the Patristic tradition. A certain tension, divorce, and opposition between piety and teaching was the most unhappy outcome of this historical adventure. This tension and divorce were overcome to a great extent in the heroic struggles of the 19th century.  

During an interlude, which Florovsky called “the heroic struggles of the 19th century,” Russian theological education in the person of metropolitan Filaret of Moscow attempted to recover its Eastern identity by shaking off the Western theological paradigms. In Filaret and Ivan Kireevsky, Florovsky saw the nineteenth-century forerunners of the neopatristic turn in Russian theology. This period was indeed marked by the introduction of the study of patristics into the curriculum of theological schools in the 1840s and the application of a historical approach to church dogmatics.  

Florovsky’s generally positive reading of this period did not fit well into the overall scheme of the “western captivity” of modern Orthodox theology, but was more in line with the “originality narrative.” Unfortunately, this promising interlude was soon overshadowed by the third and most disastrous theological pseudomorphosis. In the final act, ushered in by Vladimir Solovyov and continued by the Renaissance leaders, Orthodox theology suffered from its last and most damaging western influence—German Idealism. Florovsky’s verdict was uncompromising: “Our religious ‘renaissance’ was, in fact, a return to the experience of German Idealism and mysticism. For some it was a return to Schelling and Hegel, for others to Jacob Boehme, for still others to Goethe. The increasing influence of Solovyov only reinforced this infatuation with German philosophy. The real scope of church history remained almost unknown.”  

While such a reductionist conclusion suited Florovsky’s historiography of pseudomorphosis, Florovsky’s actual account of the Renaissance did not follow the “pseudomorphosis narrative” consistently. In fact, his discussion of the Renaissance’s bountiful intellectual and religious achievements in The Ways of Russian Theology often shifted into the mode of the “originality narrative,” a framework that he also followed in his unpublished essay “Russian Philosophy in Emigration” (1930). To some extent the narratives were

39 Florovsky’s discussion of these changes heavily relied on N. Glubokovsky, Russkaia bogoslovskaia nauka v ee istoricheskom razvitii i noveishem istolkovanii (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Sviato-Vladimirskogo Bratstva, 2002), 62 and B. V. Titlinov, Dukhovnaia shkola v Rossii v XIX stoletii (London: Gregg International Publishers, 1970; originally published in 1909), 11–25. Titlinov actually criticized the reform of the 1840s, arguing that the addition of new subjects to the curriculum had the overall effect of making education broader, but more superficial (p. 18). Florovsky wrote a foreword to the English edition of Titlinov’s study.  
40 Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 492.
complementary, since they placed an equally high premium on the distinctiveness and self-sufficiency of the Orthodox tradition.

Years later, reflecting on which figures in Russian tradition could speak for Eastern Orthodoxy, Florovsky had the following to say about the giants of Russian religious thought:

It remains to be proven that Solov’ev, Dostoyevsky, and Berdyaev are really representative of the “Eastern Orthodox thinking.” Indeed, the case of Dostoyevsky is very complex. Yet, on the whole, even Dostoyevsky stands in the Western tradition and his thought was guided by the problems of western thought, as they were reflected in the life and endeavour of his Russian contemporaries. The thought of Vladimir Solov’ev is an episode in the history of German idealism and can be fully understood only in the context of what is usually denoted as Spätidealismus [Late Idealism], a rather neglected phase of the idealistic religious philosophy, which was quite vigorous in the sixties and seventies of the last century. [ . . . ] Berdyaev himself always insisted on his close dependence upon the Western tradition. 41

In this instance, Florovsky was prepared to narrow the boundaries of what counts as “Eastern Orthodox thinking” to such an extent that not only Solovyov and Berdyaev, but even Dostoevsky, could no longer claim to represent Russian Orthodoxy. Even the staunch traditionalists, torn as they were between the adherence to the letter of patristic writings and religiously fueled nationalism, would not have dared to “excommunicate” Dostoevsky in such a cavalier manner. Florovsky’s extreme conclusion was bound to shock and offend Russian religious intelligentsia. While recognizing that Solovyov’s religious philosophy had stimulated a religious ferment in Russia—and indeed Florovsky’s own religious awakening—Florovsky insisted that this creative élan was attained at the expense of succumbing to the western influences and drifting away even further from the patristic tradition.

As far as Florovsky was concerned, the theological energies of the Russian Religious Renaissance were misspent and only widened the divide between modern Russian theological idiom and the life of the Church. What was now required, Florovsky tirelessly repeated, was to return to the Fathers:

The retrieval of patristic style is the first and main postulate of the Russian theological renaissance. I do not mean a mere “restoration,” repetition, or going back. At any rate, “to the Fathers” always means forward, not backward. I am talking of being faithful to the patristic spirit, not the letter, of lighting up with inspiration from the patristic fire, not of collecting a herbarium of the ancient texts. 42

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41 Florovsky, “Review of Matthew Spinka, Christian Thought from Erasmus to Berdyaev,” in Church History, 31 (1962), 470–1, at 470; the transliteration of the Russian names reproduces the original. In his other works, Florovsky provided a more balanced treatment of these Russian authors. On Solovyov, see e.g. his “Reason and Faith in the Philosophy of Solov’ev,” in Ernest J. Simmons (ed.), Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1955), 283–97.

42 Pati russkogo bogoslovia, 506.
Florovsky’s appeal “forward, to the Fathers” would capture the imagination of a younger generation.

THE APPLICABILITY OF THE BYZANTINE NORM TO RUSSIA’S INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

One needs to take the measure of just how revisionist Florovsky’s seemingly retrograde proposal actually was. His patristics lectures told a story of the historical “triumph of Orthodoxy.” The Ways of Russian Theology was an exercise in theological boundary-making and a trial of Russian Orthodoxy’s western deviations. Florovsky drew the boundary between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western heterodoxy with the persistence and moral ferocity characteristic of the Slavophile and Eurasian writings. As a result, a broad sweep of Russian intellectual history was judged and found guilty, out of the bounds of acceptable Orthodoxy. The time has now come, Florovsky never tired of repeating, to return to the Greek Church Fathers and to make another historical attempt at re-appropriating the theological riches of the forgotten patristic world. Thus, Florovsky’s program of the philosophical reorientation of Russian theology offered a Byzantine cultural compass that, ironically, had nothing distinctly Russian about it, not unlike those western influences, which he was so intent on stamping out of Russian Orthodoxy.

In fact, the superimposition of the Byzantine culture upon the Russian culture fits Spengler’s notion of pseudomorphosis. For, in Spengler’s terms, a pseudomorphosis was obtained when an “old” and developed culture overlaid a “young” culture in such a way that the former prevented the latter’s creative development. According to Florovsky, having been overwhelmed by the Byzantine cultural riches, Kievan Rus’ remained silent, at least as far as its theology and religious philosophy were concerned. This theological silence, on Florovsky’s reading, lasted more than five hundred years. Even more surprisingly, when Russia began to speak theologically, it did so under the “corrupting” influence of the West, not Byzantium. Since Russia could not “organically” appropriate Byzantine theology before, what possible historical reason could one have for claiming that in the twentieth century a return to Byzantine theology would generate a theological renewal? Florovsky did not seem to be aware of this problem. One historian who offered an alternative reading of Russia’s assimilation of Byzantine culture was George Fedotov.

As Florovsky’s older contemporary, Fedotov was closer to the generation of the Renaissance “fathers,” who travelled the path from Marxism to Christianity. Together with many Renaissance leaders, Fedotov was preoccupied by the social ramifications of Christian teaching. Trained by Ivan Grevs (1860–1941)
as a medievalist at the University of St Petersburg, in the emigration Fedotov taught western church history and hagiology at the St Sergius Institute in Paris until the beginning of the war. In 1941, he left for the United States, where he eventually became a professor of history at St Vladimir’s Seminary in New York until his death in 1951. Thus, he and Florovsky taught side by side on both sides of the Atlantic.

Fedotov’s *Ancient Russian Saints* was a milestone in the history of Russian hagiology. Towards the end of his life, Fedotov conceived a comprehensive historical survey of Russian spiritual culture and was able to complete the first volume under the title *The Russian Religious Mind* (1946). The second volume, partly completed, was posthumously edited and published by John Meyendorff in 1966. The stated purpose of Fedotov’s historical survey was “to describe the subjective side of religion as opposed to the objective side; that is, opposed to the complex of organized dogmas, sacraments, rites, liturgy, canon law and so on. I am interested in man, religious man, and his attitude towards God, the world, and his fellow men; his attitude is not only emotional, but also rational and volitional, the attitude of the whole man.”

Fedotov aimed at demonstrating peculiarly Russian modes of piety, expressions of sanctity, and theology of everyday life. Such a perspective was uniquely suited to describe the distinct ways in which the Byzantine tradition was appropriated in medieval Russia.

For Fedotov, Russia’s acceptance of Byzantine Orthodoxy was a peculiar historical choice, rather than an “organic” development. This choice determined both the limitations and the distinct characteristics of Russian Christianity. Fedotov was not inclined to idealize Byzantium, prompting Florovsky’s remark that he “had very little sympathy for the Byzantine tradition.” Fedotov acknowledged a high level of the Byzantine intellectual and artistic culture. But he also concurred with the western historians, who noted that this culture was “static” and “lacking in creative vitality”—the points to which Florovsky took exception. For Fedotov, the fact that Kievan Rus’ failed to creatively engage Byzantine dogmatic, mystical, and sacramental riches did not merit the condemnation of being “silent,” as it did for Florovsky. On the contrary, Russia was attuned to the practical, moral, and ascetic teaching of the Church Fathers, developing its own modes of piety and sanctity. Fedotov argued, for example, that whereas Byzantine theology preferred to contemplate Christ in his exaltation and glory, Russian tradition identified more with

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Christ’s humiliation and kenosis, developing its own rank of the saint, the so-called “passion bearer,” distinct from the martyr.

Fedotov’s work pointed to a glaring omission in *The Ways of Russian Theology*. While Florovsky maintained, as a matter of general principle, that Russian Orthodox liturgical life, piety, and “ecclesial experience” remained in fundamental continuity with the Byzantine tradition and only “school theology” became captivated by “western influences,” he made little attempt to discuss the actual content of the practices, which he valued so much as sources of continuity. As a matter of principle, Fedotov objected to imposing the Byzantine norm upon the development of Russian Christianity. In Fedotov’s judgment, apparently also supported by Meyendorff, such an imposition was historically unjustified.

Leaving Fedotov’s important work aside, it would be anachronistic to expect Byzantium to exert a significant cultural influence upon the Muscovite Russia after the fifteenth century. When the Byzantine political order crumbled after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the major vehicles for communicating rich Byzantine culture came to a halt. How could one expect Moscow to rely on Byzantium, when the Byzantine Empire was no more? In this case, Florovsky’s disregard for matters political led to unrealistic expectations in matters religious. The seventeenth-century Ukraine turned to Western Europe in its search for the paradigms of theological education, primarily because they were the only ones available at the time. 47

Even for Florovsky, the application of the Byzantine norm had its limits. For example, he justly criticized the Russian Orthodox Church for its subservience to the state. In particular, he characterized Bishop Feofan Prokopovich as a theoretician of state absolutism under Peter the Great. 48 Florovsky noted that Feofan stigmatized as “papism” any expression of ecclesiastical independence from the heavy hand of the government. It remained unclear how Byzantinism could provide “the only norm” for modern Orthodox theology, if in the field of political theology, according to Florovsky’s own admission, the Byzantine scheme itself required a correction in the “western” direction.

THE EASTERN PATRISTIC NORM AND THE UKRAINIAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

Florovsky’s historiographic scheme presupposes a seamless movement of the centers of theological scholarship from Kiev to Moscow and, subsequently, to

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47 Cf. A. V. Cherniaev, G. V. Florovskii kak istorik i filosoф russkoi mysli, 120–1.
St Petersburg. Such a scheme uncritically follows the imperial narrative of Russian political history, prevalent in the official Russian historiography since Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826). The scheme either ignored the ethnic distinctiveness of the western Slavs, particularly the Ukrainians, or construed the Muscovite kingdom as politically and ethnically continuous with the Kievan Rus’. Consequently, Polish and Austro-Hungarian dominance over western Ukraine was regarded as an aberration, whereas the expansion of the Russian imperial dominance over the same territory was justified as the restoration of unity, which was supposedly attained in the earlier period.49

In this scheme, which Florovsky uncritically assumed, the cultural standards of Moscow-grown Orthodoxy tended to be read back into the unique earlier situation of the seventeenth-century Kievian theological tradition, which in reality contained a complex interplay of western and eastern elements. But Florovsky lamented the western influences upon the Kievian school of theology as something self-evidently deplorable. He also assumed that the modes of folk piety and the styles of worship, unlike academic theology, remained untouched by the West, speaking of “tension, divorce, and opposition between piety and teaching.”50 Such an assumption is demonstrably false: the iconography, architecture, church music, and folk piety of what is now western and central Ukraine were heavily influenced by the Christian West in the sixteenth–nineteenth centuries.51 Contrary to Florovsky, there was no “rift between theology and piety, between theological learning and prayerful contemplation, between the theological school and church life,”52 because all aspects of church life, including art and piety, were, like theology, to some extent westernized.

Moreover, Florovsky’s sharp dichotomy between the Catholic West and the Orthodox East has limited application to the Ukrainian territory that was politically contested by Poland, Austro-Hungary, and the Russian Empire. This territory had its own share of ethnic struggles and experiments in political and religious boundary-drawing and redrawing. The fact that today Eastern Rite Catholicism has the largest number of adherents (approximately five million) precisely in Ukraine cannot be dismissed as a historical accident. Rather, the “westernization” of Orthodoxy and the “orientalization” of Catholicism went hand in hand and indeed continue in this area to this day. Florovsky’s rigid dichotomy between the “East” and the “West” was both anachronistic and historically unjustifiable in the case of Ukraine, especially

49 For the discussion and penetrating criticism of this narrative, see Serhy Yekelchyk, Ukraïnoфи: Svit uраіns’kyh patriotiv drugoi polovyny XIX stolittia (Kiev: KIS, 2010), 75–104.
50 “The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology,” ATR, 31 (1949), 68.
51 See e.g. Leonid Ushkalov, Українське barokove bogomyslennia: sim etiudiv pro Grygoriia Skovorodu (Kharkiv: Akta, 2001).
52 Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 502.
its western part, where there was a continuing cross-polination of the Orthodox “Eastern” and the Catholic and Protestant “Western” motifs.

Despite his mother’s Ukrainian roots, Florovsky was thoroughly Russified and as a result could not imagine Ukraine, whether past or future, as anything else but a culturally subordinate part of the (defunct) Russian Empire. As the existence of the present-day independent state of Ukraine shows, this was a major failure of historical imagination on his part, a blind spot that he shared with other pre-revolutionary intellectuals of mixed ethnic background. A very different narrative, which did justice to the cultural and political distinctiveness of the Ukrainian nation, was available to him in the work of a prominent Ukrainian historian, Mikhailo Hrushevsky (1866–1934). Florovsky was aware of this work, but chose to accept the prevalent imperial narrative instead.

In Florovsky’s master narrative, “Russian” theology includes the contributions of all figures born on the territories that at some point in history were parts of the Russian Empire. However, it could be reasonably doubted whether such an “imperialist” assumption of Russia’s cultural hegemony, consisting in the absorption of the contributions of the politically dependent, but culturally and linguistically distinct peoples, is legitimate. For example, Florovsky regards Petro Mohyla, Grigory Skovoroda (1722–1794), and Pamfil Iurkevich (1826–1874) as being without qualification a part of Russian theological legacy. But Mohyla was born in Moldova, Skovoroda and Iurkevich in Ukraine. The first two figures wrote in Ukrainian, while Iurkevich wrote in Russian, because the repressive Russian government made it illegal to publish scholarly works in Ukrainian.

In his Survey of the History of Philosophy in Ukraine, Chizhevsky presented Iurkevich as another major figure of a distinctly Ukrainian religious-philosophical tradition. It seems that Mohyla, Skovoroda, and Iurkevich were no more “Russian” than the Kiev-born Berdyaev, Shestov, and Zenkovsky were “Ukrainian.” Florovsky studied Chizhevsky’s work closely,

53 It is revealing that when the government of Hetman Skoropadsky established an independent Ukrainian state during the Civil War of 1918–1922, Florovsky, still in Crimea, greeted the news with dismissive hostility and incomprehension. Ukrainian Greek Catholic scholar Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, who interviewed Florovsky in the 1970s, recalled that “he did not recognize the existence of Ukrainians,” “Liudyna inshykh svitiv,” in E. I. Martyniuk et al. (eds), Aktual’ni pytannia tvorchoї spadshchyny G. V. Florovs’kogo (Odessa: Feniks, 2009), 5–8, at 6.
54 For a critique of Florovsky’s reading of Mohyla, see F. J. Thomson, “Peter Mogila’s Ecclesiastical Reforms and the Ukrainian Contribution to Russian Culture,” 100; A. V. Cherniaev, G. V. Florovskii kak filosof i istorik russkoi mysli, 120–1.
55 Stephan Jarms, Pamphil D. Yurkevich and His Philosophic Legacy (Winnipeg: St Andrew’s College, 1979), 19.
56 On Skovoroda, see Chizhevsky, Narysy z istorii filosofiї na Ukraїni (Prague: Ukrains’kyi hromads’kyi vydavnychyi fond, 1931), 35–62.
but did not engage his friend’s compelling historiographic scheme in *The Ways of Russian Theology.*

Strictly speaking, the Russian Religious Renaissance was both a Russian and Ukrainian phenomenon. “Russian” in the title of Florovsky’s book is a misleading synecdoche that encompasses ethnic Russians as well as numerous non-Russians, speakers of various Slavonic languages, who contributed to the multicultural intellectual heritage of what under Peter the Great would become the Russian Empire and cease to exist after the Bolshevik Revolution. One problematic consequence of lumping the Kievan theological tradition together with later Muscovite tradition was that the distinctiveness of Ukraine’s religious and intellectual heritage, which had achieved a measure of integration of the “East” and “West,” was dismissed as an early pseudomorphosis of Eastern Orthodoxy.

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**THE CRITERION OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND THE CRITERION OF THEOLOGICAL TRUTH**

The deeper problem is not the particular flaws of Florovsky’s cultural morphology, but his confusion of the criterion of cultural identity with the criterion of truth. To diagnose Russian theology with the western influences, whether real or imagined, is hardly enough to prove that the result is a dead end. More broadly, to characterize a given theological claim as “Latin,” “Protestant,” “German,” “Romantic,” or simply “western” is not a sufficient ground for regarding such a claim as false. Conversely, a particular theological stance is not true merely because it is “eastern” (or “northern,” “southern,” “Caribbean” and “Hawaiian” for that matter). It could be objected, of course, that claiming that something is “western” is a convenient short-hand for saying that it is non-Orthodox. Since one assumes, for the sake of argument, the main teachings of the Orthodox Church to be true, one also expects the beliefs that conflict with these teachings to be false. However, Florovsky rarely discusses any specific deviations from the Church dogma at length. Rather, he concerns himself with the western historical idiom and philosophical views that are not obviously false or incoherent. He usually expresses himself in general terms, rarely taking the trouble to explain how precisely a given “western influence” actually distorts the Orthodox teaching. Cultural morphology is particularly ill-suited for making normative theological truth-claims. But Florovsky constantly conflates the criterion of religious identity (Byzantine Orthodox modes of

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theological expression) with the criterion of theological truth. To apply the patristic and Byzantine norm in such a manner was to perpetuate a genetic fallacy. The widespread acceptance of this fallacy in present-day Orthodox theology does not make it any less problematic.

CONCLUSION

Bakunin’s words “the desire to destroy is also a creative desire” seem applicable to *The Ways of Russian Theology*. Florovsky’s magnum opus was a literary provocation in the style of the Eurasian manifestos. The destructive impulse was evident, and so was the creative impulse of returning Russian theology to its patristic foundations.

As a work of historical scholarship, the book contained several flaws. First, Florovsky applied a double-standard to the reading of his sources: a hermeneutic of trust and retrieval when it came to the Church Fathers, and a hermeneutic of distrust and discontinuity when it came to Russian theologians. Second, Florovsky never clearly explained what constituted the Byzantine norm. In principle, it was possible to derive a general idea of such a norm from Florovsky’s patrology volumes, but even there, the “Byzantine norm” was not spelled out systematically.

Third, Florovsky simply assumed that in order to escape a western pseudomorphosis, Russian theology had to retain its pro-Byzantine orientation, disregarding the fact that such a theological attachment to Byzantium became nearly impossible when the Byzantine Empire was no more. It also remained to be demonstrated just how “creative inspiration” was to be drawn from Byzantine theology, if in the past Russian theology was unable to benefit from its riches and remained theologically “silent.”

Fourth, he subsumed the Ukrainian theological tradition under the Russian theological tradition with no historical justification. Fifth, the complex evidence he discussed, especially his own richly textured and at times appreciative narrative of the Russian Religious Renaissance, did not yield his conclusion of the alleged western contortions of Russian theology. The “originality narrative,” which Florovsky espoused before his disillusionment with Solovyov, resurfaces in *The Ways of Russian Theology* and disrupts the “pseudomorphosis narrative,” which dominates in the book.

Finally, and most importantly, Florovsky constantly conflated the criterion of truth with the criterion of identity. Such a conflation potentially vitiates any subsequent Orthodox attempts to engage the western theological sources in a theologically rigorous manner. It may be objected that Florovsky himself did not intend such an outcome and theoretically entertained the possibility of
engaging western intellectual tradition productively. But in practice, the main thrust of his neopatristic program was to lead Orthodox theology out of its “western captivity,” not to provide a fresh, Eastern reading of western theology.

In chapter 11, we turn to further critique of Florovsky’s magnum opus, giving the Renaissance leaders, especially Berdyaev, an opportunity to respond to Florovsky’s challenge.

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The Early Reception of The Ways of Russian Theology

Berdyaev accused me [Florovsky] of “ingratitude,” implying that without the “Renaissance” The Ways [of Russian Theology] could not have been written. This is true in a certain sense. I have accepted the “Renaissance” in all seriousness, which is why I later came to reject it.¹

The prophets of doom are never welcome in exile. The sobering message of The Ways of Russian Theology, whatever its scholarly merits, was not for the fainthearted. For Florovsky personally, the publication of the book had the effect of bringing several long-term friendships to breaking point. Writing to his wife in the summer of 1935, Florovsky confessed: “I strongly feel that my book will solidify my break with the ‘older generation.’ After such a witness and confession it would no longer be possible to cover up the differences with silence and agreement. I do not doubt my convictions and assertions, but the break remains.”² Even before the Sophia Affair, Florovsky acutely perceived his break with the “fathers” of the Renaissance and realized that the appearance of The Ways of Russian Theology would only solidify the differences. Indeed, to publish such a book was to invite a literary war.

But Florovsky’s attack misfired badly. The Russian émigré community answered with something worse than an open war: a conspiracy of near-silence.³ Florovsky had excommunicated the thinkers of the Russian Religious Renaissance. Many in the Diaspora believed that he in turn deserved to be ostracized. The Parisian literati simply ceased to regard Florovsky as their own.⁴

² Florovsky, Letter to K. I. Florovskiaia, August 8, 1935, p. 1 (pagination absent in the original), GFP PUL, Box 55, f. 5.
³ In the 1970s, Florovsky recalled with bitterness that in the emigration The Ways of Russian Theology “was met with stony silence,” Florovsky, “Introduction” to Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Sergei N. Trubetskoii: An Intellectual among the Intelligentsia in Prerevolutionary Russia (Boston, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1976), 5.
⁴ Florovsky, Letter to I. Ivask, May 28, 1963, Vestnik RKhD, 130 (1979), 45: “Parisian Russians have never regarded me as their ‘own,’ especially at the St Sergius [Institute] and on Rue Olivier
years after its publication, the discussion of the book in the émigré circles was muted. About half of the projected reviews were suppressed by the editors of the Russian-language émigré periodicals.5

BERDYAEV’S CRITIQUE

A prominent Russian philosopher who broke this conspiracy of near-silence was Berdyaev. As one of the “fathers” of the Renaissance, the leader who shaped the movement’s direction and character, Berdyaev took Florovsky’s attack on Russian theological modernism personally, as a betrayal of the Renaissance and as an expression of ingratitude. A master of literary duel, Berdyaev began his review of *The Ways of Russian Theology* with the following oft-quoted words: “Fr. Georges Florovsky’s book bears the wrong title, it should have been called ‘The Waywardness of Russian Theology’ or even, because of the broad scope of the book, ‘The Waywardness of Russian Thought’ or ‘The Waywardness of Russian Spiritual Culture.’” 6 Berdyaev continued: “Such a book could have been written only after the Russian cultural renaissance of the twentieth century, but there is no gratitude in it. It is dictated by hostility rather than love; it is dominated by negative feelings.” 7

As Berdyaev saw the matter, Florovsky was not entitled to his judgment that Russian religious thought was nothing but a series of non-starters, until he had articulated his own positive theological vision. Unfortunately, in *The Ways of Russian Theology*, the Byzantine theological norm remained a desideratum with little explicit theological content. This omission was partly remedied by

[de Serres; i.e. in the Center of the Russian Student Christian Movement];” cf. Florovsky, Letter to Roman Osipovich [Iakovson], November 29, 1976, GFP PUL, Box 12, f. 3: “Strangely, ‘Russians,’ especially in Paris, reject me as a retrograde, whereas foreigners regard me as a path-breaker.”

5 The published reviews included those of N. Berdyaev, M. Lot-Borodine, and L. Gillet. The reviews of G. P. Fedotov, P. M. Bitsilli, and N. O. Lossky were suppressed. In his letter to Iv. Ivask of May 28, 1963, Florovsky mentioned that the German and English translations of *The Ways of Russian Theology* were underway and added: “You [Ivask] are not taking into account that the book [*The Ways of Russian Theology*] was ignored on purpose. I know from the late Georgy Petrovich [Fedotov] that he was ‘prohibited’ to write a review, although the review was going to be quite poisonous. Miliukov refused to publish Bitsilli’s review intended for *The Russian Notes* (*Russkie Zapiski*), see N. Lossky, *Vospominaniia*, 228, and Letter to Florovsky, June 22, 1937, p. 1, GFP PUL, Box 15, f. 3. In his letter to Iv. Ivask of November 16, 1968, *Vestnik RKhD*, 130 (1979), 50, Florovsky states that “the late Fr. Sergei Chetverikov attacked *The Ways of Russian Theology* in a personal letter.”

6 Berdyaev, “*Ortodoksiia i chelovechnost’*,” *Put*, 53 (1937), 53.

7 Berdyaev, “*Ortodoksiia i chelovechnost’*,” 53.
Florovsky’s patrology lectures, which covered theological developments up to the eighth century.

Berdyaev was also not persuaded by Florovsky’s critique of Romanticism, noting that the book was shot through with Florovsky’s own irrepressibly Romantic longing for the lost Byzantine world. Florovsky opposed German Romanticism with the romanticized Christian Hellenism of his own making. In addition, Berdyaev charged that “Fr. G. Florovsky’s Hellenism obviously wants to absolutise the categories of Greek thought, to accept them as perennial. In this regard his position is like Thomism, which accepts the universality of Greek intellectualism.” But unlike Maritain and other Neothomists, Florovsky did not articulate the philosophical underpinnings of patristic theology. Instead, he simply identified patristic theology with Christian *philosophia perennis*. Berdyaev objected that the Church Fathers did not produce any such thing. Instead, the Fathers used the resources of Greek philosophy to express the truths of revelation. In a similar vein, contemporary Russian theologians were justified in using the tools of modern philosophy to articulate the content of Christian teaching.

Berdyaev also added, and this was one of the most devastating points of his critique, that Florovsky operated with an outdated understanding of the binary opposition between the East and West. Florovsky associated authentic Orthodoxy with the Christian “East,” whereas for Berdyaev, Bulgakov, and Zenkovsky, Orthodoxy was not something primarily Eastern, but rather universal. Besides, Florovsky tended to treat the “West” as a monolithic entity, whereas the historical reality of the “West” presented nothing of the sort. Instead, French, German, and English intellectual traditions constituted discordant and at times contradictory elements of an artificially constructed conglomerate called “western culture.” In addition, Florovsky conceived of the boundary between the East and the West as static and nearly impermeable, whereas these categories were flexible and dynamic, dealing with interpenetrating realities. Russia, whether real or imagined, could not be aligned solely

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8 Berdyaev, “Orthodoksiia i chelovechnost’,” 60.
9 In justice to Florovsky, it must be observed that in his later unpublished paper, “The Prospect of Christian Philosophy,” he provided a more nuanced account of the relationship between theology and philosophy, building on the work of Charles Renouvier, Étienne Gilson, and Jacques Maritain: see “The Prospect of Christian Philosophy,” GFP PUL, Box 5, f. “Reviews without date or place of publication.” The latest work quoted in the typescript dates to 1955. Florovsky persisted in identifying “patristic theology” with “a kind of Christian Philosophy” to the end of his life: see Florovsky, “Author’s Preface (1978),” *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*, xv.
10 Many leaders of the Renaissance shared Berdyaev’s view. The point was emphasized by A. Bely in his lecture delivered on February 12, 1917 at the meeting of the Religious-Philosophical Society of St Petersburg, entitled “Aleksandriiskii period i my v osveshchenii problemy ‘Vostok i Zapad’ (Chem byl ‘Zapad’ sobstvenno),” *RFO* III: 476–500. See also P. M. Bitsilli, “‘Vostok’ i ‘Zapad’ v istorii starago sveta,” *Na Putiakh* (Moscow/Berlin: Gelikon, 1922), 317–40;
with the “East” (which in Florovsky’s scheme was additionally reduced to the Byzantine East, to the exclusion of Asia). Instead, in Berdyaev’s judgment, Russia was its own peculiar intersection of both the “East” and “West.” Berdyaev’s treatment of the East–West dichotomy aligned him with the views of Solovyov and Bulgakov, whereas the general thrust of Florovsky’s pro-Eastern orientation revealed his roots in the Eurasian doctrine, even if the “East” for him stood for Byzantium, not for Asia.

Continuing his trenchant critique, Berdyaev observed that Florovsky saw the “western influences” everywhere in modern Russian thought, but in most cases refused to recognize the profoundly creative ways in which the western ideas, including those of German Idealism, were critically received by the thinkers of the Russian Religious Renaissance. It was not enough to simply diagnose Vladimir Solovyov and his followers with an overdose of German Idealism. To understand Solovyov, one had to appreciate his profound and resourceful critique of German Idealism, undertaken in the spirit of Orthodox Christianity. Broadly speaking, Berdyaev criticized Florovsky’s scheme from the standpoint of Christian universalism, understood in this case as a responsibility of Russian thought to make truth claims that were universally valid, not merely attractive identity markers that were distinctly “Eastern.”

Berdyaev also detected several significant blind spots in Florovsky’s presentation. Florovsky, Berdyaev urged, was so preoccupied with the question of doctrinal orthodoxy that moral questions, especially the demands of social justice, had escaped him. Florovsky’s Byzantinism blinded him to the distinctive problems of modernity, especially the significance of Christian humanism, which for Berdyaev meant personalism. Florovsky instead chastised humanism and dismissed it as temptation and delusion. It should be noted that in 1950–1951, Florovsky published a short essay, “The Social Problem in the Eastern Orthodox Church,” which indirectly addressed Berdyaev’s criticism concerning Florovsky’s alleged indifference vis-à-vis social issues.

Berdyaev charged that Florovsky’s historicism imprisoned him in the distant Byzantine past to such an extent that he was incapable of appreciating the religious meaning of more recent history. As a consequence, Florovsky treated only the Byzantine period as theologically important, underrating the religious significance of modernity. Berdyaev observed with characteristic incisiveness that in Florovsky’s historiography “[a]lmost the entire West fell out of the meaning of history.”


12 Florovsky, “The Social Problem in the Eastern Orthodox Church” (1950–1951), CW II: 131–42. In this essay, he also speaks of Dostoevsky, Khomiakov, and Solovyov in surprisingly positive terms as “loyal, in the main, to Tradition, even if on some particular points they would diverge from it” (p. 138).
Unfortunately, Florovsky did not publish a rejoinder to Berdyaev’s devastating criticism of *The Ways of Russian Theology*. Retrospectively, Florovsky dismissed Berdyaev’s review as a piece written in a “bad mood” in which “everything was Berdyaev’s imagination from the beginning to the end.” In the absence of Florovsky’s response, a question could be raised, was Berdyaev’s criticism fair? More specifically, is it in fact true that Florovsky saw no positive value in Orthodoxy’s encounter with western theology? Some of Florovsky’s statements could certainly be interpreted in this way. For example, in an unpublished paper, “A Brief Summary of Orthodox Teaching,” Florovsky wrote: “Although an encounter with the West was inevitable, in reality it was not so much an encounter, as an imitation, and often blind and indiscriminating imitation.” But was Florovsky prepared to envision, at least hypothetically, a different encounter that would not cause a pseudomorphosis of Orthodox theology? The concluding chapter of *The Ways of Russian Theology* addressed this matter in the following promissory note:

The future apologetic (*oblichitel’noe*) theology must offer a historiosophic explanation of the Western religious tragedy. This tragedy must be relived as our own, in order to accomplish its possible catharsis in the fullness of ecclesial experience, in the fullness of patristic heritage. In this new, sought-after Orthodox synthesis, the ages-old experience of the Catholic West must be integrated with greater diligence and sympathy than was done in our theology before. This does not mean that we should borrow or accept Roman doctrines or otherwise imitate Romanism.

One should not forget, of course, that the warning against the imitation of “Romanism” was issued in the context of a refugee community undergoing

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14 Florovsky, unpublished transcription of informal untitled talk, beginning with the words “... Actually about two major groups [ . . . ],” p. 5, GFP PUL, Box 5, f. “Reviews without date or place of publication.”
16 Russian adjective *oblichitel’noe* literally means “accusatory” or “condemning.” The expression *oblichitel’noe bogoslovie* was commonly used in the nineteenth century to refer to the discipline of Orthodox apologetics.
17 *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, 514–15. A similar point was earlier made by V. Zenkovsky in his essay “Idea pravoslavnoi kul’tury” (“The Idea of Orthodox Culture”): “We [Russian Orthodox] are Europeans by culture, but not only Europeans; we possess something different, our very own, not yet understood not only by the West, but perhaps even by ourselves, and it is precisely this peculiar side that attracts the West, this peculiarity gives us an opportunity not only to relive the tragedy of the West as our own tragedy, but also gives us strength to approach the problems of the West freely and independently,” in V. Zenkovsky (ed.), *Pravoslavie i kul’tura: sbornik religiozno-filosofskikh statei* (Berlin: Russkaia Kniga, 1923), 27.
assimilation, including attritions to Catholicism either through direct conversions or intermarriages with Catholics. One should also note a shift in Florovsky’s account of the elements that needed to be included in a new synthesis. Previously, the synthesis was concerned with the retrieval of the Greek Church Fathers. In this case, Florovsky intended by “synthesis” an integration of “ages-old experience of the Catholic West” with authentic Orthodox theology, after it had been purified of the western influences.

Florovsky also spoke against isolationism in his 1936 paper, “Western Influences in Russian Theology,” which contained the seminal ideas of The Ways of Russian Theology: “[I]ndependence from the West must not degenerate into an alienation which becomes simply opposed to the West. For a complete break with the West does not give a true and authentic liberation.”

Actually, an extreme form of isolationism, a “complete break with the West” would result in defining Orthodoxy as inherently non-Western. Florovsky realized that such an isolationist stance would produce an even greater dependence on the western theological “Other” as a theological nemesis of Eastern Orthodoxy. Fortunately, a “complete break with the West” was practically impossible, especially for those Orthodox intellectuals, who, like Florovsky, lived, thought, and wrote in the West, in the process having become entrenched in the modes of theological inquiry shared by their western contemporaries.

**EARLY FAVORABLE RECEPTION**

Russian émigré historian Myrrha Lot-Borodine, who turned to Eastern Orthodoxy under Florovsky’s influence, defended The Ways of Russian Theology in print against Berdyaev’s attack in her review published in The Contemporary Notes journal. She urged that Berdyaev had misread Florovsky’s critique of the western influences. According to Lot-Borodine, far from encouraging isolationism, “Florovsky laments that we have lost our own intellectual expression, that we have replaced it with the masks, that we have been tempted by the foreign things and failed to appreciate our own theological tradition.

As a Byzantinist, Lot-Borodine resonated with Florovsky’s program of a return to the “narrow way of patristic theology” with a view of offering a new creative synthesis of Orthodox theology. Among those who in the 1930s

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shared Florovsky’s hopes of the neopatristic renewal, one should also mention Vladimir Lossky and Basil Krivocheine (1900–1985). A student of Berdyaev and a Byzantinist by subsequent training, Krivocheine went on to become an Athonite monk and a Russian Orthodox bishop, producing studies of St Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas.\footnote{21} Krivocheine received *The Ways of Russian Theology* positively and was particularly impressed with Florovsky’s treatment of the nineteenth-century Russian thinkers.\footnote{22}

The support of Florovsky’s neopatristic program increased with the passing away of the generation of the “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance during and after WWII. In 1948, as a token of a growing appreciation of *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Anton Kartashev proposed to award Florovsky a doctorate from the St Sergius Institute on the basis of this work.\footnote{23} Florovsky, who had recently received an honorary doctorate from the University of St Andrews in Scotland and was preparing to sail for the United States, declined Kartashev’s offer. Florovsky’s response could not but provoke more resentment of the surviving Renaissance “fathers,” but inspired respect in the “grandchildren” of the Renaissance, such as Alexander Schmemann and John Meyendorff, both of whom were at the time beginning to work in a neopatristic key.

The two generations, the “fathers” and the “grandchildren” of the Renaissance, read *The Ways of Russian Theology* differently. The author intended the book to be a literary provocation. Many of the “fathers” and their followers found Florovsky’s condemnation of the Russian Religious Renaissance off-putting, perhaps even offensive. For his part, Florovsky interpreted this reaction as a form of intellectual retreat. “They realize,—he wrote to his wife a few months after the publication of *The Ways of Russian Theology*,—that victory is probably mine, that is, that their time has come to an end.”\footnote{24} Time was certainly on Florovsky’s side, although such a self-confident declaration of victory was a bit premature. Florovsky had the last word over the generation of the “fathers” of the Renaissance for the simple reason that by the middle of the century, one by one, they had departed for their eternal reward.


\footnote{22}{In his letter to Florovsky of July 29 (August 11), 1937, Krivocheine dwelt on *The Ways of Russian Theology* at length: “The book produces a vivid and strong general impression. It contains many excellent characterizations and the ‘portraits’ of both particular individuals and whole periods. Your depictions of metropolitan Peter Mohila, Feofan Prokopovich, St Tikhon of Zadonsk, Archbishop Fotii are especially lively. Your depiction of the time of Alexander I and masonry was especially thorough, objective, psychologically and theologically profound. [...] You dedicate relatively little space in your book to the exposition of the theological views [of different figures], at least you do not dwell on them as extensively as you do in your books on the early Fathers,” GFP PUL, Box 15, f. 3.}

\footnote{23}{A. V. Kartashev, Letter to Florovsky, March 5, 1948, GFP PUL, Box 17, f. 4.}

\footnote{24}{Florovsky, Letter to K. I. Florovskaia, September 13, 1937, p. 6, GFP PUL, Box 55, f. 7.}
The mid-1930s were an important turning point for Florovsky. Berdyaev’s scathing review of *The Ways of Russian Theology* had a chilling effect on their scholarly cooperation. From 1937, Florovsky stopped contributing to *The Way* and left the journal’s editorial board. Before the mid-1930s, most of Florovsky’s writings were originally composed in Russian. Afterwards, English became the primary language of his scholarly prose, so much so that towards the end of his scholarly career he could declare: “I can now express myself better in English [than in my native Russian].” Florovsky may be said to have undergone a peculiar form of linguistic self-alienation, not uncommon among the emigrants. It is ironic that a self-appointed guardian of the western corruption of Orthodox theology would succumb to the most fundamental form of westernization by choosing English over his mother tongue as his primary medium of scholarly expression. This was to some extent inevitable, as Florovsky expanded his scholarly activities and as his reputation in the non-Orthodox Christian circles grew. After the Sophia Affair, at the ecumenical gatherings, he tended to prefer the company of the non-Orthodox delegates to that of his colleagues at the St Sergius Institute in Paris. He used every opportunity to be away from the Institute, accepting offers to lecture at different churches and colleges in Britain, as well as making lengthy research trips to other countries of Europe. Towards the end of his life, he had thoroughly convinced himself that the rejection of his life’s work by the Russian émigré intellectuals, especially the Parisian literati, was complete and irreversible. While the mutual alienation was undeniable, Florovsky’s subsequent activities only deepened rather than healed their growing disagreements.

WWII was also an important testing ground. The responses to the Nazi onslaught on Europe in the Russian Diaspora ranged from collaboration to armed resistance. On the one side of the spectrum, Dmitry Merezhkovsky infamously hailed Nazi Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union as a crusade against Communism. Boris Vysheslavtsev even collaborated with the Germans. On the other side of the spectrum, Vladimir Lossky, despite his health problems, joined the French resistance. Vasily Zenkovsky was arrested by the Germans and spent fourteen months in a concentration camp. This

25 Berdyaev’s considerable correspondence with Florovsky, which lasted over 15 years, terminated in 1935 at the close of the Sophia Affair. Berdyaev’s letters (or, more precisely, brief notes) to Florovsky, written on small-size postcards, are in GFP PUL, Boxes 12–14.
26 Florovsky, “The Renewal of Orthodox Theology: Florensky, Bulgakov and the Others,” unpublished and undispatch typescript, p. 1, GFP PUL, Box 5, f. marked “**.” The paper also has a telling alternative title “On the Way to a Christian Philosophy.”
experience caused Zenkovsky to become a priest in 1942.\textsuperscript{29} He remained at the helm of the Russian Student Christian Movement until the end of his life in 1962. Nun Maria Skobtsova was actively involved in rescuing the Jews during the war. She was arrested by the Gestapo and tragically perished in a concentration camp, along with her co-workers Fr Alexander Klepinin and Ilia Fondaminsky. In 2004, they were recognized as saints by the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Florovsky’s conduct during this time of testing was neither saintly nor collaborationist. He spent the war years in Yugoslavia, teaching at the Russian secondary schools in Bela Crkva and Belgrade. During this period, he came into close contact with the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. He continued to maintained personal ties with the clergy of this Orthodox jurisdiction during his American period.

Unlike Florovsky, Bulgakov stayed in war-torn Paris, continuing to teach at the St Sergius Institute, despite the frequent shortages of food and heating during the German occupation.\textsuperscript{30} In July 1944, after a protracted battle with cancer, Fr Sergius departed this life. One of his devotees ascribed to him a near-death vision of the light of transfiguration. But his long-time associate Zenkovsky saw on Bulgakov’s face an expression of a protracted spiritual struggle, instead of light.\textsuperscript{31} Perhaps, there is a measure of truth in both accounts. Like his teacher Vladimir Solovyov, in the realm of the spirit, Bulgakov was a tireless wanderer and a profound enigma.

Berdyaev also did not leave France and boldly spoke out against the Nazis during the war. Having witnessed the victory of the Soviet Union over Germany, at the sunset of his life he looked with a renewed hope at the new socialist Russia. He died in 1948, at his writing desk, with a cigar in his hand and the New Testament open in front of him. The end of the war also marked the end of the generation of the Renaissance “fathers.” Russia has never known a more theologically prolific, more intellectually prodigious, and more tragic generation than theirs.


In a sense the Church itself is Hellenistic, is a Hellenistic formation,—or in other words, Hellenism is a standing category of the Christian existence.¹

The polemical underpinnings of Florovsky’s neopatristic theology come to the fore in his account of Christian Hellenism. In this account, Florovsky was particularly concerned to oppose the Protestant master narratives of the historical fall of the Church from a presumed original ideal. According to one influential theory, which found its prominent exponent in the German Lutheran historian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), the fatal influence of Greek philosophy was to blame for the intellectual fall of the early Church. The polemic against Harnack’s theory of Hellenization animated Florovsky’s idealization of Christian Hellenism.² Florovsky saw in Christian Hellenism a successful paradigm of the Christianization of culture and a perennial form of Christian philosophy. Ironically, Florovsky’s interpretation of Russian intellectual history had a methodological point of contact with the Protestant interpretation of early Church history, since both emphasized discontinuity and distortion and proceeded with a hermeneutic of distrust.

Florovsky, a value-neutral historical narrative was neither possible nor desirable. In the field of religious history, this meant that “the Church historian is inevitably also a theologian. He is bound to bring in his personal options and commitments.”³ For Florovsky, such a judgment often involved a polemical confrontation. He stressed that for many scholars church history was a theological battlefield:

The study of Church History was from the beginning a polemical endeavour, a field of theological confrontation, and this inherent theological bias has never been concealed or disavowed. The need for such a bias was simply taken for granted. The Protestants assumed that at a certain moment in history the Church had, as it were, “deviated” from the right path, or had lost the way altogether, or else had been “corrupted” by certain “accretions” of various sorts. Thus it [Protestantism] was intending to “reform” the Church, to recover or rediscover the lost road, and to “return” to the normative Antiquity, before the break or deviation. The break itself was differently located or identified, and at this point there was little agreement even within the Protestant camp itself. Was it the alleged “end of the Apostolic age,” or Nicea, or Chalcedon, or the Rise of Papacy, or something else? But it was commonly assumed: there was a break, a detour or deviation. Catholic historians denied the charge and the fact itself. They insisted on an unbroken continuity of history, on the identity of the Church, from the beginnings up to her present state.⁴

When Florovsky considered patristic theology, he tended to follow the “Catholic” approach, emphasizing consensus and continuity. Among the Catholic historians, Florovsky found particularly congenial the work of Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838).⁵

Patristic theology for Florovsky was an “organic” continuation of New Testament theology and Byzantine theology, in turn, “organically” followed upon patristic theology.⁶ While methodologically Florovsky objected to the application of the analogy of organic growth to historical change, in his study of the Church Fathers he had recourse to organicist categories, when he needed to emphasized continuity and unity of patristic thought. In his study of Russian religious thought, he instead followed a “Protestant” approach, if not in content, then in general methodological emphasis upon the

⁴ Florovsky, “The Patterns of Historical Interpretation,” unpublished typescript, pp. 2–3, GFP PUL, Box 4, f. year 1966. This paper is a response to Albert Outler’s seminar paper, dated March 1966. Florovsky’s response is different in content from “O tipakh istoricheskogo istolkovaniia” [“On the Types of Historical Interpretation”], Sbornik v chest’ na Vasil N. Zlatarski po sluchai na 30-godishnata mu nauchna i profesorska deinost’ (Sofia: Drzhavna pechatnitsa, 1925), 521–41.
discontinuities and rifts between the original ideal and the subsequent developments. As Kåre Johan Mjør showed, the negative organic categories of “fermentation,” “illness,” and “rootlessness” dominate Florovsky’s account of the “western influences” in the history of modern Russian theology.⁷

A similar theological judgment was expressed in the Protestant approach to the problem of the Hellenization of early Christianity. In a brief encyclopedia entry, “Hellenism and Hellenization” (1960), Florovsky wrote:

It has been often contended that Christianity has been, in fact, heavily contaminated by “Hellenistic accretions,” has been profoundly deformed by them, so that it needed a “reformation,” had to be “de-Hellenized” in order to be restored and restated in its original “biblical” purity. This contention was an integral part of that criticism of the Medieval system which has been initiated in the period of the Reformation. Originally this criticism was addressed to the “scholastic theology,” which was openly associated with Aristotelian philosophy. Very soon, however, the criticism has been extended to the whole course of Christian history and generalized. The Bible has been radically contrasted with “Philosophy,” and the use of “Philosophy” in theology has been disavowed. Faith has been opposed to “Doctrine,” Glaube versus Lehre. Accordingly, a definite scheme of Church history has been adopted, especially in the Protestant circles, according to which the Church underwent a radical change at a certain point in her history and had to be brought back to original shape and standard. The concept of “Urkirche” [“early Church”] has been elaborated and accepted as a criterion in theology and discipline. The whole history of the Church came to be viewed in the light of the “Abfallsidee” [“the idea of the fall”], and the essence of this “Abfall” [“fall” or “breaking away”] has been identified precisely as “Hellenisierung” [“Hellenization”]. The first systematic presentation of this view was given by Gottfried Arnold in his Unparteische Kirchen und Ketzergeschichte (Frankfurt a [m] Main, 1699–1700), preceded in 1696 by another book: Wahre Abbildung der Ersten-Christen im Glauben und Leben. This thesis has been variously developed by historians and theologians ever since. It was assuming different forms, with different degrees of radicalism. The very concept of “Dogma” came to be regarded as a “Hellenic accretion,” alien to the Bible and to the spirit of the Gospel. In modern times the thesis was radically restated by Adolf v[on] Harnack, who went so far as to deny all “Christian” character to the Eastern Church since the third century. For him she was no more than Hellenism in a deceiving disguise.⁸


⁸ Florovsky, “Hellenismus: Hellenisierung (des Christentums),” original English typescript, p. 1, GFP PUL, Box 4, f. year 1960. German translation published in Weltkirchenlexicon, ed. F. H. Littell and Hans H. Walz (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1960), cols 540–1; cf. “The Crisis of German Idealism (II),” CW XII: 39: “Contemporary Protestant rigorists resemble the young Ritschlian liberals remarkably in their attitude towards Christian history. For them, the history of Christianity is a history of decline, of fall. Historical Christianity is a compromise; to them the Hellenization of original Christianity seems like a kind of contamination of the original harsh simplicity.”
According to Harnack, Jesus’s original message consisted of proclaiming the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of men, and the infinite value of the human soul. This simple proclamation captured the time-transcending, cross-cultural, and non-dogmatic essence of Christianity. Over time, the Church distorted the original message by attempting to fit it into an alien Greek philosophical framework. In his magisterial History of Dogma (Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, 1898), Harnack construed the Hellenization of Christianity as a process of the gospel’s corruption by Greek metaphysics. Gnosticism was a product of what Harnack called “acute Hellenization.” The theology of the Church Fathers did not fare much better in comparison, since it too was a result of the more gradual, but equally damaging impact of Hellenization, which led to the distortion and obfuscation of the original gospel. On Harnack’s reading, the byproducts of Hellenization included the doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity, as well as crudely materialistic views of salvation and magical forms of worship. More generally, for Harnack, “the Orthodox Church is in her entire structure alien to the Gospel and represents a perversion of the Christian religion, its reduction to the level of pagan antiquity.”

The study of early Christianity provided the tools for identifying and purging heathen accretions from the mindset of his Christian contemporaries. For Harnack, the history of dogma spelled the end of dogma.

Westernization in Florovsky’s historical narrative of Russian religious thought played an explanatory function akin to that of Hellenization in Harnack’s account of the early church history. For Harnack, the original apostolic kerygma functioned as a supra-historical criterion of authentic Christian message, free of dogmatic accretions. For Florovsky, not only the apostolic kerygma, but also the teaching of the Fathers was a “permanent category of Christian faith, a constant and ultimate measure or criterion of right belief.” The Christian Hellenism of the Fathers was a trans-cultural norm, admitting of no translation into the categories of modern philosophy. Not only the content, but also the form of the patristic doctrine of God was an unchangeable philosophia perennis. The proposal that Russian theology must follow the perennial patristic philosophy was put forth in the nineteenth century by

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9 As Harnack’s Das Wesen des Christentums (1900) is commonly summarized; English translation by T. B. Saunders, What Is Christianity? (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1901), 229.
12 Florovsky, “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” 187.
Ivan Kireevsky in his essay “On the Necessity and Possibility of a new foundation of Philosophy” (1856). Florovsky recognized Kireevsky’s pioneering role and spoke of him with approval as issuing “a vigorous appeal for the creation of an Orthodox Philosophy, i.e. of a philosophy in the spirit of the Fathers of the Church.”

Kireevsky’s point was pursued with greater historical and philosophical rigor by Sergei Trubetskoy. Florovsky acknowledged that Trubetskoy was the first to argue against Harnack and to frame “the question of Hellenism as a Christian problem.” Following early Christian commentators, Trubetskoy held that Greek philosophy provided a suitable conceptual framework for the divine revelation. Florovsky’s concept of Christian Hellenism was influenced by Trubetskoy’s main contention that “the truth of Hellenism was sanctified and accepted by Christianity.”

Both Harnack and Florovsky focused largely on the intellectual element of Hellenistic culture. For Florovsky, quite simply, “Hellenism means philosophy.” This overconcentration on philosophy was for Florovsky a methodological stance, for he believed that philosophical views, whether explicit or less clearly articulated, determined the modes of piety and the styles of religious practice, whether pagan or Christian. Like Florovsky, Harnack was primarily interested in intellectual history.

Harnack interpreted the development of Christian doctrine in the post-apostolic period as the corruption of the original gospel by philosophy. Florovsky made a similar interpretative move by presenting the history of Russian religious thought as a story of interruptions and failures, a scandalous “poisoning” of Byzantine theology by Western philosophical influences. Like Harnack, who distinguished between acute and gradual Hellenization, Florovsky spoke of acute and less severe “Latinization” of Russian theology.

For Harnack, the corruption began to set in the second century, if not earlier. For Florovsky, modernity brought about the “western poisoning” of Russian Orthodox theology:

The Seventeenth century was a critical age in the history of Eastern theology. The teaching of theology has deviated at that time from the traditional patristic pattern and underwent influence from the West. Theological habits and schemes were borrowed from the West, rather eclectically, both from the late Roman Scholasticism of Post-Tridentine times and from the various theologies of the

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14 “Brief Notes on New Books,” p. 2, GFP PUL, Box 5, folder “Reviews without date or place of publication.”
16 Florovsky, “Introduction” to M. Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Sergei N. Trubetskoi, 7.
Reformation... It was indeed a sore and ambiguous *Pseudomorphosis* of Eastern theology, which is not yet overcome even in our own time [1959].

Both Harnack and Florovsky wrote their respective histories with a view of reforming the theology of their contemporaries. Florovsky turned to the Fathers in order to purify contemporary Orthodox theology from its Western distortions, to overcome the Western pseudomorphosis of Russian Orthodoxy. Harnack’s theological purpose in writing his *History of Dogma* was to purify German Lutheran theology at the turn of the twentieth century from pagan accretions. Harnack fought the Lutheran confessional orthodoxy of his time. Both Harnack and Florovsky saw a church historian as a prophetic figure who announced a new theological paradigm.

If Harnack was a determined anti-Hellenist, Florovsky was an unbending anti-sophiologist. For Harnack, any mixture of Christianity with Hellenism led to the distortion of the gospel. Harnack discounted even a possibility that Christianized Hellenistic thought could retain its continuity with the original message of Jesus. The inevitable implication of this position was that Hellenism simply could not be Christianized. Similarly to Harnack, Florovsky held that the encounter between Russian Orthodoxy and the West had led to the slavish imitation of the Western patterns of thought and dangerous distortions of Byzantine Christianity. An encounter with the West in which Eastern Orthodoxy would not be subject to a pseudomorphosis, while possible in principle, has not yet occurred.

**THE ENCHURCHING OF HELLENISM**

Despite the points of contact noted earlier, Florovsky’s Christian Hellenism was a binary opposite of Harnack’s Hellenization thesis. Harnack construed the Hellenization of Christianity as its co-option by pagan culture. The suspicion of the Church pervades Harnack’s hermeneutics. For Harnack, patristic testimony to the historical Jesus is unreliable, unless proven otherwise by historical investigation. Patristic theology had a wrong starting point, for it was, according to Harnack, a “‘ perverse proceeding to make Christology the fundamental substance of the Gospel.”

Florovsky could not disagree more. For him, Chalcedonian Christology was the abiding achievement of patristic

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19 Florovsky, “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” *ER*, 12 (1960), 191, ellipsis and emphasis in the original.


theology, expressing the very heart of Christian Hellenism. One could come to grips with the patristic project by acquiring the mind of the Church Fathers. The understanding of scripture and patristic writings is impossible without a hermeneutic of trust: the Church Fathers are reliable witnesses and guides to the contemporary understanding of the Gospel.22

In a programmatic essay, “Christianity and Civilization” (1952), published in the newly launched St Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly (as St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly was called until 1968), Florovsky expounded his notion of Christian Hellenism and identified his fundamental disagreement with Harnack in no uncertain terms:

It was a “New Hellenism,” but a Hellenism drastically christened and, as it were, “churchified.” It is still usual to suspect the Christian quality of this new synthesis. Was it not just an “acute Hellenization” of the “Biblical Christianity,” in which the whole novelty of the Revelation had been diluted and dissolved? Was not this new synthesis simply a disguised Paganism? This was precisely the considered opinion of Adolf Harnack. Now, in the light of an unbiased historical study, we can protest most strongly against this simplification. Was not that which the XIXth century historians used to describe as an “Hellenization of Christianity” rather a Conversion of Hellenism? And why should Hellenism not have been converted? The Christian reception of Hellenism was not just a servile absorption of an undigested heathen heritage. It was rather a conversion of the Hellenic mind and heart.23

Florovsky saw the Christianization of Hellenism as a paradigmatic case of pagan culture’s transformation by the Gospel. For him, the “main historical accomplishment of patristics is the enchurching of Hellenism.”24 As the reader would recall, the enchurching of culture was the central aim of the Russian Religious Renaissance. While other Renaissance leaders conceived the term “enchurching” rather broadly, for Florovsky, Russian theology had to re-appropriate the Christian Hellenism of the Church Fathers in order to accomplish this aim.

RE-HELLENIZATION OF ORTHODOXY

In December 1936, Florovsky provoked much discussion among Orthodox theologians gathered at the international Congress in Athens by issuing the following appeal:

22 A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 61.
In a sense the Church itself is Hellenistic, is a Hellenistic formation,—or in other words, Hellenism is a standing category of the Christian existence . . . And thus any theologian must pass an experience of a spiritual hellenisation (or re-hellenisation) . . . Many shortcomings in the modern developments of Orthodox Churches depend greatly upon the loss of this hellenistic spirit. And the creative postulate for the next future would be like this: let us be more Greek to be truly catholic, to be truly Orthodox.²⁵

Florovsky was not inclined to nuance this position over time. About twenty years later, in 1957, he addressed the Greek-American readers of The Orthodox Observer newspaper with a passionate appeal that was essentially a variation on the same theme: “The task of our time, in the Orthodox world, is to rebuild the Christian-Hellenic culture, not of the relics and memories of the past, but out of the perennial spirit of our Church, in which the values of culture were truly ‘christened.’ Let us be more ‘Hellenic’ in order that we may be truly Christian.”²⁶

Such provocative statements were bound to generate some misunderstanding. The conflation of “Hellenism” with “true Christianity” sounded like the policy of “Hellenocentricity” long-time associated with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. For the Eastern patriarchates, such a policy amounted to the suppression of the non-Hellenic forms of Christianity, a cultural chauvinism that had little to do with Christianization and much to do with Greek nationalism. Glubokovsky warned about the unseemly geo-political side of Christian Hellenism in “Christianity in Its Essence.” Florovsky was aware of the problem, but chose to disregard it. He was more concerned to refute Harnack and to overcome the ethnic isolationism of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.²⁷ In the context of the Russian Diaspora, Florovsky’s message of Christian Hellenism provided a trans-national identity marker.²⁸ In the context of Greece and the Greek Diaspora, Florovsky’s appeal for a re-Hellenization of Orthodoxy could encourage undue nationalist triumphalism, which he found objectionable.²⁹

²⁵ “Patristic and Modern Theology,” 242; emphasis in the original. For the historical circumstances of Florovsky’s participation in the congress, see A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 71.
²⁸ For a sympathetic reception of Florovsky’s re-Hellenization appeal, see J. Meyendorff, “Greek Philosophy and Christian Universality,” Catholicity and the Church (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983), 47.
²⁹ See Florovsky, “Problematika khristianskogo vossoedineniia” (January 1933), IBS, 171. For the critical analysis of such consequences, see Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “Hellenicity and Anti-westernism in the Greek Theological Generation of the 60s,” unpublished Ph. D. thesis, School of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2008, esp. 173–205, summarized in French in
Aside from disturbing geo-political implications, if “Hellenism is a standing category of the Christian existence,” what is one to make of the existence of other historical expressions of Christianity, for example, the one represented by the Latin Fathers? Florovsky gave a baffling answer: “What is the difference [between the East and the West]? Here I, first of all, offer one of my ‘heresies.’ I believe that the early period of Christian theology, sometimes described as Patristic, was purely and thoroughly Hellenic, Hellenistic, Greek, and that Latin patristics [had] never existed.”

Making an allowance for rhetorical exaggeration, we may interpret what Florovsky privately calls his “heresy” in light of what he said in his 1948 public address:

For several centuries Christendom has been united in theology, under the uncontested lead of the Greek Fathers and masters. Western theology up to St. Augustine was basically Greek, though in Latin dress: St. Hilary, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, all of them were but interpreters of the Greek tradition, and even St. Augustine himself was deeply Hellenistic in mind. Tertullian also fits easily into the same Hellenistic frame.

Florovsky’s predilection for sweeping generalizations, his tendency to reduce the contributions of prominent theologians to “influences,” which was so prominent in *The Ways of Russian Theology*, was also evinced by his attempt to fit the Latin Fathers “into the same Hellenistic frame.” As far as Florovsky was concerned, “Augustine was really an Eastern Father.”

In *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth—Eighth Centuries*, he went so far as to suggest that the Tome of the pope Leo, written in Latin and endorsed by the Council of Chalcedon, had failed to gain the universal acceptance of the Eastern churches, for “the pope wrote in the language of the western theological tradition and did not even raise the question of how to translate his Tome into Greek, how to express the orthodox truth in the categories of Greek tradition,” which alone could claim universal validity.

Because of this failure of translation into the Greek categories, the Tome proved ambiguous, failing to secure the doctrinal unity of the Church. Florovsky’s interpretation of this historical incident betrayed the underlying conviction that such a theological translation into Greek categories was a prerequisite for reaching a theological consensus.


30 “Quest for Christian Unity: The Challenge of Disunity” (1955), GFP PUL, Box 3, f. 11.


In the West, the dominance of Christian Hellenism found two principal expressions: the influence of Hellenistic culture upon the Latin Fathers and the influence of the Greek and Byzantine Fathers on the Medieval Latin authors. As Florovsky explained in one of his unpublished works:

St Augustine and even St Jerome were no less Hellenistic than St Gregory of Nyssa and St Chrysostom. And St Augustine introduced Neoplatonism into Western theology. Pseudo-Dionysios was influential in the West no less than in the East, from Hilduin up to Nicolas of Cusa. And St John of Damascus was an authority both for the Byzantine Middle Ages and for Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. Thomism itself is Hellenistic. In England, the Caroline divines were obviously Hellenistic in tendency. And one of the greatest contributions of the Tractarian Movement was just this move back to the Greek Fathers.  

Florovsky’s extensive use of Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, Augustine, Vincent of Lérins, as well as other Latin patristic authors was predicated on the tacit assumption that they were also, broadly speaking, “Christian Hellenists.” Such a characterization was to some extent justified. For example, it would be quite anachronistic to conceive of the Greek and Latin cultures as completely isolated in late antiquity. To various degrees, most Latin authors were indeed Hellenized, just as most Greek-speaking authors would politically self-identify as “Romans” both in the late antique and Byzantine periods. Augustine, for example, was profoundly influenced by later Platonism and those Greek Fathers, whose works were available in Latin translations. However, it would not do justice to Augustine’s creative genius, to reduce his theological contribution to Hellenistic influences alone. Besides, such naïve reductionism was reminiscent of the nineteenth-century Hellenophiles, who Romanticized Greece’s struggle for political independence and obligingly credited most achievements of the western civilization to the inspiration of ancient Greece. 

After his first visit to Greece in 1936, Florovsky found himself overwhelmed by similar sentiments.

For a twentieth-century Russian Orthodox intellectual exiled in the West, to claim that “Romano-Germanic” culture derived from the medieval and ancient Latin Christian culture, which in turn mediated Hellenistic Christian

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34 Florovsky, *In Ligno Crucis: The Patristic Doctrine of the Atonement* (1936–39), First draft of the introduction, p. 4 (pagination absent in the original), GFP PUL, Box 2, f. 1. Later in the same document, p. 6, he adds that “Medieval Scholasticism was perhaps overburdened with unformed philosophy.”

35 Boris Gasparov, “Russian Greece, Russian Rome (Two Classical Paradigms of Russian Culture in the Late 18th Century),” in *Twenty-Five Year Commemoration to the Life of Georges Florovsky* (1893–1979) (New York: Semenenko Foundation, 2005), 57–86, at 77, quotes the following statement of P. A. Katenin (1792–1853): “The Greeks were the most perfect of nations; it naturally follows from this that their sculpture and poetry were superior […] The Romans were far from possessing the inherent talent and ability for the arts with which nature blessed the Greeks […] The whole of Latin literature consists of imitations.”

culture (the basis of the Orthodox civilization), was to compensate rhetorically for the ongoing and inevitable assimilation to the western habits of life and patterns of thought in the dispersion. While the historical merits of this cultural morphology were dubious, Florovsky was engaging in what could be called “compensatory Christian Hellenism,” a literary construct that functioned similar to Eurasian “compensatory nationalism.” Florovsky made a comparable reductionist move in *The Ways of Russian Theology*, when he collapsed all peculiarities of the Ukrainian theological tradition into the Russian tradition, which in turn also lost itself in slavishly imitating the West.

Florovsky’s cultural morphology could also be seen as a counterbalance to the historiographic speculations of his contemporary, Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975). This prominent British historian proposed that the Christian West was a separate “intelligible world,” which could be understood entirely on its own terms, independently from the Christian East. Questioning this assumption, Florovsky postulated instead that the theology of the Greek Fathers was a common foundation both for the East and for the West. On this reading, there was a fundamental asymmetry between the East and the West: the Christian patristic East possessed a degree of self-sufficiency and universality that could not be equally claimed by the West. Florovsky held that the theology of the Latin Fathers in the final analysis derived from that of the Greek Fathers. In contrast, all forms of Western theology after the Great Schism of 1054 represented various deviations from the Greek patristic norm. It followed that all Western theologies were culture-bound; Christian Hellenism alone had a trans-cultural significance.

Florovsky’s peculiar contention that Latin patristic tradition (up to Augustine) is a species of Christian Hellenism explains why his lectures on patristics at the St Sergius Institute did not contain separate chapters discussing the distinctive contributions of the Latin Fathers. As the reader will recall, the two volumes of his lectures were originally published in Russian under the titles *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century* and *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth—Eighth Centuries*. Although Bulgakov invited Florovsky to teach general introductory courses in patristics, Florovsky himself chose to focus primarily on the Greek Fathers. Such a move was a departure from the

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37 See Florovsky’s critique of A. Toynbee in “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” 198.
39 For the discussion of Cyprian’s and Augustine’s ecclesiology, see Florovsky, “The Doctrine of the Church and the Ecumenical Problem,” *ER, 2* (1950), 152–61.
40 The consideration of the early Latin Church Fathers was added to the English edition of Florovsky’s patrology and published in CW VIII under a misleading title, *The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century*. 
pre-revolutionary curriculum of the Orthodox seminaries, where the study of the Latin Church Fathers had its modest, yet clearly delineated place. By prioritizing the patristic Greek “East” and virtually excluding the Western Fathers from his lectures at the St Sergius Institute, Florovsky created his own version of the Eurasian “exodus to the East.”

Florovsky’s preference for the Greek Fathers might also be regarded as a matter of expedience in his Parisian milieu, where there was no dearth of capable interpreters of the Western Fathers, whereas the theological interest in the Eastern Fathers was only beginning to gain its momentum. It should be recalled that Florovsky started teaching at the St Sergius Institute in 1926, about a decade before the first soundings of the French ressourcement movement, dedicated to the recovery of the Eastern patristic sources.

It should be added that in Florovsky’s patrology, the non-Greek Eastern theologians fared no better than their Latin counterparts. He postponed the coverage of the Syriac patristic authors until the last and shortest chapter of The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century. His treatment of the Syriac authors was often condescending and dismissive. For example, according to Florovsky, Ephraem the Syrian had a “lyrical talent,” but was “least of all a thinker.” The Syriac Father’s theological talent was disserved by the philosophical limitations of his language. According to Florovsky, Ephraem “had many bold images, but few original and bold ideas.”

The poetic form of Ephraem’s theology “was not conducive to logical clarity.” Such statement told little about Ephraem and much about Florovsky’s inability to appreciate the value and originality of theology that did not fit into the “Hellenistic frame.” While it would be anachronistic to judge Florovsky’s interpretation by the standards of twenty-first century Syriac scholarship, his cursory treatment of the Syrian Fathers exposes the limitations of the totalizing narrative of Christian Hellenism.

Florovsky cherished his exclusive attachment to Christian Hellenism to the end of his life. In his “Theological Will,” he summed up his guiding convictions as follows:

Salvation has come “from the Jews,” and has been propagated in the world in Greek idiom. Indeed, to be Christian means to be Greek, since our basic authority is forever a Greek book, the New Testament. Christian message has been forever

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41 Florovsky, Vostochnye ottsy IV veka, 228 and 233. The original draft of this chapter, preserved in GFP PUL, Box 11 (no folder number), was worded even more strongly, scolding the purported religious isolationism of the “Far East.”

42 Florovsky, Vostochnye ottsy IV veka, 230.

formulated in Greek categories. This was in no sense a blunt reception of Hellenism as such, but a dissection of Hellenism. The old had to die, but the new was still Greek—the Christian Hellenism of our dogmatics, from the New Testament to St. Gregory Palamas, nay, to our own time. I am personally resolved to defend this thesis, and on two different fronts: against the belated revival of Hebraism and against all attempts to reformulate dogmas in categories of modern philosophies, whether German, Danish, or French (Hegel, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Bergson, Teillard de Chardin) and of alleged Slavic mentality.  

Florovsky’s disavowal of the “belated revival of ‘Hebraism’” did not amount to a wholesale denial of the Hebraic element of revelation. He acknowledged a temporal importance of the ancient Judaism. But he also held that the covenant with Israel was superseded by the Church: “The Old Testament no longer belongs to the Jews. It belongs to the Church alone.”  

The NT authors translated the Jewish message into the Greek categories, which admitted of no further translation. In Florovsky’s own words, “the categories of sacred Hebraism lose their independent significance. Any attempt to distinguish or separate them from the wholeness of Christian synthesis produces only a relapse to Judaism. The truth of ‘Hebraism’ is already incorporated in the Hellenistic synthesis.”  

The composition of the NT in Greek was providential for the spread of the gospel in the Roman Empire. For Florovsky, “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 this.”  

Once transmitted in Hellenistic form, the Jewish matrix of the NT, as well as the non-Hellenistic forms of Christianity could have no abiding theological import. In the context of the clouds of fascism gathering over Europe, Florovsky’s version of supersessionism was both historically questionable and morally dangerous. While Florovsky could not be implicated in narrow-minded nationalism or anti-Semitism, his deafness to the socio-political repercussions of his theological declarations was astonishing.

\[\text{Footnotes:}\]

44 Florovsky, “Theological Will,” in A. Blaine, Georges Florovsky, 155; cf. Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogosloviia, 509.
48 “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology,” CW III: 32.
49 Florovsky, “The Crisis of German Idealism (II),” CW XII: 38.
50 As a young boy, Florovsky made many friends among Odessa’s Jewish population: see A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 178 n. 13.
As far as the study of the Bible was concerned, Florovsky simply glossed over most of the issues raised by modern biblical criticism, including the “revival of Hebraism,” dismissing them as a failure to read the Bible with the Church. More generally, a return to the Fathers did little to stimulate a robust Orthodox engagement with modern biblical criticism. As a result, the work of assessing the achievements of modern biblical hermeneutics has only begun in contemporary Orthodox scholarship.

The problematic implications of absolutizing Christian Hellenism did not escape the attention of Florovsky’s Anglican friends. Writing to Florovsky in the middle of the Sophia Affair, Arthur Dobbie-Bateman cautioned him:

Your exaltation of Patristics and Christian Hellenism seems to me to be somewhat too simple and naïve—forgive me this criticism. But does not Christian Hellenism contain a large and essential component of Christian Hebraism? And, if the patristic age is given this exclusive importance, does that not condemn all subsequent ages in the Church and in fact deny the very historicity which you value? If it is a fault of some that they minimise the Fathers and follow German philosophers, are you not open to the retort that your devotion to the Fathers leaves you blind to everything else?

Dobbie-Bateman drew attention to an unsettling implication of Florovsky’s theological historiography, which also did not escape Berdyaev: to accord to the patristic period an exclusive normative significance is to deny theological import to later history, especially to modernity.

Florovsky could respond that unlike the western historians, he left the chronological limits of the “age of the Fathers” open: “After all, it does not make much difference whether we restrict the normative authority of the Church to one century, or to five, or to eight. There should be no restriction at all.” He claimed instead that the “age of the Fathers” continued, that the Fathers were as much the Church’s past as they were her future. He also cautioned against privileging a particular “golden age” of Church history. Contrary to the judgment of some western historians, the original deposit of patristic theology was not distorted or ossified in the Byzantine period. Florovsky’s patristics lectures could be viewed as an appeal to Byzantium’s cultured despisers to rethink their narrative of the fall and corruption of the Church.

51 One possible exception is his essay “Has Jesus Ever Lived?” (“Zhil li Khristos,” 1929, VK, 365–401), which was a response to the pseudo-scholarship which denied the historical existence of Jesus altogether. It would be an exaggeration to call Florovsky’s piece of popular apologetics an exercise in historical criticism.
52 A. F. Dobbie-Bateman, Letter to G. Florovsky, November 10, 1935, p. 2, GFP PUL, Box 14, f. 3; emphasis in the original.
But while denying the historiography of decay and postulating a deep continuity between the Greek patristic and Byzantine periods, Florovsky also emphasized the rift between the pre-modern periods just mentioned and modernity. Modern theology and indeed much of western medieval theology, for Florovsky stood under the sign of the “fall” from the Byzantine theological ideal. Modern Orthodoxy could rediscover its true identity by returning to the perennial Christian philosophy of the Church Fathers.

CHRISTIAN HELLENISM AS PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS

The heart of Christian Hellenism was not a mindless glorification of Hellas’ past, but the Church’s ongoing experience and proclamation of Christ. For Florovsky, Christian Hellenism was a paradigm for a comprehensive conversion of intellectual culture. Such a conversion was nothing less than a “dissection of Hellenism by the sword of the Word, of the Christian Revelation.”\(^{55}\)

Drawing on Ivan Kireevsky and Sergei Trubetsky, Florovsky maintained that in the process of undertaking such a conversion, the Church Fathers created a “new philosophy,”\(^ {56}\) which was quite distinct from anything that pagan Hellenistic philosophers had to offer. Florovsky put the matter categorically: “Christian dogma itself is the only true philosophical system.”\(^ {57}\) In this system, the ahistorical cosmism of the Greeks gave way to the mighty acts of God in history; the conception of divinized eternal cosmos was replaced with the intuition of the creature’s time-bound contingency and dependence upon God; the metaphysical primacy of the universal over individual was challenged by Christianity’s emphasis upon the uniqueness of persons; the deterministic accounts of divine and human agency were rejected in favor of safeguarding divine freedom and human cooperation with divine grace.\(^ {58}\)

For Florovsky, the foundations of Christian Hellenism—historical revelation, intuition of creaturehood, personalism, and indeterminism—were permanently valid. As such, they constituted Christian philosophia perennis.\(^ {59}\)

The concept of “perennial philosophy” appears to have been introduced by Marcilio Ficino (1433–1499), who intended by this expression an eclectic mix of classical philosophical sources, including Aristotelianism and late


\(^ {56}\) “Bogoslovskie otryvki,” IBS, 130; “Patristics and Modern Theology,” 241.

\(^ {57}\) The Byzantine Fathers of the Fifth Century, CW VIII: 19.


\(^ {59}\) “Bogoslovskie otryvki,” IBS, 130–1.
Platonism. The Renaissance Humanists, Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), and the twentieth-century Neothomists had recourse to the idea of perennial philosophy, although they meant different things. For example, for the Neothomists, the theological synthesis of Thomas Aquinas was the perennial philosophy. Florovsky, on the contrary, saw western scholastic theology as an instance of insufficiently Christianized Hellenism, due to the scholastics’ overindulgence in the philosophy of Aristotle. The same charge applied, mutatis mutandis to the attempt of Russian religious philosophers to recast Christian doctrine in the categories of German Idealism, which for Florovsky was a relapse into pre-Christian Hellenism. As I discussed in chapter 8, for Florovsky, Russian sophiology mirrored the philosophical assumptions of pagan Hellenism—cosmism, pantheism, impersonalism, and determinism. Hence, the deeper problem with modern Russian theology was not its westernization per se, but the fact that by adopting western philosophies the Russian religious thinkers accepted pagan Hellenism that conflicted with the Christian Hellenism of the Church Fathers.

As a general hermeneutical rule, Florovsky proposed that instead of translating patristic theological categories into the modern ones, contemporary Orthodox theologians would do better if they recast contemporary theological issues in patristic terms instead. For example, Florovsky classified as “new Nestorianism” the liberal Protestant tendency to see in Christ “a human redeemer, only assisted by God.” In contrast, the Protestant Neo-Orthodoxy’s tendency to regard human persons as merely passive recipients of divine revelation, in Florovsky’s judgment, amounted to “new Monophysitism.” Similarly, the metaphysical speculations of the Russian sophiologists were a species of Gnosticism. Such an extrapolation of the ancient Christian heresies to contemporary theological problems was intended to demonstrate that the writings of the Church Fathers were “more relevant to the troubles and problems of [our] own time than the production of modern theologians.” Such extrapolations of ancient heresies to cover modern precedents were a common practice for the Renaissance theologians. For example, the views of decadent intelligentsia were sometimes compared to those of the ancient Gnostics. Florovsky took this comparison to be generally valid. In

62 Florovsky, “The Lost Scriptural Mind” (1951), CW I: 14; emphasis in the original.
The Tragedy of Philosophy, Bulgakov ingeniously reduced the nineteenth-century philosophical systems to different trinitarian heresies.** For Florovsky, Bulgakov’s own system was a permutation of Origenism. In general, Florovsky’s neopatristic theology facilitated such historical extrapolations.

To what extent was Florovsky’s vision of Christian Hellenism historically informed by the thought of the Church Fathers? It must be stressed that already in “The Metaphysical Presuppositions of Utopianism,” begun in 1923, prior to any sustained study of patristics, Florovsky argued that cosmism and monism, characteristic of utopian schemes, compromised personhood and did not do justice to the concrete and free human agency in history.** The subtext of this article is an indirect critique of Solovyov’s ontology of all-unity, against which Florovsky revolted in the mid-1920s, after his study of Herzen, rather than the Church Fathers. As Florovsky admitted himself, the central categories in which he subsequently cast Christian Hellenism went back to Charles Renouvier’s Essai d’une classification du doctrine philologique (1886), a work that engaged modern philosophy, rather than patristics.**

The concept of Christian Hellenism would have been in the back of Florovsky’s mind since reading S. N. Trubetskoy and N. N. Glubokovsky in Odessa. However, Florovsky’s later idealization of Christian Hellenism was more directly provoked by Harnack’s Hellenization thesis and Russian sophiology, than by the scholarly study of the patristic period. It is revealing that in the original Russian edition of his patristics lectures, he made only a single passing reference to Christian Hellenism, while discussing Julian the Apostate’s failure to restore Roman religion. This failure, according to Florovsky, “signaled the demise of pagan Hellenism. The period of Christian Hellenism began—the period when the attempts were made to build a Christian culture as a system.”** Remarkably, nowhere else in his published lectures on the Church Fathers did he make another reference to Christian Hellenism, treating the problem of the interaction of theology and Greek philosophy in an ad hoc manner.

In fact, Florovsky made plans for a “serious study of Hellenism” only after he had published his two-volume patrology and had completed The Ways of Russian Theology.** For this purpose, he planned to write a third volume, focusing on the Byzantine authors of the ninth through fifteenth centuries. In

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67 S. Bulgakov, Tragediia filosofii (Moscow: Nauka, 1993; first published in German translation in 1920).
69 Florovsky, “The Renewal of Orthodox Theology: Florensks, Bulgakov and the Others,” unpublished typescript, pp. 10–11, GFP PUL, Box 5, folder marked “*”.
70 Florovsky, Vizantiiskie ottsy V–VIII vekov, 5.
August 1937, Florovsky wrote to his wife: “If we go to Athens, I think of concentrating again on the Church Fathers and of trying to write the last volume of my patrology focusing on the Byzantine period, from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries. The museums and libraries of Athens provide a very suitable place for such an undertaking. Besides, this is a little-researched period and such a book is needed not only in Russian, but also in general.”\textsuperscript{72}

This project apparently did not proceed beyond a draft of the chapter on Photius of Constantinople (c. 810–893).\textsuperscript{73} As a result, Florovsky did not undertake systematic studies of the Byzantine Fathers after Photius, such as, for example, Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas. In the Orthodox scholarship, the study of Symeon the New Theologian was advanced by Florovsky’s friend Basil Krivocheine and a generation later by Alexander Golitzin. The resurgence of interest in Gregory Palamas in modern Orthodox theology is due to the works of Vladimir Lossky, John Meyendorff, John Romanides, Christos Yannaras, and others. While Florovsky knew these works and held them in high esteem, it is important to emphasize that Neo-Palamism was not a vital part of his version of Christian Hellenism.

CONCLUSION

Harnack’s and Florovsky’s interpretations of the historical function of Hellenism represent two limiting cases. If Harnack demonized the Hellenization of Christianity, Florovsky idealized the Christianization of Hellenism. If Harnack advocated a de-Hellenization of Protestant theology, Florovsky, on the contrary, proposed a re-Hellenization of Orthodoxy. Both positions could be viewed as one-sided extremes, reflecting Florovsky’s Eastern Orthodox and Harnack’s Liberal Protestant sensibilities.

Florovsky’s cultural morphology of pagan and Christian Hellenisms has many problems. He may have been a relentless critic of German Idealism, but he surely shared the Idealist predilection for large-scale typologies. The assumption that diverse modes of religious belief and observance in the Hellenistic period could be boiled down to a metaphysically monolithic worldview is historically indefensible. To postulate, as Florovsky does, a common “Hellenistic mind” and contrast it with the equally unified “patristic mind” is to violate the methodological constraints of his own historical singularism.

\textsuperscript{72} Florovsky, Letter to K. I. Florovskaia, August 1, 1937, GFP PUL, Box 55, f. 7; cf. Letter to K. I. Florovskaia, September 14, 1937, GFP PUL, Box 55, f. 7.

\textsuperscript{73} See Florovsky, “2. Literaturnaia deiat’nost’,” manuscript containing 17 pages of the chapter on Photius of Constantinople, GFP PUL, Box 7, no folder number. In his “Theological Will,” Florovsky mentions that he projected five volumes on the Church Fathers, but published only two.
Florovsky’s construction of Christian Hellenism remains a contested, yet indispensable reference point for contemporary Orthodox theology. The main building blocks of the perennial philosophy of Christian Hellenism—historicism, creaturehood, personalism, and indeterminism—suggested themselves to Florovsky’s mind well before he made an in-depth historical investigation of patristic thought. Did Florovsky merely read these ideas back into the patristic authorities? Undoubtedly, there was an element of eisegesis in his reading of the Fathers. Both the polemical thrust (anti-Idealist, anti-Solovyovian, anti-Sophiological, anti-Harnackian) and the distinctly modern cast of his exposition of Christian Hellenism were strong and undeniable. Florovsky’s theological genius lay precisely in his ability to connect the patristic and modern sources in a mutually informing manner. While engaging the Church Fathers, he was reaching after a “new Christian synthesis,” a constructive vision that would enable contemporary Orthodox theology to reconnect with its patristic and Byzantine roots. Further exploration of the methodological foundations and the theological contours of this new synthesis will occupy us next.

74 In June 2010, St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary organized a conference on “Orthodoxy and Hellenism.” It is a measure of Florovsky’s continuing influence that the conference organizers took as a starting point Florovsky’s dictum that Hellenism “is a standing category of Christian existence.” Select papers were published in SVTQ 54/3–4 (2010). For the critique of Florovsky, see B. Gallaher, “‘Waiting for the Barbarians’: Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky,” Modern Theology, 27 (2011), 659–91; P. Gavrilyuk, “Harnack’s Hellenized Christianity or Florovsky’s ‘Sacred Hellenism’: Questioning Two Metanarratives of Early Christian Engagement with Late Antique Culture,” St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 54/3–4 (2010), 323–44.

75 For a similar list, see A. V. Cherniaev, G. V. Florovskii kak filosof i istorik russkoi mysli, 88.
Ecclesiological and Epistemological Contours of Neopatristic Theology

The fullness of knowledge is originally given in the experience and consciousness of the Church and only needs to be recognized as such.¹

Profound epistemological insights are scattered through Florovsky’s considerable literary corpus. Florovsky’s “rhapsodic” approach to methodological issues makes the task of systematizing his ideas quite difficult. This chapter explores Florovsky’s treatment of the theological norms and sources, in particular, revelation, experience, scripture, and tradition. Central to Florovsky’s account of theological knowledge is a category of “ecclesial experience.” His trademark was an emphasis on the transformation of the knower and on the formative function of the Church in the process of coming to know God. Florovsky’s theory of theological knowledge is a peculiar version of social epistemology, grounded in his ecclesiology.

DIVINE REVELATION AND ECCLESIAL EXPERIENCE

The seminal essays for understanding the sources and norms of Florovsky’s historical theology are “The Father’s House” (1926) and “Theological Fragments” (1931). According to Florovsky, the knowledge of God is communicated in divine revelation, which is “the source and the criterion of the Christian Truth.”² Revelation consists of divine actions and words in history. While transcending history, the divine disclosure is constitutive of the history of salvation.³ For Florovsky, the starting point of any theological investigation

¹ Florovsky, “Problematika khristianskogo vossoedineniia,” IBS, 175; emphasis in the original.
must be a historical record of divine acts, rather than abstract speculation about the God–world relationship. Florovsky stressed the historical character of revelation to such an extent that other modes of divine self-disclosure, such as general revelation through nature, received very little attention in his writings. He criticized Russian religious philosophy, especially sophiology, for prioritizing speculative cosmology over historical revelation. His rejection of natural theology seems to have been motivated by his polemics against German Idealism and sophiology. He also opposed those hermeneutical strategies that de-historicized the content of revelation, such as ancient allegorical interpretation, or Bultmanian demythologization.

As a general principle, Florovsky rejected the speculation regarding continuing public historical revelation. In line with the manuals of Orthodox theology, he maintained that “revelation is completed with the founding of the Church and with the Holy Spirit’s descent into the world.” The only proviso that he reasonably allowed was the ultimate divine disclosure in the eschaton. He associated the concept of a future revelation with the promoters of the “Third Covenant” theology, such as Merezhkovsky and Ternavtsev. Florovsky looked with a mixture of dread and disgust upon the “extra-ecclesial mysticism” that so mesmerized the writers and artists of the Silver Age.

Florovsky maintained that the Church is the only legitimate recipient and interpreter of divine revelation. He expresses this conviction in no uncertain terms: “Revelation is given, and is accessible, only in the Church; that is, only through life in the Church, through a living and actual belonging to the mystical organism of the Body of Christ.” In most cases, Florovsky leaves the referent of the “Church” undefined, although in this context he treats the term expansively, as including the ancient Israel. He assumes, although rarely states his assumption explicitly, that the historical referent of the “Church” is continuous with the Greek patristic, Byzantine, and contemporary Eastern Orthodox Church. The Church receives, articulates, preserves, transmits, defends, and upholds the truth of divine revelation. Florovsky associates these activities at different points with what he calls “ecclesial experience” or “ecclesial life.”

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8 Revelation, Philosophy and Theology,” CW III: 36.
Florovsky’s earliest engagement of the category of experience was occasioned by his reading of Pavel Florensky. In the beginning of his major theological work, The Pillar and Ground of the Truth (1914), Florensky wrote: “‘Living religious experience as the only legitimate way of understanding dogmas’—this is how I would express the general aspiration of my book.”9 In his ecclesiological debut “The Father’s House,” Florovsky drew on Florensky by asserting that “all Christian teaching is a description of ecclesial experience.”10 More precisely, “all fullness of knowledge is originally given in the experience and consciousness of the Church and only needs to be recognized as such.”11 To theologize is to draw on the reservoir of revealed knowledge received by the Church.

Following Khomiakov, Florovsky held that in her catholic fullness the Church is infallible: “The Church alone possesses the force and the capacity for true and catholic synthesis. Therein lies her potestas magisterii, the gift and unction of infallibility.”12 Florovsky located infallibility in the Church’s ability to offer a catholic synthesis based on the shared experience of believers throughout the ages. He contrasted the “living experience of the Church” with the “subjective religious experience” and “solitary mystical consciousness,” which could not be reliable sources of Church doctrine.13

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

The “living experience of the Church,” as Florovsky uses the expression, is not a separate source of the knowledge of God, but rather a set of historical practices that reliably mediate the content of divine revelation, enshrined in scripture and tradition. Scripture is a fruit of the Church’s reception of divine revelation. As such, the Church holds a chronological, hermeneutical, and epistemological priority over scripture. Chronologically, the Gospels are

9 Florensky, Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny, vol. I: 3. For the discussion of this passage, see Avril Pyman, Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius (London: Continuum, 2010), 72.
11 Florovsky, “Problematika khristianskogo vossoedineniia,” IBS, 175; emphasis in the original. In Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 274, he credited a similar point to A. Khomiakov.
“records of church experience and faith.” Florovsky was especially fond of repeating Tertullian’s assertion in *De praescriptione hereticorum* that outside the Church there could be no scripture, properly speaking. The biblical teaching could be correctly understood, interpreted, and transmitted only within the community that brought it about, namely, the Church. Hermeneutically, scripture is a part of the tradition of the Church. As such, the tradition is not a second source of Christian doctrine, the authority of which could be variously calibrated in relation to scripture. The core of the apostolic tradition is summarized in the ancient rules of faith, which serve as a basis for the ancient Christian baptismal instruction and preaching. Drawing on the work of a distinguished Anglican historical theologian, Henry Ernest William Turner (1907–1995), Florovsky held that the rule of faith served as an ancient hermeneutical principle of scripture. The rule of faith safeguards the integrity of scripture against the attacks of the heretics. By receiving and interiorizing the rule of faith within the Church, the believers were able to grasp the overarching plan and the intent of scripture. Thus, the rule of faith was not an externally imposed criterion. Both scripture and the rule of faith originated in the ecclesial experience of the reception, appropriation, and transmission of divine revelation.

As a repository of ecclesial experience, tradition is not merely a collection of ancient artifacts, but rather “the inner, charismatic or mystical memory of the Church.” In opposition to the leaders of the “new religious consciousness,” who criticized the “historical Church” for quenching the Spirit, and awaited God’s more powerful revelation in the future, Florovsky located the work of the Holy Spirit squarely within the “historical Church” and saw the tradition itself as charismatic, mystical, and liberating. On occasion, Florovsky expressed himself boldly, as only a true son of the Russian Religious Renaissance could: “[L]oyalty to tradition means not only concord with the past but in a

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18 I develop this point in “Scripture and *Regula Fidei*: Two Interlocking Components of the Canonical Heritage,” in William J. Abraham, et al. (eds), *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008), 27–42.
certain sense freedom from the past. Tradition is not only a protective, conservative principle, it is primarily the principle of growth and regeneration [. . . ] Tradition is the constant abiding of the Spirit, and not only the memory of words. Tradition is a charismatic, not an historical principle.” Such words could have been written by Zenkovsky or Bulgakov, who also stressed the pneumatological and dynamic character of tradition. Yet Florovsky also departed from the Renaissance theologians by insisting that the retrieval of patristic theology was itself creatively liberating. In Florovsky’s mind, twentieth-century Orthodox theology first had to emancipate itself from its intellectual captivity to the philosophical paradigms of the West by expanding its historical horizon beyond the possibilities of the nineteenth century. In order to accomplish this task, Orthodox theology had to “return to the Fathers.”

The catholicity of ecclesial experience safeguards the unity and continuity of the Christian teaching. To participate in ecclesial experience is to overcome the subjectivity of private religious experience: “It is precisely through the ‘common mind’ of the Church that the Holy Spirit speaks to the believers.” By offering access to the “mystical memory of the Church” tradition could be said to conquer time. Florovsky explains that “time-conquering unity is manifested and revealed in the experience of the Church, especially in its Eucharistic experience.”

Florovsky emphasizes a vital connection between the lex orandi and lex credendi in patristic theology. As he contends in The Ways of Russian Theology, this connection has been lost in modern Russian theology. But the “worshipping Church,” unlike “school theology,” has not lost its patristic moorings. In Florovsky’s judgment, “one can be best initiated into the spirit of the Fathers by attending the offices of the Eastern Church, especially in Lent and up to Trinity Sunday.” More generally, for Florovsky, “true theology can spring only out of a deep liturgical experience.” While Florovsky himself did not elaborate on this point, the reconnection of liturgical practice with

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21 Florovsky, “The Lamb of God,” 16; cf. “The Catholicity of the Church,” CW I: 49: “We put forward no subjective religious experience, no solitary mystical consciousness, not the experience of separate believers, but the integral, living experience of the Catholic Church, catholic experience, and Church life.”
dogmatic theology was systematically undertaken by Florovsky’s follower, Alexander Schmemann.  

**ECCLESIOLOGY: THREE CONVERSATIONS**

The Renaissance leaders were involved in three conversations germane to Florovsky’s neopatristic ecclesiology. The first conversation involved Aleksei Khomiakov’s original interpretation of the third mark of the Church, her catholicity (sobornost’). Khomiakov taught that catholicity involved both the unity of the Church and the variety of each member’s spiritual gifts. Russian lay theology stressed the pneumatological, rather than hierarchical nature of the Church. The unity of the Church was not based on external authority, but on the acquisition of a common theological mind.

During his American period, Florovsky became increasingly critical of Khomiakov, claiming that everything that was expressed by the Russian term sobornyi had already been captured by the Greek term katholike. Hence, there was no need to adopt an additional Russian term in order to account for the third mark of the Church. This semantic quibble, reflecting Florovsky’s increasing alienation from Russian theology, should not detract from the point that Florovsky understood catholicity in the Khomiakovian sense of free “unity in plurality,” rather than in the more traditional sense of “universality.”

The second conversation was the enchurching of life and culture pursued by the Renaissance leaders. There was a broad spectrum of attitudes towards enchurching. On the one side of the spectrum were some representatives of “new religious consciousness,” for whom enchurching involved a creation of the new church of the Third Covenant in opposition to the “historical Church” represented by the pre-revolutionary Russian Orthodox ecclesiastical establishment. As far as Florovsky was concerned, the religious experimentations of “new religious consciousness” were deviations from authentic ecclesiality. On

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26 Florovsky, transcription of the lecture under the title “Seminar—1967,” pp. 3, GFP PUL, Box 4, year 1967, where on p. 2 he notes that he “passionately dislikes” the term “sobornost’” and that the term “katholike” covers all valid aspects of the term “sobornyi.” On p. 11 of the same document he notes that he “completely disagrees” with the Eucharistic ecclesiology of Nikolai Afanasiev.
the other side of the spectrum were those who, like Florovsky, urged a return precisely to the “historical Church,” to the fullness of her sacramental life. For Florovsky, the enchurching of culture could mean only one thing: the bringing of Russian religious philosophy in line with the perennial philosophy of the Church Fathers. As he insisted, Russian religious thought lost its way, abandoned “the Father’s House” and proceeded to repeat the mistakes of the Christian West. At stake in the conversation between Florovsky and the Renaissance leaders was an understanding of the historical and theological identity of Orthodoxy and of the canonical boundaries of the Church.

The second conversation in turn spilled over into the third one, conducted within the framework of the emerging ecumenical movement. Much of what Florovsky wrote on the Church was stimulated by various ecumenical exchanges in which he was engaged. This position differentiated Florovsky the ecumenist from the traditionalist Orthodox, who regarded any involvement in the ecumenical dialogue as compromising the “purity” of Orthodoxy. The nature and boundaries of the Church were the subjects commonly raised in the exchanges between the Anglican and Russian émigré theologians that were members of the Fellowship of Stt Alban and Sergius. Bulgakov was initially an acknowledged leader of the Russian Orthodox delegation, gradually yielding his role to Florovsky. Two factors contributed to this development. First, the Anglican interlocutors were taken aback by the obscurities of Bulgakov’s sophiology and came to trust Florovsky’s position as more representative of the Orthodox tradition. Second, several influential Anglican theologians joined Florovsky in resisting Bulgakov’s proposal for intercommunion under the auspices of the Fellowship. In the end, Florovsky’s more cautious approach prevailed and Bulgakov, due to his failing health and advanced age, ceded his prominent place in the ecumenical movement to his protégé, Florovsky.

ECCLESIAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF CATHOLIC TRANSFORMATION

Florovsky’s approach to theological epistemology is closely tied to his ecclesiology. Theological inquiry must involve a transformation of a theologian’s mind by the ever-deepening incorporation into the life of the Church. The aim of this incorporation is to reach the fullness of communion with the Church as the Body of Christ, thereby accomplishing “the catholic transfiguration of personality.”

27 Incorporation into the Church provides access to the main sources of the revealed truth and prepares the mind to receive these sources

in a catholic manner. Without the “catholic transfiguration of personality,” one might quote the Church Fathers as external authorities, but fail to enter the mind of the Fathers.28 Put differently, a theologian’s mind must be transformed by the reality to which the patristic authors bear witness. Since the Church Fathers have attained the “catholic fullness” of the faith, they serve not only as pastoral guides, but also as epistemic exemplars.29 One might describe Florovsky’s admittedly fragmentary reflections as an ecclesial epistemology of catholic transformation.

The most likely source of Florovsky’s ecclesio-epistemological reflections was Khomiakov, who maintained that “individual thinking could be powerful and productive only when the highest knowledge and people expressing it, are connected with the rest of the social organism by the bonds of free and rational love.”30 Khomiakov saw the Russian Orthodox peasant commune (Russian: mir or narod) as an exemplary case of such a social organism. Khomiakov’s central insight—that the process of knowledge acquisition involves a properly functioning community of knowers, rather than an autonomously operating solitary mind—was about a century ahead of its time. In fact, he anticipated the development of social epistemology, which became an established field of philosophical inquiry only in the second half of the twentieth century.

In relation to religious knowledge, Khomiakov sketched out what Berdyaev called an “epistemology of catholicity (Russian: sobornost),” or ecclesial epistemology of love.31 According to Khomiakov, catholicity uniquely reflected the free unity of mind and spirit that was established between the believers in ecclesial communion.32 Building on the work of Ivan Kireevsky, Khomiakov held that “the understanding of truth is based on communion of love and is impossible without such a communion. Inaccessible to an individual mind, the truth is accessible to the community of minds, bounded by love. This feature sharply distinguishes the Orthodox doctrine from all others: from Latinity, built on external authority, and from Protestantism, which leaves

the individual freedom in the desert of abstract intellectualism.”

Consequently, “the rationality (razumnost’) of the Church is the highest form of human rationality.”

Khomiakov’s religious epistemology of catholicity was a special case of social epistemology developed in the context of Orthodox ecclesiology. In addition to love, which is most fully realized in the Eucharistic assembly, Florovsky stressed ascetic effort, repentance, the renunciation of the self, and the cultivation of discernment as means of attaining the desired catholic transformation.

By relying on Khomiakov, Florovsky went to the source of Solovyov’s theory of integral knowledge, accepting Solovyov’s conception of faith and his critique of “abstract principles,” but rejecting the philosopher’s appeal to “non-ecclesial” mysticism. Florovsky was not only familiar with Khomiakov’s writings directly, but also closely studied the philosophy of Sergei Trubetskoy, who had developed Khomiakov’s epistemology of catholicity. Florovsky’s account of catholic transformation was also anticipated by Florensky’s epistemological explorations, which accorded the central role to conversion in the acquisition of the knowledge of God. Although Florovsky was later quite critical of The Pillar and Ground of the Truth, he drew on Florensky’s work more extensively than he admitted.

In terms of contemporary analytic philosophy, Florovsky’s theological epistemology can be classified as a species of reliabilism. According to reliabilism, a true belief is knowledge if it is certain and obtained by a reliable process. For Florovsky, religious beliefs are certain if properly grounded in ecclesial experience. In this respect, religious beliefs are akin to perceptual beliefs, since they are obtained by vision-like apprehension. The reliability of religious belief is secured by the knower’s ecclesial incorporation. Unlike most non-religious forms of philosophical reliabilism, Florovsky’s proposal requires a catholic transformation of the theologian’s mind, a process of conforming personal judgment to the mind of the Fathers, to the mind of the Church, and ultimately, to the mind of Christ. It is this catholicity that Florovsky found

33 Khomiakov, “To povodu otryvkov, naidennykh v bumagakh I. V. Kireevskogo,” Sobranie otdel’nykh statei i zamek raznorodnago soderzhania (Moscow: Tipografia P. Bakhmet’eva, 1861), I: 283. In the judgment of Serge Bolshakoff, this passage sums up “the whole of Khomyakov,” see The Doctrine of the Unity of the Church in the Works of Khomyakov and Moehler (London: SPCK, 1946), 56. For Florovsky’s appreciation of this point, see Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 280–1.

34 Khomiakov, “To povodu otryvkov, naidennykh v bumagakh I. V. Kireevskogo,” I: 283.


lacking in the “fathers” of the Russian Religious Renaissance, especially in Florensky, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov.

Although Khomiakov’s teaching regarding sobornost’ was widely discussed by the Renaissance thinkers, Florovsky’s epistemology of ecclesial incorporation was anti-Renaissance. While they accepted the spiritual importance of Eastern Orthodox tradition, the Renaissance thinkers held that unquestioning endorsement of the teaching of the Church limited the freedom of theological inquiry. Such a stance caused Florovsky to define the Renaissance thinkers primarily as “free religious philosophers,” who rebelled against the authority of the Church.

On these grounds, Florovsky looked down upon the Renaissance leaders, believing himself to possess “authentic ecclesiality,” which they were lacking. He was, for example, unjustly dismissive of the work of Pavel Evdokimov (1900–1970)—a remarkable, yet neglected Orthodox moral theologian, who creatively integrated the insights of the Russian Religious Renaissance with patristic wisdom. According to Florovsky, “Evdokimov continues the tradition of Fr. S. Bulgakov and does not follow the spirit of the Holy Fathers, despite quoting from them.” Florovsky often presumed an epistemological advantage over the Renaissance “fathers,” because they did not attain “catholic transformation.” But why was he, in contrast to other modern historical theologians, uniquely qualified to transcend the hermeneutical divide between the twentieth century and late antiquity? After all, many Russian theologians, among them Evdokimov, Bulgakov, and Zenkovsky, were thoroughly immersed both in patristic thought and in the sacramental life of the Church. The fact that Evdokimov did not share Florovsky’s philosophical assumptions or his theological program should not disqualify him from having access to the mind of the Fathers. What qualities, either spiritual or scholarly, could give Florovsky such an epistemic advantage over his contemporaries? In the absence of good grounds for such an advantage, Florovsky owed the Renaissance leaders a measure of epistemic humility.

To compound the problem, Florovsky’s philosophy of history, especially his historical singularism, made the appeal to the collective patristic mind tenuous at best. Florovsky’s historical singularism recognized only the historical agency of particular persons, not aggregate entities, such as the “mind of the Church.” Besides, Florovsky followed Herzen and Renouvier in rejecting organicism, which he associated with Hegelian historical rationalism and determinism. Yet in his theological epistemology and in his ecclesiology Florovsky understood the Church as an organism, as the mystical body of Christ. The bold ontological realism of Florovsky’s ecclesiology—the realism that also characterized German mystics, German Idealists, Aleksei Khomiakov, Vladimir Solovyov,

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and his followers—clashed with the nominalist strictures of Florovsky’s philosophy of history.

THE MODALITIES OF THEOLOGICAL REASONING

Florovsky maintained that dogma is “intellectual vision, a truth of perception”\(^{40}\) and “faith itself is a sort of vision.”\(^{41}\) These definitions echo Berdyaev’s words in *The Philosophy of Freedom*: “Christian dogmas are neither intellectual theories, nor metaphysical teachings; they are rather facts, visions, and living experience.”\(^{42}\) While Florovsky concurred with Berdyaev’s and Florensky’s emphasis on the experiential character of dogmatic theology, he did not share their interest in the writings of western mystics. Yet similar to these Renaissance “fathers,” Florovsky closely associates knowledge of God with intuition and spiritual perception.\(^{43}\) Thus, for example, he speaks of the “intuition of creaturehood” as constitutive of the perennial philosophy of the Church Fathers. While Florovsky offers no developed account of spiritual perception, he privileges this mode of knowing over discursive reasoning.

Given the emphasis on knowledge-vision, there appears to be a tension between Florovsky’s theological epistemology and his philosophy of history. According to Florovsky, historical interpretation involves informal inferences based on “sympathetic imagination.” Hence, historical knowledge is indirect and inferential, and in this respect unlike perceptual and intuitive knowledge. He is equally adamant that the knowledge of God is available only through the historical revelation. Since for Florovsky all theological knowledge is a form of historical knowledge and all historical knowledge involves a form of inference, it follows that all theological knowledge is inferential. In other words, a historical theologian has direct access only to the surviving patristic writings and other ancient sources, and only indirect access to the “ecclesial experience” attested by the sources.

Florovsky made no attempt at reconciling his account of theological knowledge-vision with his account of inferential historical knowledge as “reading signs.”\(^{44}\) It is possible to interpret his account of theological knowledge as

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40 “Revelation, Philosophy and Theology,” CW III: 29.
44 On Florovsky’s account of historical knowledge, see chapter 5.
involving a short inference, or layers of increasingly sharper insight into the mystery of God contemplated by faith. On this harmonizing reading, Florovsky could be interpreted as not excluding discursive reasoning altogether, but rather as putting a higher premium on intellectual intuition in the acquisition of the knowledge of God.

**CONCLUSION**

According to Florovsky, the main locus of revelation is history, the only legitimate recipient of religious experience and interpreter of scripture is the Church, and the chief mode of apprehending divine truths is non-inferential. Florovsky’s epistemological insights, while they do not amount to a well-developed theory, offer what I have called “the ecclesial epistemology of catholic transformation.” Florovsky’s theory of knowledge is a species of social epistemology, which takes most seriously the mediation of theological knowledge by the Church.
The Reception of Florovsky in Orthodox Theology

Three phases may be identified in the reception of Florovsky’s theological heritage. The first phase is marked by his engagement and conflict with the Renaissance “fathers,” taking place roughly from the mid-1920s through the 1930s. The second phase is characterized by a general acceptance of Florovsky’s program by his younger contemporaries and the next generation of theologians, lasting approximately from the post-war period until the end of the twentieth century.

In the twenty-first century, the third phase is gradually emerging, punctuated by the criticism and revision of Florovsky’s historical methodology. As it is to be expected, significant exceptions to the prevailing tendencies could be found in each phase. For example, it could be argued that already in the 1930s a number of younger voices—most notably, Vladimir Lossky, Myrrha Lot-Borodine, and Basil Krivocheine—welcomed Florovsky’s ideas. Conversely, in the emerging third, critical phase, Florovsky continues to be widely read and respected by the contemporary Orthodox theologians.

The previous chapters mostly tackled the phase of engagement and conflict with the Renaissance “fathers.” The main focus of this chapter is the second phase, which includes positive responses to Florovsky’s neopatristics in France, the United States, Greece, and post-Soviet Russia. A common feature of the second phase is a broad endorsement of the standard narrative that assumes a polarization between the Renaissance modernism and neopatristics.

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1 Bradley Nassif recalled how at an ecumenical gathering “a participant noted that the age of the church fathers had ended and was no longer relevant to the modern world. To that Florovsky replied, ‘The Fathers are not dead. I am still alive!’,” “Georges Florovsky,” in Michael Bauman and Martin I. Klauber (eds), Historians of the Christian Tradition (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 449–68, at 461.

2 Lot-Borodine apparently converted to Orthodoxy partly due to Florovsky’s direct influence on her study of the Church Fathers: see A. Arjakovsky, Zhurnal “Put’,” 469.
My conclusions regarding the third and presently continuing phase of receiving Florovsky will remain tentative. One emerging feature of the last phase is a growing recognition that the standard narrative requires a revision.

Reception may take different forms, all of which involve selective appropriation and some modification of that which is being received. I focus primarily on those theologians who both have interiorized Florovsky’s narrative of the western pseudomorphosis and have answered his call to return to the Church Fathers. The preference is given to those theologians who adopted Florovsky’s heritage creatively, rather than to those who merely repeated what he said.

Many presently active Orthodox theologians have received Florovsky’s ideas indirectly, through their mentors, who were more immediately influenced by his thought. It is also extremely difficult, at times even impossible, to distinguish between the influence directly attributable to Florovsky and that related to larger theological currents of the twentieth century, such as ressourcement in Catholic theology and an ecumenical revival of theologically engaged patristic scholarship.

FRANCE: VLADIMIR LOSSKY AND LEONID OUSPENSKY

Vladimir Lossky regarded Florovsky as “possibly the greatest Orthodox theologian of our time.” According to Rowan Williams, Lossky’s most celebrated work, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* was “partly a response to Florovsky’s demand, often reiterated, for the ressourcement of Orthodox theology, a return to the Fathers, a ‘neo-patristic synthesis.’” Lossky enthusiastically received *The Ways of Russian Theology*, where such a demand was eloquently expressed.

Florovsky was introduced to the Lossky family in Prague in 1922. At the time Vladimir was approaching twenty and was just beginning his studies in medieval history at Charles University (March 1923–June 1924). Like Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky belonged to the generation of the “children” of the Renaissance. Their acquaintance in Prague was brief, since Vladimir soon moved to Paris, where he became a student of philology at the Sorbonne in November 1924.

Florovsky, who remained in Prague until the summer of 1926, briefly organized an informal patristics reading group in the same year, which was attended by Nikolai Lossky and Vasily Zenkovsky. After Florovsky’s move to

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3 Lossky, lecture delivered on December 13, 1956, p. 10, the recording transcribed and quoted by R. Williams, “The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaevich Lossky,” 281.
Paris, he and N. Lossky, who stayed in Czechoslovakia, kept a regular correspondence. N. Lossky, who after the war moved to the United States, would be closely involved in bringing Florovsky to New York in order to lead the reorganized St Vladimir’s Seminary. The aging philosopher, who was approaching eighty, would formally remain on the faculty of the Seminary until his retirement in 1950. In terms of collegial contacts, Florovsky was closer to the father, Nikolai, than to the son, Vladimir.

Little is known about V. Lossky’s and Florovsky’s interaction in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. Florovsky was aware of the work of the St Photius Brotherhood in which Lossky played a leading role beginning in 1925. The members of the Brotherhood were committed to the study of church history and patristic theology. The stated mission of the Brotherhood was “the dogmatic and canonical defense of the unity of the Church, with a purpose of establishing the triumph of Orthodoxy in the West.” In the modernist and ecumenically minded Orthodox circles, the reputation of the Brotherhood was that of a self-appointed doctrinal watchdog. Florovsky did not associate with the Brotherhood, because the credentials of its leaders, with the exception of V. Lossky, inspired little confidence in him.

Despite V. Lossky’s and Florovsky’s common interest in the Church Fathers, several factors militated against their close partnership. V. Lossky, who was ten years younger, could not be a serious scholarly match for Florovsky, at least initially. As a scholar, Lossky made his debut only towards the end of the 1920s with two articles on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. Florovsky knew these articles, but did not engage Lossky’s interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius’ apophatic theology in the relevant chapter of his patrology.

V. Lossky and Florovsky inhabited separate academic and ecclesiological spheres, although they shared a few mutual friends. Lossky’s life revolved around the studies of medieval religious history at the Sorbonne, where he was a student of Ferdinand Lot (1866–1952) and Étienne Gilson (1884–1978). In the early 1930s, Florovsky contemplated the possibility of pursuing a doctorate

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5 GFP SVSL, Box 1, f. “Correspondence from N. O. Lossky to Fr. G. Florovsky,” contains no less than 32 letters from N. Lossky, written over the period of 1926 to 1939.
6 N. Lossky, Letter to G. Florovsky, July 5, 1947, GFP PUL, Box 17, f. 3.
7 The Brotherhood was founded in 1925 by A. V. Stavrovsky. Lossky was its Vice-President from its founding and subsequently its president from 1931 to 1940.
9 Florovsky apparently drew on Lossky’s 1929 article on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in his Vizantiiskie ottsy V-VIII vekov, 201, where he observed that for Pseudo-Dionysius’s commentator, Maximus the Confessor, “the whole meaning of apophatic theology lies in reminding us of the ecstatic experience (‘mystical theology’) of God.
in patristic theology at the Sorbonne, but apparently could not find the time for such a demanding task amidst his conference travel and teaching at the St Sergius Institute.\textsuperscript{11}

This period was a turbulent time for the Orthodox Church in the Diaspora due to the continuing jurisdictional disputes. V. Lossky was one of the few who remained loyal to the Patriarchate of Moscow, while the majority of St Sergius’ faculty, including Florovsky, were canonically subordinate to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. While the two patriarchates shared sacramental communion, in practice, different jurisdictional loyalties often dictated different patterns of socialization.

Unlike Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky played a public role of Bulgakov’s opponent in the Sophia Affair. In 1935, the authorities of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) approached Lossky, as a leader of the St Photius Brotherhood, asking him to supply a review of Bulgakov’s teaching. Metropolitan Sergius’ subsequent ukase against sophiology was partly based on the report prepared by Lossky. When this fact became known among those close to Bulgakov and Berdyaev, Lossky and his Brotherhood were vilified as aiding and abating the attacks of the “pro-Bolshevik” church against the church in the Diaspora. Lossky became persona non grata at the St Sergius Institute and as a result had never been affiliated with the school. After the war, with the collaboration of Evgraf Kovalevsky, Lossky started the Institute of St Denis, which attracted a number of Francophone admirers of Orthodoxy as students. While Florovsky shared many points of Lossky’s critique of sophiology, associating too closely with Bulgakov’s most serious theological opponent would have jeopardized Florovsky’s already precarious position at the St Sergius Institute.

Temperamentally, Lossky was somewhat reclusive, preferring quiet study to the often contentious gatherings of the émigré intellectuals. Florovsky, although he was more sociable, tended to benefit more from arguing with his opponents than from collaborating with like-minded theologians. Because of this disposition, Florovsky was inclined to emphasize his disagreement, rather than common ground, even with Lossky.\textsuperscript{12} The two theologians became close when Florovsky briefly returned to Paris after the war (1945–1948), as both of them were involved in common ecumenical ventures.\textsuperscript{13} When Florovsky left for the United States in 1948, they continued to correspond and

\textsuperscript{11} Florovsky, Letter to F. Lieb, January 9, 1933, Issledovaniia (2007), 574. The topic of the future dissertation was going to be “Gregory of Nyssa’s Origenism,” which would have provided another occasion for indirect criticism of Bulgakov’s sophiology.


\textsuperscript{13} V. Lossky, Letter to G. Florovsky, January 12, 1948, GFP PUL, Box 17, f. 4.
meet at conferences. For example, we know of their participation at the Second International Conference for Patristic Studies at Oxford in 1955, shortly before V. Lossky’s premature death three years later.

Florovsky and Lossky shared many things in common. They both came from academic families, thoroughly immersed in the pre-revolutionary Russian tradition of liberal arts. Both had a strong background in history and languages. As a college student in St Petersburg, Lossky was initiated into the study of the Middle Ages by Ivan Grevès and into the theology of the Greek Church Fathers by Lev Karsavin. Mentored by Étienne Gilson at the Sorbonne, Lossky had the advantage of receiving a first-rate academic training in medieval theology, which Florovsky lacked. Both of them matured as theologians in Paris, Florovsky reaching his acme in the 1930s and Lossky in the 1940s. They were in equal measure “exilic” theologians, striving to articulate Orthodox theology’s modern identity in the context of Russia Abroad. Both were intellectually shaped by the West and, in turn, influenced the western understanding of Orthodoxy. Lossky accepted Florovsky’s narrative of the western pseudomorphosis of Russian theology and concurred that to recover its true identity modern Orthodox theology needed to return to the Eastern Church Fathers. Both Florovsky and Lossky found in patristic theology a spiritual vision focused on divine revelation, rather than speculative philosophy, although they articulated the relevant terms of contrast in different ways. Both grounded their theology in ecclesial experience, in contrast to private mysticism and philosophical speculation. They tended to emphasize the unity, coherence, and continuity of patristic thought, often downplaying considerable differences between the Church Fathers.

As the recognized theological leaders of their generation, Florovsky and Lossky were united in their common rebellion against the perceived theological modernism of the Russian Religious Renaissance. They agreed that the religious vision of the Renaissance was clouded by western philosophies, especially German Idealism. They especially rejected organicism, determinism, impersonalism, and rationalism of the idealist philosophy of history. They fell back on the patristic sources in search of alternatives. Yet, in recovering the Church Fathers, both were constantly engaged with the thought of the Renaissance “fathers.” For example, both Florovsky and Lossky followed Florovsky in recognizing the central place of antinomies in religious language.

Both neopatristic theologians drew on Berdyaev, Shestov, and Karsavin in

14 GFP PUL, Boxes 17–22, contain eleven letters from V. Lossky to Florovsky, dating from 1948 to 1957. In the letters of January 12, 1948 and of May 28, 1948, Lossky invited Florovsky and his wife for a dinner with his family.


16 V. N. Lossky, In the Image and Likeness of God (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 52, 68, 75, 84, 93, 106, 146, 178.
constructing their own versions of personalism, grounded in the theological vision of the Church Fathers.\textsuperscript{17}

According to a family report, Vladimir Lossky “obstinately denied Nicolas Onufrievich Lossky’s assertion that his eldest son Vladimir was the heir who continued his philosophical thinking.”\textsuperscript{18} But such a self-description is only partially accurate, since Vladimir owed at least some aspects of his personalism and intuitivism to his father. V. Lossky’s understanding of the apophatic dimension of theology derived not only from the Eastern Fathers, but also from western medieval mystic Meister Eckhart and Russian religious philosopher Semen Frank.

Most profoundly, Florovsky’s and V. Lossky’s neopatristic theologies were shaped by a polemic against the premier theologian of the Renaissance, Bulgakov. According to Rowan Williams, “especially in his treatment of Trinitarian theology, Lossky seems constantly aware of Bulgakov as a controversial interlocutor.”\textsuperscript{19} As we saw in chapter 8, these words apply in equal measure to Florovsky’s presentation of Christology and the patristic doctrine of creation, where indirect polemic with Bulgakov constitutes a Chekhovian subtext. V. Lossky’s criticism of Bulgakov was direct, explicit, and public, prompting Florovsky’s caustic remark that Lossky was a “sophiologist topsy-turvy.”\textsuperscript{20} Lossky’s assertion that a deterministic cast of Bulgakov’s sophiology undermined human freedom echoed Florovsky’s critique of German Idealism.\textsuperscript{21} Lossky also accused Bulgakov of confusing the fundamental ontological distinction between created and uncreated, temporal and eternal, by systematically collapsing them in one concept of Godmanhood.\textsuperscript{22} According to Lossky, by eternalizing Godmanhood, Bulgakov has transformed the historical divine incarnation into a cosmic process. It should be recalled that Florovsky made a similar criticism in reference to Solovyov’s religious philosophy. Lossky also concurred with Florovsky that speculative philosophy, rather than divine revelation, was a controlling factor in Bulgakov’s system.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{17} For a critical account of Lossky’s personalism, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, \textit{Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion} (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).


\textsuperscript{19} R. Williams, “The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaevich Lossky,” 30.

\textsuperscript{20} B. Krivocheine, Letter to G. Florovsky, June 1, 1955, GFP PUL, Box 21, f. 4. Krivocheine corrects Florovsky’s reading of Lossky: “I agree with you [Florovsky] concerning Russian religious philosophy, but cannot count V. N. Lossky as its representative. He is actually its determined opponent. I think, that the formation of Lossky’s mind was not influenced by Karsavin, but rather by Meister Eckhart and Latin scholasticism. He is not a ‘sophiologist topsy-turvy’ (sofianets na vyvorot), but rather a ‘thomist topsy-turvy,’ although even this would be an exaggeration. I value him as an Orthodox theologian.”

\textsuperscript{21} V. Lossky, \textit{Spor o Sofii}, 44–61; see R. Williams, “The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaevich Lossky,” 53.

\textsuperscript{22} V. Lossky, \textit{Spor o Sofii}, 42.

\textsuperscript{23} V. Lossky, \textit{Spor o Sofii}, 20.
While the details of Lossky’s argument against Bulgakov cannot be pursued here, the points of contact with Florovsky’s earlier indirect critique of the same are quite striking.

After a comprehensive consideration of Lossky’s theological vision, Rowan Williams concluded:

Lossky’s debt to Florovsky is patently very great: the concept of the Church as *imago Trinitatis*, the rejection of “sophiological determinism,” and the stress on the world’s contingency, the concern with Christ as the restorer of man’s objective nature, and with the transfiguration of the material cosmos, the refusal to divide Scripture from Tradition, and the insistence on the foreignness of “external” authority to the Church, all these are themes that Florovsky had developed before Lossky had begun to write on dogmatics, and there is a clear relation of dependence.  

Whether a similar relation could also be confidently claimed for Lossky’s anti-organicism and personalism is a moot point, since such general parallels are not conclusive indicators of direct dependence.

Florovsky’s epistemology of catholic transformation, his appeal to ecclesial experience, and his privileging of intellectual vision as a paradigm of theological knowledge also have points of contact with Lossky. In his religious epistemology, Lossky likewise placed a high premium on experiential knowledge culminating in the vision of God. At first glance, Florovsky’s and Lossky’s accounts of experiential knowledge look similar. But apparent similarities begin to disappear when we consider them more closely. For Florovsky, the paradigmatic ecclesial experience is Eucharistic communion, whereas, for Lossky, the experiential paradigm is the ultimate folding of all cognitive functions in the mystical union with God, as epitomized by Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology*.

Moreover, while both theologians subordinated discursive reasoning to knowledge-vision, they nevertheless understood the process of attaining this knowledge in different ways. For Lossky, the apophatic purification of religious language functioned as a spiritual discipline leading the mind to the shedding of conceptual idols and to the contemplation of God. Florovsky agreed that the fullness of ecclesial experience could not be exhausted in language. However, Florovsky was less concerned with apophasis than Lossky was and stressed to a greater extent the definitive character of the main categories of the Christian *philosophia perennis*. In some respects, in his

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account of the divinely given rationality of religious language Florovsky struck a balance between the radical apophaticism of Lossky and the speculative cataphaticism of Bulgakov.

While it is possible to regard Lossky’s theology as a species of the neopatristic synthesis, both in method and in content he departed from Florovsky substantially. In his approach to patristic sources, Lossky stressed a logical connection of ideas, rather than their concrete historical genealogy. For example, following Lev Karsavin, Lossky held that the “question of the procession of the Holy Spirit has been the sole dogmatic grounds for the separation of East and West” and went so far as to derive the doctrine of papal primacy from Filioque. Florovsky sensibly objected that claims to high papal authority had been made before Filioque became an issue. Following Vasily Bolotov, Florovsky saw Filioque as a questionable theologoumenon (doctrinal view) rather than a church-dividing issue. As a historian, Florovsky was interested in the “actual association, rather than the logical deduction of ideas” and believed that Lossky’s “deductions” were rather far-fetched.

More generally, it could be said that Florovsky regarded the heritage of the Greek Fathers as having a universal significance and found Lossky’s analysis of the division between East and West exaggerated. Lossky followed Theodore de Régnon’s thesis that the fundamental difference between Eastern and Western trinitarian theology went back to the Cappadocian Fathers and Augustine, respectively. Florovsky, in contrast, was more receptive to the thought of Augustine, especially his ecclesiology, whereas Lossky tended to read the medieval division between the East and the West back into the Greek and Latin Church Fathers.

In constructing his neopatristic theology, Lossky placed the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite at the center. He subsequently drew a connection between Dionysius’s theory of knowledge on the one hand, and Gregory Palamas’ theology on the other hand. On these grounds, Lossky referred to his work as a “Palamite” synthesis. While Florovsky acknowledged that Lossky’s synthesis authentically represented Orthodox tradition, his own theological accents lay elsewhere. For Florovsky, the organizing principle of neopatristic theology was Chalcedonian Christology, not apophaticism.


28 Lossky, In the Image and Likeness of God, 71.
30 Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, 238; cf. Florovsky, Vostochnye otsy IV-go veka, 76.
31 Florovsky, ”Review of The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church by Vladimir Lossky,” 207.
According to Florovsky, Lossky’s neopatristic theology lacked a sufficient Christological emphasis. In his more constructive works, Florovsky tended to dwell more on the early Church Fathers, and less on the Byzantine theologians. More generally, it would be wrong to lump Florovsky’s neopatristic theology together with the retrieval of Palamite theology in the works of Basil Krivocheine, Vladimir Lossky, John Meyendorff, and other twentieth-century Orthodox scholars. The Palamite distinction between the unknowable essence of God and the uncreated divine energies did not play a noticeable role in Florovsky’s neopatristic synthesis.

Despite these differences, Florovsky highly valued Lossky’s *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, hailing it as “an essay in what can be described as a ‘neo-patristic synthesis’” and as “probably the best presentation of the Orthodox position in recent times, and indeed a powerful theological book in itself.” When an English translation of Lossky’s book came out in 1957, Florovsky recommended it to all of his listeners at Harvard Divinity School and the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. Florovsky especially noted a positive reception of the book among non-Orthodox students and the younger generation of Greek Orthodox scholars. Towards the end of their lives, Florovsky and Lossky became in equal measure alienated from their émigré compatriots. Lossky’s principal conversation partners were French converts to Orthodoxy, scholars at the Sorbonne, and Catholic theologians Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou, Henri de Lubac,

32 Florovsky, Letter to S. Sakharov, April 8, 1958, *Perepiska*, 68. Florovsky also did not share Lossky’s claim that human nature is saved by Christ, whereas human personhood is saved by the Holy Spirit.
36 Florovsky, Letter to S. Sakharov, March 10, 1958, *Perepiska*, 48: “At Harvard I am teaching a course on eastern monasticism to a small group [of students] and conducting a seminar on St Gregory of Nyssa. All of my non-Orthodox students have read V. N. Lossky’s book [*The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*] immediately after its publication in the English translation, whereas the Orthodox think it is ‘difficult’ and uninteresting: little related to ‘practical life,’ that is, to everyday hustle (which is, fortunately, true).”
38 At the age of 75, Florovsky wrote: “In the last chapter of *The Ways of Russian Theology* I adumbrated a program of theological renewal, but it was noticed only by foreigners and was translated into French. Our own show little interest in theology proper, with the exception of those who converted to orthodoxy from western confessions. Instead of talking about ‘Russian tradition’ we should return to the Fathers. The way of orthodox theological renaissance is the way of neopatristic synthesis. I spoke about this at the patristic congress at Oxford in the past year [1967]. But for now my opinion remains a ‘voice of the one crying in the wilderness,’” Letter to Yu. Ivask, November 16, 1968, *Vestnik RKhD*, 130 (1979), 51.
Christophe Dumont, and others associated with the ressourcement movement. Lossky also enjoyed friendship with the members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, especially Derwas Chitty.³⁹ After his successive clashes with the colleagues at the St Sergius Institute, St Vladimir’s Seminary, and Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Florovsky also felt more valued by his western colleagues at Columbia, Harvard, and Princeton, and in ecumenical circles. But if only a handful of people in the Russian Diaspora could sufficiently appreciate Florovsky and Lossky, their western friends, as well as their Greek Orthodox followers, praised them as contemporary “Church Fathers.”⁴⁰ Whatever their differences, Lossky was the first Russian theologian to answer Florovsky’s call to recover the mind of the Church Fathers with a view of producing a new Christian synthesis.

Florovsky’s approach also made a deep imprint upon the writings of Vladimir Lossky’s friend, iconographer and art historian, Leonid Ouspensky (1902–1987). Lossky and Ouspensky came to know each other in the 1930s, as members of the Brotherhood of St Photius.⁴¹ Later Ouspensky taught courses in iconography and church history at the Institute of St Denis. In Theology of the Icon, he interpreted the history of the Byzantine and Russian church art closely following the framework of The Ways of Russian Theology, as well as Florovsky’s articles on patristic theology and iconography.⁴² Drawing on Florovsky, Ouspensky took the patristic theology of image as normative and Byzantine iconography as canonical. Against this framework, Ouspensky interpreted the history of the Russian church art of the seventeenth–nineteenth centuries as progressive capitulation to various western influences—Catholic, Protestant, and secular—resulting in a pseudomorphosis of the normative iconographic tradition.⁴³ If in Byzantium the writing of icons was a part of ecclesiastical life, in modern Russia, the production of church art became a secular, autonomous technique. Closely following Florovsky’s narrative, Ouspensky speaks of western influences as precipitating a painful break between religious art and the sacramental life of the Church.⁴⁴ Like Florovsky,

³⁹ A. Schmemann, Letter to G. Florovsky, August 12, 1947, GFP PUL, Box 17, f. 3.
⁴² The groundwork for Theology of the Icon was laid in the lectures that Ouspensky offered for the theological pastoral courses in Paris, initiated by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1954. The first French edition of volume one appeared in 1960, and was followed by the revised and complete two-volume edition La theologie de l’icône dans l’Église orthodoxe (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1980), with the English translation published posthumously as Theology of the Icon, 2 vols (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1992), and the Russian version appearing in 1989.
⁴³ L. Ouspensky, Theology of the Icon, II: 327–9, where the author refers to Florovsky’s specific use of pseudomorphosis.
Ouspensky sought to reverse the process of western pseudomorphosis by returning twentieth-century Orthodox iconography to the path of the Byzantine tradition. Ouspensky acknowledged that the rediscovery of the spiritual value of Byzantine iconography was made at the beginning of the twentieth century, somewhat hesitantly crediting specific figures, such as Evgeny Trubetskoy, with this effort. Ouspensky was too much in the grip of Florovsky’s critique of the Russian Religious Renaissance to properly acknowledge that it was precisely the Renaissance as a movement that drew attention to pre-seventeenth-century expressions of Orthodox religious art.

Ouspensky’s historical work stimulated what could be called a Neo-Byzantine revival in twentieth-century Orthodox iconography in the West. Such iconography often follows the Byzantine patterns more deliberately than the church art of Greece and Russia in the seventeenth–nineteenth centuries did. While Florovsky was only indirectly involved in this development, the neopatristic revival in contemporary Orthodox theology and the Neo-Byzantine revival in Orthodox iconography were intertwined.

THE UNITED STATES: ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN AND HIS GENERATION

From the 1930s until the 1960s, initially in Europe and then also in the United States, Florovsky rose to prominence as a major spokesman for Eastern Orthodoxy in the Western Christian world. Frequently invited to international ecumenical gatherings, he was trusted and respected as an authoritative exponent of the Orthodox tradition. His international acclaim brought him in September 1948 to the United States, where within a year he had assumed the leadership of St Vladimir’s Theological Seminary and Academy (as it was then called), establishing it as a world-renowned center of Orthodox learning, which it remains today.

Realizing that he was short on staff in the area of liturgical studies, Florovsky invited Alexander Schmemann to join St Vladimir’s Seminary faculty in 1950. Schmemann was twenty-eight years younger than Florovsky and belonged to the next generation of the “grandsons” of the Renaissance (1910s-1920s). Trained as a Byzantinist, Schmemann studied at the St Sergius Institute during the war, at the time when Florovsky was away, in Yugoslavia. Schmemann took classes in church history from Anton Kartashev and pastoral theology from archimandrite Kiprian Kern. After the war, Schmemann joined the faculty of the Institute to teach church history. When Florovsky left

for the United States, Schmemann filled his shoes on the European and British ecumenical scene. Young Schmemann was inspired by Florovsky’s vision and looked up to him. In a letter written to Florovsky from Paris, Schmemann confessed that “of all theologians, I find you the most congenial,” explaining that he shared Florovsky’s “historicism, ecclesiology, and the Christological sacramentalism of the Church” and adding that “to work under your supervision would make me very happy.” 46 Citing a Catholic theologian who called Florovsky a “Church Father,” Schmemann added with approval: “and so you must be.” 47

By offering Schmemann a post in liturgical studies at St Vladimir’s Seminary, which was a bit of a stretch since Fr Alexander’s primary training was in Byzantine history, Florovsky caused his protégé to discover his theological forte. In a similar situation, a quarter-century earlier, Bulgakov recognized in the young Florovsky, then a cultural historian, the promise of a patristics scholar by appointing him to teach the Church Fathers at the St Sergius Institute in Paris. Both appointments proved to be career-defining. But while the friendship between Bulgakov and Florovsky at the St Sergius Institute survived the test of the Sophia Affair, the partnership between Florovsky and Schmemann at St Vladimir’s Seminary was rather short-lived and came to a crushing halt in 1955. The clash between Florovsky and Schmemann had more to do with the incompatibility of leadership styles and understandings of seminary education—Florovsky was more inclined to emphasize the academic rigor, Schmemann the pastoral formation—than with theological differences. When Florovsky resigned from St Vladimir’s, the vacant deanship eventually passed on to Schmemann. Just as Florovsky could be seen in Freudian colors of rebellion against the Renaissance “fathers,” Schmemann, under very different circumstances and for very different reasons, rebelled against the authoritarian “father-figure” of Florovsky. Nevertheless, the general thrust of Schmemann’s theological vision—towards Eastern patristics and away from the “western captivity” of Russian theology—was a continuation of Florovsky’s main direction.

Schmemann’s first book, The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy (Istoricheskii put’ pravoslaviia, 1954) was strongly influenced by Florovsky’s approach to patristic and modern Russian theology. 48 The book was completed when Florovsky and Schmemann taught side by side at St Vladimir’s Seminary. In the title of his book, Schmemann took put’ (“road” or “way”) as a controlling image echoing The Ways of Russian Theology. Schmemann’s study followed the chronological framework of Florovsky’s patrology lectures,

46 A. Schmemann, Letter to G. Florovsky, July 9, 1947, GFP PUL, Box 17, f. 3.
47 A. Schmemann, Letter to G. Florovsky, December 20, 1948, GFP PUL, Box 17, f. 5.
covering early Eastern and Byzantine Christian history, but focusing more on institutional life. The final chapter of Schmemann’s book summarized the argument of *The Ways of Russian Theology*, digressing only in the discussion of popular piety, drawn from Fedotov’s *The Russian Religious Mind*. In this chapter, Schmemann adopted Florovsky’s narrative of the seventeenth-century westernization of Russian theology, emerging from the theological schools of Kiev and spreading to Moscow and St Petersburg. Like Florovsky, Schmemann was calling for a more independent and creative, rather than merely imitative, engagement of the West in Orthodox theology.

In 1959, a few years after his dramatic break with Schmemann, Florovsky was asked to comment on the usefulness of publishing an English translation of *The Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy*, which was being commissioned by Harper & Row. Florovsky advised the publisher against pursuing the translation, judging the book to be superficial, flawed, incomplete, and too dependent on his own work and also that of George Fedotov. Evidently the wounds received from his clash with Schmemann were still fresh. Besides, the English translation of Florovsky’s own magnum opus was proceeding at snail’s pace. Florovsky’s words apparently had their effect, since Harper & Row decided against publication. The English edition of Schmemann’s book was eventually undertaken by a different publisher.

Schmemann gave a concrete and deeply original expression to Florovsky’s appeal to reconnect dogmatic theology and ecclesial experience. Fr Alexander began to acquire his own theological voice as a liturgical theologian in the 1960s. In his celebrated work *For the Life of the World* (1963), Schmemann welcomed the “return to the Fathers” as liberating and identity-defining for contemporary Orthodox theology:

> The “Western captivity” of Orthodox theology has been vigorously denounced by the best theologians of the last hundred years and there exists today [1963] a significant movement aimed at the recovery by our theology of its own genuine perspective and method. The return to the Fathers, to the liturgical and spiritual traditions, which were virtually ignored by the “theology of manuals,” is beginning to bear fruit.

For Schmemann, a return to the patristic foundations consisted primarily in overcoming the alienation between theology and liturgy and the corresponding reconnection of the *lex orandi* with the *lex credendi*.

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49 Florovsky, Response to the Letter from Hugh Van Dusen, October 22, 1959, GFP PUL, Box 4, f. “year 1959.”


In a conclusion to the encyclopedia article entitled “Orthodox Theology” written in the same year as Schmemann’s *For the Life of the World*, Florovsky tentatively suggested that his direction was gaining momentum: “On the whole, Orthodox theology seems to be in the period of transition and in search for its own method and style. The period of Western training seems to be coming to its end. The next step seems to be a return to the Patristic foundations and search for what may be denoted as a ‘Neo-Patristic synthesis.’”\(^5^3\) This statement was more than a self-fulfilling prophecy, as it reflected an increasing engagement with patristic thought in Orthodox theology.

In his bibliographic survey, “Russian Theology: 1920–1972,” Schmemann analyzed the main achievements of “exilic” theology. Drawing on Florovsky, Schmemann interpreted this development as a gradual liberation from the “long western captivity” in which Orthodox theology was held in the previous centuries.\(^5^4\) Schmemann argued that paradoxically this liberation intensified precisely as a result of the existential confrontation with the West in the dispersion. Following Florovsky, Schmemann distinguished two major trends of Diaspora theology associated with two different groups and attitudes towards theology. The first trend, typified by Bulgakov, maintained that although Orthodox theology could use patristic sources as its point of departure, it eventually had to go “beyond the Fathers.” This group made an “attempt to ‘transpose’ theology into a new ‘key.’”\(^5^5\) The second group, whose “most representative theologian” was Florovsky, in contrast, emphasized the need to “return to the Fathers,” to acquire their mind and distinct theological style.\(^5^6\) If Bulgakov believed that the patristic categories could be recast in new philosophical categories, Florovsky, on the contrary, insisted on the enduring value of the categories of Christian Hellenism.

In Schmemann’s account, which closely followed Florovsky’s polarization narrative, Bulgakov and Florovsky emerged as “ideal types” representing two attitudes to history: dogmatics and ecumenism. While Schmemann was not entirely dismissive of the first trend, associated with Bulgakov, he nevertheless embraced the second trend, associated with Florovsky, who was featured in the

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\(^{54}\) A. Schmemann, “Russian Theology: 1920–1972. An Introductory Survey,” *SVTQ*, 4 (1972), 174. The article was given as the Seventh Annual Bibliographical Lecture at the Union Theological Seminary in 1967, and in actual fact covered a slightly shorter period than was indicated in the title.


survey more prominently than any other theologian. Sparing no words in praise of his former colleague, Schmemann stated that Florovsky’s patrology lectures were “acclaimed as masterpieces of historical and theological analysis of the ‘patristic mind.’” Schmemann emphasized that Florovsky had “had a decisive influence on the younger generation of Orthodox theologians, both Russian and non-Russian.” Following Florovsky, Schmemann took St Vladimir’s Seminary in the neopatristic direction.

Through Schmemann, who remained at the helm of St Vladimir’s Seminary for more than twenty years (1962–1983), Florovsky’s polarizing narrative influenced a generation of Orthodox church leaders in the United States and around the world. Schmemann’s friend and long-time colleague, Byzantinist John Meyendorff, also followed Florovsky’s narrative of “organic” reception of Byzantine Christianity and the subsequent demise of modern Orthodox theology due to “western influences.” Upon his succession to the Deanship of St Vladimir’s Seminary in 1984, Meyendorff recognized Florovsky’s profound impact upon the school:

The awesomeness of my responsibilities is actually well expressed by this cross, which I just received from you, Your Beatitude [metropolitan Theodosius], and which was worn by Father Georges Florovsky. Indeed, it is Father Florovsky who placed St. Vladimir’s Seminary on the map of first-class academic institutions in this country, who left us with the legacy of a truly catholic conception of Orthodoxy, who oriented our school—and to a large degree the Church itself—towards a mission to America in the twentieth century. He did so in faithfulness to tradition [of] the Fathers by calling us all to a “neo-patristic synthesis.” To accept his cross implies the endorsement of his legacy.

Today Florovsky’s continuing legacy at St Vladimir’s Seminary is visible on a number of levels. *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, a journal that he spearheaded in 1952, continues to be a flagship periodical of Orthodox scholarship in the United States and around the world. The Seminary Library bears Florovsky’s name. The general orientation of the Seminary in the twenty-first century remains firmly anchored in the study of patristics.

Florovsky’s name also became a catalyst for a number of other important initiatives in the United States. For example, the Orthodox Theological Society...
in America (OTSA), founded in 1966, has the Annual Georges Florovsky lecture, which serves as a focal public event at its meetings. The establishment of the Fr Georges Florovsky Orthodox Christian Theological Society in 2010 by the graduate students of Princeton University and Princeton Theological Seminary marks a new chapter in the reception and dissemination of Florovsky’s intellectual heritage. The society organizes annual conferences, which bring students and scholars together to reflect on theological questions of historical and contemporary significance.\textsuperscript{61} Florovsky left a considerable personal archive to Princeton University, housed in the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts of Firestone Library, with many materials remaining to be catalogued, digitized, translated, and published.

It is also a measure of Florovsky’s influence that such a prominent church historian as Jaroslav Pelikan (1923–2006) counted Florovsky as his “mentor of sacred memory.”\textsuperscript{62} Pelikan held Florovsky’s patrology volumes in high esteem, stating that they were “basic to our understanding of the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas.”\textsuperscript{63} In the preface to \textit{The Melody of Theology} (1988), Pelikan wrote that if the book had a dedication “it would have been inscribed to Georges V. Florovsky (1893–1979), who, more than any other person except my late father, taught me to sing ‘the melody of theology’ this way.”\textsuperscript{64} Pelikan, who was accepted into the Orthodox Church towards the end of his life, was inspired by Florovsky’s deep sense of existential relevance of patristic thought.

GREECE: JOHN ROMANIDES, CHRISTOS YANNARAS, AND OTHERS

Ever since his debut at the First Congress of Orthodox theologians in Athens (1936), Florovsky made a lasting imprint on twentieth-century Greek Orthodox theology.\textsuperscript{65} In modern Greek theology, the patristic turn happened in the post-war period. In 1958, Florovsky noted with satisfaction that in Greece his “name is often mentioned in the disputes having to do especially with the idea

\textsuperscript{61} For the Society’s activities, visit <http://www.otsamerica.org>.
\textsuperscript{62} Jaroslav Pelikan, "Orthodox Theology in the West: The Reformation," in J. Breck, J. Meyendorff, and E. Silk (eds), \textit{The Legacy of St Vladimir} (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 159–65, at 159.
\textsuperscript{64} J. Pelikan, \textit{The Melody of Theology: A Philosophical Dictionary} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), x.
\textsuperscript{65} Pantelis Kalaitzidis, “From the ‘Return to the Fathers’ to the Need for a Modern Orthodox Theology,” \textit{SVTQ}, 54 (2010), 5–36, at 5; A. Blane, \textit{Georges Florovsky}, 186 n 86.
of a neopatristic synthesis.”

Another student of Florovsky, a noted Greek theologian, John Romanides (1928–2001), took neopatristics in a decidedly anti-western direction. In 1960, while mentoring Romanides at Harvard, Florovsky gave his graduate student the following terse, yet revealing characterization:

At present, there is a dearth of theological resources in the Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, I am hopeful about my student, Fr John Romanides, who made a debut three or four years ago with an excellent doctoral dissertation (in Greek, in Athens) on original sin in the teaching [of the Fathers] of the first two centuries. Now he is studying with me towards a Ph.D. at Harvard. He has a bias towards “isolationism,” drawing away from the West in everything and locking himself in the Byzantine tradition. Nevertheless, he remains on the level of genuine theological culture and deep ecclesiality (glubokaia tserkovnost’).

For Florovsky, “deep ecclesiality” uniquely qualified a theologian to enter the mind of the Fathers. As far as Florovsky was concerned, the Renaissance leaders were lacking precisely the quality of “deep ecclesiality,” when they refused to be guided by the Church. While praising Romanides for his dedication to the Church, Florovsky was apprehensive of his student’s isolationism. This judgment, coming from Florovsky’s own pen, should serve as a deterrent to those Orthodox theologians who invoke Florovsky’s authority in justification of their own anti-western and anti-ecumenical agenda. It should be noted, however, that Florovsky often allowed himself such a scorching criticism of “western influences” that he could be easily misunderstood as endorsing the

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66 Florovsky, Letter to S. Sakharov, May 18, 1958, Perеписка, 87. In recognition of his theological contribution, the University of Salonika awarded Florovsky an honorary doctorate in 1959.


isolationist stance espoused by traditionalists. Florovsky’s debt to Renaissance modernism and his critique of the theology of repetition renders any association of his theology with traditionalism rather unconvincing.

In the 1970s, another prominent Greek theologian, Christos Yannaras (b. 1935) surveyed the history of Greek Orthodox theology over the period of the last 150 years. Yannaras studied Florovsky’s work and regarded it as “classic.” Without always acknowledging the matter explicitly, Yannaras’s assessment of modern Greek theology moved within the framework of Florovsky’s main categories. Following Florovsky, Yannaras maintained that theology is an expression of ecclesial experience, not a speculative metaphysical system. For Yannaras, theological knowledge is akin to “immediate vision,” a point of special emphasis in Florovsky and V. Lossky. According to Yannaras, the main problem with modern Greek theology is its corruption by western intellectual influences, including scholasticism, rationalism, and pietism. Westernization created a rupture between academic theology and the ethos of the Greek Orthodox Church. The solution is to return to the Greek Church Fathers in order to recover the spirit, not merely the letter of their writings. Referring to Florovsky by name, Yannaras urged to imbue modern Greek theology with “the hellenism of the dogmas, the hellenism of worship, the hellenism of icons.” Thus, in Yannaras’s narrative, both the diagnosis of the problem and the prescription were issued in distinctly Florovskian terms.

For Yannaras, the future of Greek Orthodox theology is closely linked with Greece’s search for its modern identity, which he defines as a “balance between its Eastern origins and its European involvements.” In content, however, Yannaras’s theology was closer to the apophaticism and Palamism of Vladimir Lossky, and the anti-westernism of Romanides, than to Florovsky’s Christocentric theology.

The topic of Christian Hellenism was also taken up at the “Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement” conference in honor of the 100th anniversary of Florovsky’s birth, organized in March 1993 by the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts. One of the presenters, a former student of Florovsky, went so far as to canonize him as a “contemporary Church Father” for his “love of Hellenism.” Another student of Florovsky called him a “devoted son of the Ecumenical Patriarchate” and a

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72 The identification of tradition with the uninterrupted experience of the Church is also characteristic of the work of Dumitru Staniloae. See e.g. “The Orthodox Conception of Tradition and the Development of Doctrine,” Sobornost, 5 (1969), 652–62, at 653–4.
75 The papers presented at the conference were published in GOTR, 41 (1996).
“true Hellene.” Still another conference participant spoke of Florovsky’s “deep appreciation of the Hellenic spirit” and repeated Florovsky’s point that a common Hellenistic background constituted a meeting ground between the East and West. In the Greek context, Florovsky’s appeal to re-Hellenize Orthodox theology, issued as early as 1936, could ignite nationalist passions. In Florovsky’s own mind, however, Christian Hellenism stood for the universal foundation of Christianity, not for Greek national exclusivism. Florovsky had little patience with anything that smacked of narrow-minded nationalist arrogance, whether Slavic, Greek, or any other.

Some Greek interpreters of Florovsky have a more nuanced understanding of Christian Hellenism. For example, Peter Chamberas points out that Florovsky’s re-Hellenization of Orthodox Christianity “does not mean at all an ethnic Hellenism, nor the Hellenism of antiquity with its anti-Christian elements, but a Christian Hellenism, one that has been baptized, transfigured, and incorporated into the very reality of the Church as an eternal and perennial category of Christian existence.” Chambers concludes that Florovsky’s approach has had a deep and lasting impact on the “generations of Greek Orthodox theologians who have taken up his challenge for a neopatristic synthesis to restore the Patristic criterion in Orthodox theology and to revitalize the true meaning of Christian Hellenism.”

After Florovsky had left his temporary teaching post at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Massachusetts, his legacy was continued by his former student, George S. Bebis, who taught patristics at the school for forty-two years. In his book, The Mind of the Fathers (1994), Bebis adopted Florovsky’s categories—consensus patrum, ecclesial experience, Christian Hellenism, and so on—although his grasp of his teacher’s neopatristic vision was quite limited. The neopatristic direction at the school was also continued by Fr George Dion Dragas. Both directly and indirectly,

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81 Dragaś’s students, who wrote theses on Florovsky, include Christoph Künkel (his thesis defended at Durham University was published as Totus Christus: Die Theologie Georges V. Florovsky [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991]), George Sarraf (“The Reception of George Florovsky’s Neo-Patristic Synthesis,” unpublished Th. D. thesis, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, MA, 2009), and Matthew Baker (“Neo-Patristic Synthesis: An Examination of a Key Hermeneutical Paradigm in the Thought of Georges V. Florovsky” [unpublished M. A. thesis, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, MA, 2010]).
through his students and followers, Florovsky had a hand in changing the theological climate of twentieth-century Greek Orthodox theology.  

**POST-SOViet RUSSIA: SERGEI HORUZHY AND OTHERS**

During the Soviet period, Florovsky was little known because of the state-wide suppression of theological literature.  

In the 1950s, there was some interest in bringing him back to the Soviet Union with a view to entrusting him with the leadership of one of the Orthodox Theological Academies that Stalin permitted to reopen after the war.  

Sadly, a new wave of persecutions started in 1959 and continued for the next two decades, stifling theological research in the Soviet Union once again.  

But even if an official offer from the Moscow Patriarchate were to come through, Florovsky would not have accepted it. Although in the 1950s and 1960s ecumenical work and scholarly conferences brought him to the countries of Western Europe, Britain, and even India, he made no effort to visit the Soviet Union. Such a visit could have been arranged, given the fact that he had never been directly involved in anti-Soviet politics and that he was a church leader of international renown. His friend, metropolitan Anthony Bloom, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church in Britain and Ireland, who routinely travelled to the Soviet Union for church-related business, could facilitate such a visit. It should be recalled that Florovsky’s sister, Klavdia, returned to the Soviet Union from Bulgaria after the war. Unfortunately, Florovsky, whose writings also found resonance among the Soviet dissidents, did not live long enough to witness the Perestroika.

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83 See S. Sakharov, Letter to G. Florovsky, May 2, 1958, *Perepiska*, 72, who mentions Fr Pavel Statov and A. S. Buevsky (a secretary of metropolitan Nikolai), as the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate who “knew Florovsky’s books and valued them highly.” Fr Petr Gnedich also read Florovsky and referred to his works in his articles in *The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*: see S. Sakharov, Letter to G. Florovsky, August 28, 1958, *Perepiska*, 112–13. As an undated letter of Mikhail Aksenov-Meerson to Florovsky attests (GFP SVSL, no box number), there was an interest in the Soviet Union in publishing a collection of Florovsky’s essays in Russian with a view to reaching the circles of Moscow intelligentsia. The project did not get off the ground.  

84 Archimandrite Sofrony Sakharov mentions in his letter to Florovsky of August 28, 1958 that Bishop Mikhail of the Russian Orthodox Church expressed such a desire: see *Perepiska*, 109–10.  

85 N. Struve, “Five Years of Religious Persecution in Russia,” *SVTQ*, 8 (1964), 221.  

With the discovery of the émigré heritage after the fall of Communism, Florovsky’s writings have been enjoying a revival in Russia and Ukraine. For example, in October 1993, on the occasion of the centennial anniversary of his birth, a church procession with the cross was organized in his birthplace, Kirovograd (former Elisavetgrad), accompanied by a speech given by a local bishop and a symposium in Florovsky’s honor.\footnote{See \url{http://wiki.kr.ua} (accessed May 1, 2012). In addition, the thirtieth anniversary of Florovsky’s death was commemorated with a symposium on October 20, 2009, at the St Tikhon’s Orthodox University in Moscow: see \url{http://vsdn.ru/anounce/264.htm} (accessed May 1, 2012).} A project of establishing the Center for the Study of Florovsky’s Heritage is presently under way at Florovsky’s alma mater, the State University of Odessa (former Novorossiisky University).\footnote{For the announcement of this project, see Eduard I. Martyniuk et al. (eds), Aktual’ni pytannia tvorchoi spadshchyny G. V. Florovskogo (Odesa: Feniks, 2009), 211. The project director is Inna Golubovich.}

Over the past twenty years, *The Ways of Russian Theology* has been reprinted repeatedly, most recently in 2009.\footnote{Reprinted editions, retaining old orthography and many typographic errors, appeared in 1983 and 1991. The editions with modern Russian spelling appeared in 2006 and 2009. The English translation was first published in 1987 (this Lichtenstein edition has become a bibliographic rarity); the Italian translation appeared in the same year and the French translation was published in 1991.} Judging by the number of recent editions, Florovsky’s patrology lectures also continue to be in demand in Eastern Europe. The republication of his articles, which previously were a bibliographical rarity, facilitated the study of his heritage. The same could be said about his correspondence, especially letters pertaining to his Russian and European periods. In part due to the discovery of Florovsky and his émigré followers, from the 1990s, patristic revival has been gathering momentum in Russia and Ukraine, with about half a century delay compared to Greece and other centers of Orthodox theology.

Among the treatments of Florovsky’s narrative of Russian intellectual history, one study stands out in particular. The joint work of Aleksandr and Sergei Posadskiïs, *Russia’s Historical-Cultural Way in the Context of G. V. Florovsky’s Philosophy* (2004) is the first monograph-length treatment of Florovsky’s philosophy of history.\footnote{A. V. Posadskiï and S. V. Posadskiï, *Istoriko-kul’turnyi put’ Rossii v kontekste filosofii G. V. Florovskogo* (St Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2004).} The authors adopt and systematically develop Florovsky’s binary opposition of personalism, freedom, creativity, Christian Hellenism, and Orthodoxy versus organicism, naturalism, cosmov, determinism, rationalism, and monism, turning this opposition into a framework for discussing the problem of the western influences in Russian intellectual history. The Posadskiïs elaborate Florovsky’s assumption that the large-scale cultural transformations are best explained in terms of religious and
philosophical factors, rather than economic and political ones. Turning to *The Ways of Russian Theology*, the Posadskiis distinguish seven major periods of Russian intellectual history, ingeniously extrapolating Florovsky’s findings to the eighth period of the “socialist experiment,” lasting from the Bolshevik Revolution until the Perestroika. While the Posadskiis’ approach glosses over some problematic features of Florovsky’s historiography of pseudomorphosis, their work represents the first application of Florovsky’s historiography to the more recent Russian history.\(^91\)

Perhaps the most original adherent of Florovsky in Russia is a theoretical physicist and philosopher, Sergei Horuzhy (b. 1941). This remarkable thinker had already begun to explore the heritage of the Renaissance in the 1970s, during the time when such activity was seen as subversive by the Soviet authorities. After the Perestroika, Horuzhy emerged as an influential interpreter of Russian émigré philosophy and a religious philosopher in his own right. Horuzhy divides Russian religious philosophy into two major trajectories, the first associated with Solovyov’s metaphysics of all-unity and the second associated with the “patristic turn” of Florovsky and V. Lossky.\(^92\) The Russian scholar adopts both Florovsky’s polarizing narrative of the Renaissance and his genealogy of Solovyov’s philosophy, tracing it back to pre-Christian Platonism and German Idealism.\(^93\) Horuzhy construes Florovsky’s theological program as “endless patristics,” involving an expansion of the intellectual horizon of Russian thought beyond the philosophical options of the nineteenth century.\(^94\) Following Florovsky, Horuzhy takes patristic theology to be a successfully Christianized form of Hellenism, precisely because the Church Fathers grasped the central intuition of creaturehood, otherwise lacking in the panentheistic scheme of Russian sophiology.\(^95\) According to Horuzhy, Florovsky and Bulgakov attempted to integrate sophiology into ecclesial Orthodox thinking, but failed. Horuzhy emphasizes that patristic theology is a fruit of “ecclesial” and “ascetic-mystical” experience, rather than a product of philosophical speculation.\(^96\)

Departing from Florovsky, Horuzhy identifies the content of neopatristics with the Palamite distinction between essence and energies, hesychastic

\(^91\) For a penetrating critique of the Posadskiis’ historiography, see A. Cherniaev, *G. V. Florovskii kak filosof i istorik russkoi mysli*, 11. Since my main focus is the reception of Florovsky’s neopatristic program, a detailed discussion of this work, as well as other recent contributions dealing primarily with his account of Russian intellectual history, cannot be afforded in this chapter.

\(^92\) Horuzhy, *Posle pereryva. Puti russkoi filosofii* (St Petersburg: Aleteia, 1994), 8; *O starom i novom*, 49.


\(^94\) Horuzhy, *O starom i novom*, 46, 53.

\(^95\) Horuzhy, *O starom i novom*, 21, 56.

\(^96\) Horuzhy, *Posle pereryva*, 9; *O starom i novom*, 23, 88, 137.
practice, and what he calls “synergistic anthropology.” Drawing on V. Lossky’s critique of Bulgakov’s sophiology, Horuzhy presents the main directions of Orthodox theology in terms of the opposition between panentheism (which he also calls “essentialism”) and “energetism.” According to Horuzhy, essentialism is constituted by the panentheistic claim that the essence of the world inheres in God, with all attendant difficulties that Florovsky and V. Lossky criticized, especially determinism and organicism. In contrast, according to energetism, creatures freely participate in the divine energies, rather than in the divine essence. According to Horuzhy, energetism is an indeterministic and open system that draws its main inspiration from the ascetic-mystical experience of the Church and the theology of Gregory Palamas. Most originally, Horuzhy proposes that energetism is compatible with the fundamental assumptions of quantum physics. For the Russian physicist, energetism constitutes a distinctive “Eastern Christian discourse,” and the only viable foundation of Orthodox theology. Horuzhy ingeniously integrates Florovsky’s polarizing narrative with the Neo-Palamism of V. Lossky, B. Krivocheine, and J. Meyendorff. Yet, unlike these theologians and in sharp contrast to Florovsky, Horuzhy has paid very little, if any, consideration to Christology and Trinitarian doctrine, concentrating primarily on theological anthropology. Despite these omissions, Horuzhy is perhaps the most original post-Soviet philosophical theologian to engage the Renaissance and Florovsky’s critique of the movement. Horuzhy has most ingeniously reworked Florovsky’s polarizing narrative in a Neo-Palamite fashion.

THE EMERGING THIRD PHASE

There are signs that presently Orthodox theologians are entering a new, more critical phase of receiving Florovsky’s heritage. Two different trajectories are distinguishable within this emerging phase. The first trajectory is represented by the Orthodox theologians who work within the neopatristic paradigm, but take exception to some of Florovsky’s assumptions and conclusions. The second trajectory includes those who question the dominance of the neopatristic paradigm and call for creative work in the theological domains outside patristics.

97 Horuzhy, Ocherki sinergiinoi antropologii (Moscow: Institut filosofii, teologii i istorii sv. Fomy, 2005).
98 Horuzhy, Posle pereryva, 40, 264–5; O starom i novom, 179; for the discussion of panentheism, see chapter 8.
99 Cf. also Alexei V. Nesteruk, The Universe as Communion: Towards a Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Theology and Science (London: T&T Clark, 2008).
100 Horuzhy, Posle pereryva, 283.
101 Horuzhy, Posle pereryva, 177.
One of the most distinguished representatives of the first trajectory is Russian patristic theologian, metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev (b. 1966). Three generations and a Soviet hiatus separate Alfeyev’s work from that of Florovsky. For this reason, while Alfeyev’s scholarship belongs to the same general trajectory of Orthodox patristic revival, it would be inaccurate to include Alfeyev among Florovsky’s followers. While recognizing that “Florovsky was to be the chief impetus behind the ‘patristic renaissance’ in Russian twentieth-century theology,” Alfeyev also departs from Florovsky in significant ways.

Conceding to some extent Florovsky’s critique of Russian theology’s “western captivity,” Alfeyev points out that not every instance of western influences led to a pseudomorphosis. Alfeyev notes, for example, that the Russian saints Dimitri of Rostov and Tikhon of Zadonsk were deeply rooted in the Orthodox tradition, despite graduating from Latin-style theological schools. Alfeyev also questions the standard narrative by describing more than two different streams within twentieth-century Russian émigré theology. The first stream is associated with the names of Florovsky, V. Lossky, B. Krivocheine, K. Kern, and J. Meyendorff, initiating a patristic revival. The second stream is represented primarily by Bulgakov, whose work, notes Alfeyev, also drew on the Fathers, in addition to German Idealist philosophers and Vladimir Solovyov. The third stream reflects a liturgical revival and is associated with Nikolai Afanasiev and Alexander Schmemann. The fourth stream has to do with literature, culture, and spirituality, and includes G. Fedotov, K. Mochulsky, A. Kartashev, and others. The fifth stream includes religious philosophers, such as S. Frank, N. Lossky, L. Shestov, and V. Zenkovsky. Alfeyev’s taxonomy of the five main streams complexifies Florovsky’s polarizing narrative of the neopatriarchs versus the theological modernism of the Renaissance.

Alfeyev also acknowledges the limitations of Florovsky’s historical scholarship. He observes that Florovsky tended to exaggerate the extent of the consensus patrum, failing to pay sufficient attention to the actual variety of historical and cultural contexts of patristic writings. Alfeyev calls for a more contextual reading of the Church Fathers, in order to appreciate not only the similarities, but also the peculiarities of their thought. While in practice Florovsky did not pursue the contextual interpretation of patristic writings, in principle such a reading was consonant with his personalism and historical singularism.

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103 Alfeyev, Orthodox Witness Today, 164.
Following John Meyendorff, Alfeyev also questions the legitimacy of applying the Byzantine theological norm to the theological traditions of other cultures, including Russian Orthodoxy. Alfeyev insists that the “universal Orthodox tradition is wider than Byzantinism” and urges a rethinking of Florovsky’s category of Christian Hellenism.\(^{106}\) The Russian metropolitan concludes that “another qualitative leap forward is needed in order to build the neo-patristic synthesis” on a foundation that does justice not only to Greek, but also to other cultural expressions of Christian thought. Alfeyev’s constructive critique of Florovsky’s findings is indicative of the emerging third phase of receiving neopatristic theology.

In a similar vein, Dorothea Wendebourg questions the applicability of the pseudomorphosis narrative to the history of modern Greek theology. According to Wendebourg, the endorsement of this narrative by leading contemporary Greek theologians, such as Yannaras, has had the overall effect of discouraging the exploration of post-Byzantine Greek theology and inhibiting Greek theologians from engaging the West constructively.\(^{107}\)

Perhaps the most comprehensive criticism of Florovsky’s impact on modern Greek theology is offered by Pantelis Kalaitzidis. The Greek scholar also emphasizes that Florovsky’s program had the effect of encouraging a new wave of anti-westernism in twentieth-century Greek Orthodox theology. Kalaitzidis argues that the hegemony of neopatristic theology tended to stifle present-day Orthodox conversations in such significant areas as biblical studies, political theology, liberation theology, feminist theology, theology of the body, and so on.

In order to promote a new work in these fields, in June 2010, Volos Theological Academy (Volos, Greece), directed by Kalaitzidis, hosted a conference under the title “Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology Be Contextual?” Reassessing the neopatristic paradigm, the conference contributors tended to gravitate towards one of the two trajectories, outlined in the beginning of this section. Some conference presenters called for a more contextual study of the Church Fathers, while other participants focused on new avenues of contemporary Orthodox theology, acknowledging the need to engage contemporary social, political, and cultural contexts.\(^{108}\) Volos Theological Academy continues to co-sponsor numerous other academic initiatives in these fields.


\(^{108}\) The conference proceedings, along with some additional contributions, were published in *Theologia*, 81 (December 2010). The discussion of contextual theology was resumed at another conference with a similar theme, which took place in Cluj-Napoca, Romania in May 2013.
The Volos conference coincided with two other events engaging Florovsky’s heritage, which took place in the United States. The first event was a conference organized by Greek-American theologians Aristotle Papanikolaou and George Demacopoulos at Fordham University, addressing the topic of “Orthodox Constructions of the West.” The conference was indicative of an emerging re-examination of the twentieth-century Orthodox criticism of Western theology associated with Florovsky, Lossky, Yannaras, and others. The conference participants called for a more nuanced engagement of the binary opposition between East and West that would overcome the previously held Orthodox stereotypes and overly polemical constructions of the West.

The second event was a symposium hosted by St Vladimir’s Seminary on the topic of “Hellenism and Orthodoxy,” which took Florovsky’s words that “Hellenism is a standing category of Christian experience”109 as its epigraph. But far from accepting Florovsky’s interpretation of Christian Hellenism uncritically, the presenters offered some nuanced evaluations of various expressions of Hellenism throughout history.110 My own experience of discussing Florovsky’s work with colleagues in Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Greece, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States confirms the emerging third, more critical, phase of appropriating his vision.

CONCLUSION

Florovsky influenced numerous eminent twentieth-century Orthodox theologians, such as, V. Lossky, L. Ouspensky, A. Schmemann, C. Yannaras, J. Romanides, and S. Horuzhy. Lossky responded to Florovsky’s call by offering the first “Palamite” synthesis; Ouspensky applied Florovsky’s pseudomorphosis narrative to the history of iconography; Schmemann reconnected doctrine and “ecclesial experience” by developing liturgical theology; Yannaras and Romanides undertook the task of liberating modern Greek Orthodox theology from its “western captivity;” Horuzhy took Florovsky’s polarizing narrative of Russian theology to a new theoretical level, driving a verge between the panentheism of the Renaissance philosophers and the energetism of the neopatristic theologians. Thanks to these theologians and their followers, during the second phase of receiving Florovsky, both his

110 The select symposium papers were published in SVTQ, 54/3–4 (2010). The contributions of James C. Skedros, Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Elpidophoros Lambriniadis, Elizabeth Prodomou, and Brandon Gallaher (published separately) are particularly relevant for assessing Florovsky’s interpretation of Christian Hellenism.
narrative of pseudomorphosis and his “return to the Fathers” gained an almost universal acceptance in worldwide Orthodoxy.

The third, critical phase in the reception of Florovsky’s theological legacy has emerged in the work of recent conferences and individual Orthodox scholars, including Alfeev, Arjakovsky, Baker, Behr, Gallaher, Kalaitzidis, Cherniaev, Plested, Wendebourg, and others. The following points are emerging in recent scholarly exchanges. First, twenty-first century Orthodox patristic scholarship must go beyond Florovsky in content and in method. Second, the neopatristic direction, while remaining influential, is gradually beginning to lose its hegemony in contemporary Orthodox thought. The theological minds attuned to other paradigms are emerging, resonating more with the “modernist” impulses of the Russian Religious Renaissance. Third, Orthodox theology in the West is no longer an unknown commodity. Given this new situation, Orthodox theology seems poised for the task that Florovsky encouraged, namely that of a creative encounter with the West. In the changed historical circumstances, such an encounter would include a robust engagement of the postmodern condition. Whatever form such an engagement may take, it should not become yet another instance of a pseudomorphosis, of an intellectual capitulation to the West. Finally, the standard narrative that sharply opposes the theology of the Renaissance “fathers” to the neopatristic theology of the “children,” will keep on being challenged and renegotiated, as the present-day Orthodox theologians continue balancing faithfulness to the patristic tradition with the freedom of theological inquiry and creativity. As the new paradigms of Orthodox theology are being tested today, the “return to the Fathers” will remain an indispensable reference point and a source of inspiration and renewal.
Beyond the Polarizing Narrative

It is not enough to be the possessor of genius—the time and the man must conjoin. An Alexander the Great, born into an age of profound peace, might scarce have troubled the world—a Newton, grown up in a thieves’ den, might have devised little but a new and ingenious picklock...¹

The Renaissance represented a formidable collective effort of the Russian intellectuals to engage modernity religiously in a comprehensive manner. The two major impulses of the Renaissance were to give a religious expression to all aspects of culture and to “enchurch” life. The first impulse brought about much religious experimentation, while the second impulse resulted in a return of the Russian intelligentsia to the Orthodox Church. Florovsky was awakened by the first impulse and fully embraced the second one, which especially intensified during the “exilic” period of the Renaissance, after the Bolshevik Revolution. He was a living history of the Renaissance, due to his personal acquaintance with the numerous participants in the movement and due to his encyclopedic grasp of their ideas. As I have argued in this book, his rebellion against the Renaissance “fathers” needs to be seen as a crucial moment within the movement, not merely as an attempt to jettison its heritage altogether. No matter how dismissive and critical Florovsky was of the spiritual achievements of the Renaissance, he could not help acknowledging the significance of this period in Russian history:

The last and most distinctive feature of the Russian development in recent time was a return of philosophers to the Church and their attempt to re-interpret precisely the Patristic tradition in modern terms, to restate the teaching of the Church as a complete philosophy of life. It was a noble endeavor, and a daring and courageous one. There is no need to conceal all the dangers of this venture or the failures of those who run the risk. Unfortunately, this reinterpretation was unnecessarily linked with the adoption of German idealistic philosophy, of Hegel, Schelling and Baader, and very much of unhealthy mysticism has crept into the

schemes constructed by Vladimir Soloviev, the late Father Sergius Bulgakov, Father Paul Florensky, and perhaps most of all the late Nicolas Berdiaev. There is no need to endorse their findings and speculations. But it is high time to walk in their steps.²

This study has shown that Florovsky had in fact walked in the steps of these Russian thinkers. I have situated Florovsky’s thought within the Renaissance without accepting his terms of contrast between the idealism-driven theological modernism of the Renaissance “fathers” and the Christ-centered neopatristic synthesis of his own.

I have argued instead that both the Renaissance “fathers” and Florovsky had been preoccupied with how to reconcile faithfulness to the Orthodox tradition with theological creativity. The sharp opposition between the modernist religious philosophy of the Renaissance and a traditionalist theology based on the Church Fathers does justice neither to Florovsky nor to his Russian interlocutors. In the passage just quoted, Florovsky acknowledges that the Renaissance philosophers also started from the patristic tradition, which they proceeded to reinterpret in modern categories. He shared the patristic starting point with the Renaissance “fathers,” although he was ambivalent as to the need for a modern reinterpretation. Methodologically, Florovsky was against reconceptualizing Christian doctrine in modern terms. But in practice, his personalism was both patristic and modern, whereas his historicism arguably owed more to the modern philosophers of history than to the Church Fathers. Florovsky’s neopatristic synthesis cuts across the boundaries of traditionalism and modernism, without permanently settling into either of these two options. Therefore, the symbolic replacement of the Renaissance “fathers” with the Church Fathers in Florovsky’s “Christian philosophy” has never been as complete as Florovsky had imagined.

To various degrees, Florovsky owed his anti-organicism to Petr Bitsilli; his personalism and emphasis on freedom to Nicholas Berdiaev, Lev Karsavin, and others; his historical a-teleology and anti-determinism to Alexander Herzen; his tendency towards philosophical nominalism to Nikolai Lange; his historical singularism to Petr Struve; his balance between tradition and creativity to Vasily Zenkovsky; his interest in religious antinomies, theology of creation, and “ecclesial experience” to Pavel Florensky; his epistemology of ecclesial incorporation to Aleksei Khomiakov; his concept of patristic Christian philosophy to Ivan Kireevsky; his understanding of Christian Hellenism to Sergei Trubetskoy; his critique of western influences in Russian theology to Anthony Khrapovitsky, Gustav Shpet, Boris Iakovenko, and others. Besides, as a historian, Florovsky stood on the shoulders of the Russian pre-revolutionary patristic scholars, especially Vasily Bolotov, Nikolai Glubokovsky, Aleksandr Gorsky, and Aleksei Lebedev. Most importantly, Florovsky owed his religious-philosophical

² “The Legacy and Task of Orthodox Theology,” ATR, 31(1949), 69–70.
awakening to Vladimir Solovyov and the discovery of his vocation in patristics to Sergius Bulgakov.

This list of various influences is intended to be illustrative, rather than exhaustive. An equally long list of western intellectuals who influenced Florovsky could be produced, including figures such as Charles Renouvier, Johann Adam Möhler, John Henry Newman, Adolf von Harnack, Oswald Spengler, and Arnold Toynbee. However, the primary focus of this study was Florovsky’s interaction with his Russian contemporaries, rather than his equally important dialogue with his western interlocutors. The latter exchange, especially the points of contact between Orthodox neopatristics and Catholic ressourcement, would require a separate monograph. It was not my purpose to reduce Florovsky’s stance to a set of influences, but to show that while he was thoroughly steeped in Russian religious thought, Florovsky also saw new theological possibilities emerging out of his immersion in patristic sources.

It would be a misleading oversimplification to represent Florovsky as drinking peacefully at the fountain of patristic sources. As I have emphasized throughout this study, his theological vision was also marked by a conflict with his Russian and western contemporaries. Florovsky’s neopatristic theology was predicated on rejecting Solovyov’s philosophy of all-unity, Bulgakov’s panentheism, Tolstoy’s moralism, the “non-ecclesial” mysticism of “new religious consciousness,” and more generally, on criticizing the “western captivity” of modern Russian Orthodox theology. For Florovsky, neopatristic theology was a form of “liberation theology,” to the extent to which it offered emancipation from corrupting western influences.

As a philosopher of history, Florovsky reacted against Eurasian etatism, Hegelian panlogism, and Harnackian historiography of Hellenization. Hence, Florovsky’s frequently repeated claim that he was an autodidact in theology requires a correction. He was thoroughly schooled in the theology of the Renaissance, which he began to appropriate in Russia and with which he engaged more intensely in the Diaspora. While this education was not formal, the mark that it left on his mind was more profound and lasting than he was prepared to admit.

FOUR TYPES OF A SYNTHESIS

One of the main difficulties in understanding Florovsky’s neopatristic theology is that he rarely inquires into the operation of a synthesis with
methodological precision. In our presentation we distinguished the following types of a synthesis: religious, historical, patristic, and neopatristic. A “religious synthesis” is obtained when theological knowledge is integrated with other knowledge domains. A paradigmatic case was Solovyov’s theory of integral knowledge.

A “historical synthesis” emerges, when a historian converts a record of past events and a collection of sources into a judgment-laden intelligible unity. A scholarly inquirer accesses ancient literary sources and non-literary artifacts as signs of the past that need to be rendered intelligible in the present. Florovsky insists that such a synthesis involves personal judgment and sympathetic imagination. Historical knowledge is not exclusively bound up with the past; on the contrary, history becomes known always from the standpoint of the present. Understood in this way, “no ultimate synthesis is possible in history but still there is a measure of integration for every age.” In the closing sentence of The Ways of Russian Theology, Florovsky wrote: “a genuine historical synthesis is not so much an interpretation of the past as a creative fulfillment of the future.” Such a synthesis can operate both on the micro-level of individual human achievement and on the macro-level of the large-scale historical transformations.

A “patristic synthesis” refers to cases when the Church Fathers, whether individually or collectively, expressed the mind of the Church. Some of Florovsky’s examples are the “theological-metaphysical synthesis” of Basil of Caesarea, the “artistic synthesis” of Ephraem the Syrian, the “short lived theocratic synthesis” of Emperor Justinian, and the “ascetic synthesis” of Maximus the Confessor. Florovsky discusses different examples of such a synthesis in his patrology lectures without clarifying how those connect to his search for a “new Christian synthesis,” announced in the preface to the book. To clarify this relationship I distinguished between a “patristic synthesis,” achieved by ancient Christian authors, and a “neopatristic synthesis,” sought by contemporary historical theologians.

In his “Theological Testament,” composed towards the end of his life, Florovsky defined the neopatristic synthesis in the following way:

I was led quite early to the idea of what I am calling now “the Neo-Patristic Synthesis.” It should be more than just a collection of Patristic sayings or statements. It must be a synthesis, a creative reassessment of those insights which were granted to the Holy Men of old. It must be Patristic, faithful to the spirit and vision of the Fathers, ad mentem Patrum. Yet, it must be also Neo-Patristic, since it is to be addressed to the new age, with its own problems and queries.7

6 Florovsky, Puti russkogo bogoslovia, 520; emphasis in the original.
7 A. Blane, Georges Florovsky, 153–4; emphasis and capitalization in the original.
This is Florovsky’s most explicit statement of what he intended by the neopatristic synthesis. Florovsky distinguished his theological program from the traditionalist “theology of repetition.” As far as he was concerned, such a repetition was both theologically undesirable and hermeneutically impossible. The neopatristic synthesis is a result of applying a “historical synthesis” to different instances of a “patristic synthesis.”

In any historical narrative, the past events and ideas can never be frozen entirely in the past, but are reinterpreted from the standpoint of the present. But what precisely was involved in such a reinterpretation? Bulgakov and other “modernist” theologians construed such a reinterpretation rather freely—as involving a translation of the ancient dogmatic definitions into the language of contemporary philosophy and as sanctioning a speculative expansion of traditional beliefs. Theoretically, Florovsky was opposed to any expression of the modernist philosophical translation of patristic theological categories, since for him the Christian Hellenism of the Church Fathers was philosophia perennis. But in actual practice he read the insights of modern historicism and personalism back into the patristic sources, crediting the Church Fathers with the “discovery” of history and personhood. His guiding paradigm of theological inquiry was an ever-deepening interiorization of patristic theology, entering the mind of the Fathers, and sharing in their experience of God. He contrasted this paradigm with merely repeating patristic statements (the error of the traditionalists) or, worse still, purporting to go beyond the Fathers into the realm of speculation (the alleged error of Bulgakov and others).

**THE UNFOLDING OF THE NEOPATRISTIC PROGRAM IN FLOROVSKY’S CAREER**

We are now in a position to trace, with broad strokes, how the program of a return to the Church Fathers came to be shaped in Florovsky’s mind over the years. It is generally recognized that Florovsky had not completed his neopatristic synthesis, preferring to treat the subject in a “rhapsodic,” rather than systematic manner. In this regard it would be helpful to distinguish between a “return to the Fathers” as a polemical stance, a research project, a hermeneutical strategy, a theological program, and a synthesis proper. As a polemical stance, a “return to the Fathers” was meant to oppose the perceived theological modernism of the Renaissance “fathers.” As a research project, a “return to the Fathers” primarily involved a study of patristic texts. Related to that was a

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hermeneutical strategy of “acquiring the mind of the Fathers,” achieved by means of sympathetic imagination through ecclesial incorporation. As a theological program, a “return to the Fathers” included Christocentric theology, sacred Hellenism, intuition of creaturehood, ecclesial experience, personalism, historicism, and anti-determinism. Finally, as a synthesis proper, a “return to the Fathers” was meant to draw together patristic research, a hermeneutical strategy, a theological program, and a polemical stance in a comprehensive, yet open way. Florovsky had recourse to all of the above-mentioned aspects of a “return to the Fathers,” without always clearly differentiating between them himself.

The first references to the general framework of the patristic tradition appear in Florovsky’s first published article, a survey of scholarly literature on Vladimir Solovyov. In the 1910s, Florovsky maintained that the religious philosophy of Solovyov and his followers expressed the spirit of Eastern patristic thought. Awakened by Solovyov as a student, Florovsky planned to pursue a religious synthesis, involving scientific and religious knowledge. But his studies at Novorossiisky University afforded little opportunity for such a synthesis. Instead, the writings of the Renaissance leaders, which Florovsky had already begun to read as a gymnasium student, provided his informal schooling in Russian religious philosophy and theology. His correspondence with Pavel Florensky offered a vital personal link with one of the “fathers” of the Renaissance, while his exchange with Nikolai Glubokovsky gave him access to the world of Russian academic theology. Florensky’s The Ground and Pillar of the Truth stimulated his later reflections on the doctrine of creation out of nothing, whereas Glubokovsky’s and S. Trubetskoy’s account of Christian Hellenism supplied Florovsky with a major category of his future neopatristic theology. During his Russian period, Florovsky remained primarily a recipient, rather than a participant in the Renaissance.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the following exodus of the leading religious thinkers from Russia was a watershed experience for the generation of the Renaissance “fathers” and “children.” The trauma of the Revolution and exile converted the study of the Russian past into a form of theodicy, into an explanation of the evils that afflicted Russia at present, including the destruction of the Church by the Bolsheviks. Upon his arrival in Sofia from Odessa during the general evacuation of 1920, Florovsky joined the Eurasian circle. While he could not accept some premises of the Eurasian doctrine, such as, for example, geographic determinism and pro-Asian orientation, Florovsky nevertheless came to formulate his own version of the Eurasian “exodus to the East.” Like most of his émigré contemporaries, Florovsky dreamed of returning home, only his new “home” was no longer Russia, but the “land of the Church Fathers.” Such a return was not a matter of a geographic relocation, but that of an intellectual emancipation from the thought-patterns of the West. Such a return was Florovsky’s peculiar solution to the problem of
spiritual deracination caused by the exile. If the emigration dreamed of Russia freed from the Bolsheviks, Florovsky dreamed of Orthodox theology purified of the western influences.

The 1920s were for Florovsky a period of “searches and wanderings,” of an intense quest for an intellectual center of gravity. We discovered that Florovsky made his first written announcement of a “return to the Fathers” in his essay “On Righteous and Sinful Patriotism,” included in the second Eurasian volume, On the Ways (1922). Drawing upon Ivan Kireevsky, Florovsky called for an articulation of a “new religious philosophy” founded on patristic tradition and informed by western Christian thought. In this transitional essay Florovsky was not yet determined to renounce Solovyov and, with him, the heritage of the Renaissance “fathers.”

Florovsky began articulating his own philosophy of history as he was pursuing research and writing of his master’s thesis on Herzen in the early 1920s. Only fragments of this thesis were previously known in scholarship. Integration of archival discoveries has permitted a chapter-by-chapter reconstruction of the whole dissertation. Following Petr Struve, Florovsky gravitated towards historical singularism, a theory of historical knowledge that gave priority to particular events and concrete historical persons as against large-scale developments and “corporate persons,” such as nations, states, and institutions. Drawing on Mikhail Gershenzon, Florovsky held that historical understanding involved informal inference, personal judgment, and sympathetic imagination. In theory, if not always in practice, Florovsky also rejected organicism, a view that historical change was akin to the growth of a biological organism. Following Herzen, Florovsky argued against Hegel that human history was not “rationally transparent,” that the historical process had no overarching purpose and was fraught with rifts and discontinuities. Florovsky later applied this methodology to the history of Russian religious thought with some devastating results. At the same time, contradicting his own methodological commitments, in his study of the Church Fathers he often resorted to the organicist categories in order to stress the continuity of patristic thought.

Upon a closer reading of Solovyov in 1922, Florovsky became convinced that the Solovyovan philosophy of all-unity was co-opted by German Idealism and thereby fell into pre-Christian Hellenism. During his Prague years (1922–1926), Florovsky began, as he put it, “pulling away” from Solovyov. I showed that a major turning point was marked by his essay “In the Realm of Searches and Wanderings” (1923). Florovsky’s intellectual estrangement from Solovyov continued with some vacillation for the rest of his life, providing a springboard for launching his own theological program.

In Prague, Florovsky made his personal acquaintance with Bulgakov, Berdyaev, Novgorodtsev, Struve, N. Lossky, and Zenkovsky, to name only the most prominent leaders of the older generation. As a member of Bulgakov’s
Brotherhood of St Sophia, on a personal level, Florovsky struggled with the problem of enchurching his own intellectual life. He also became more established in his growing theological orientation towards the patristic tradition and away from modern Russian theology. In 1926, Florovsky accepted Bulgakov’s offer to teach patristics at the St Sergius Institute. This choice was the most significant career change of his life. As he admitted years later, by teaching patristics he “discovered his true vocation.”

In Paris, Florovsky was drawn more closely than before into the orbit of thought and action of the Renaissance “fathers,” particularly that of Berdyaev and Bulgakov. Florovsky interiorized Berdyaev’s critique of the inadequate Christological focus of Renaissance theology. Berdyaev’s personalist existentialism and his tragic view of history informed Florovsky’s own version of personalism and historical singularism. Berdyaev and Bulgakov promoted Florovsky on the ecumenical scene, both in France and abroad. In the 1930s, Florovsky rapidly reached his acme as a patristics scholar and polemically sharpened his neopatristic vision.

Florovsky’s first strictly theological essay, “The Father’s House” (1927), was published in Berdyaev’s journal The Way and addressed the nature of the Church. Ecclesiological themes would remain on Florovsky’s radar for the rest of his life, becoming one of the main foci of his future neopatristic synthesis. His articles against German Idealism and Romanticism indirectly targeted Russian sophiology. His seminal essay, “Creation and Creaturehood,” first presented at Berdyaev’s ecumenical Colloquium and subsequently published in the Proceedings of the St Sergius Institute in 1928, was an exposé of the patristic doctrine of creation out of nothing. The essay was also a thinly disguised attack upon Bulgakov’s panentheism, which in Florovsky’s view undermined the intuition of creaturely contingency, human freedom, and the significance of history by postulating the eternal ground of the world in God. According to Florovsky, the theologian’s primary task was to do justice to the historical divine revelation and only then to engage in cosmological speculations about the relation between God and the world.

Florovsky’s essay “Theological Fragments” (1931) provided an early précis of the sources and methodological assumptions of his historical theology. In this essay, he marshaled his idea of Christian Hellenism as a historiographic assumption, rather than a claim requiring a sustained historical argument. “The Father’s House,” “Creation and Creaturehood,” and “Theological Fragments” announced the central themes of Florovsky’s historical theology, without using the expression “neopatristic synthesis.” In terms of the taxonomy adopted in the beginning of this section, one could speak of Florovsky’s polemical stance developing into a hermeneutical strategy and a theological program at this stage.

In the preface to the first volume of the lectures on the Eastern Church Fathers, delivered at the St Sergius Institute and published in 1931, Florovsky

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asserted that only patristic theology could open “the right and true way to the new Christian synthesis.” Apparently, he conceived his patrology lectures as preparing the ground for, rather than actually articulating, this new synthesis. The lectures provided an author-by-author treatment of the major patristic writers, then standard in western patrologies. Simultaneously, Florovsky began to work on *The Ways of Russian Theology*, which told the story of the “western captivity” of modern Orthodox theology, leading to various theological “dead ends.” I have proposed to read the patrology volumes and *The Ways of Russian Theology* as a trilogy. Florovsky developed what I have called “exilic theology,” predicated on the hope that modern Russian Orthodox could return from its intellectual exile in the West into the “grace-filled land of the Fathers of the universal Church.” Remarkably, *The Ways of Russian Theology* served the double purpose of at once explaining the past and changing the course of history.

The Sophia Affair of 1935–1936 had the effect of widening the theological divide between Florovsky on the one hand and the champions of modernist Russian theology on the other hand. Florovsky’s “pulling away” from Solovyov now took the more radical form of intellectual undoing of the Russian Religious Renaissance in the name of neopatristics. But no matter how passionately Florovsky revolted against the Renaissance, the questions he asked, the range of answers he was prepared to entertain, as well as the key categories he deployed, were to a large extent inherited from the Renaissance “fathers.”

In December 1936, Florovsky’s program of a “return to the Fathers,” which he now developed more fully in terms of the restoration of Christian Hellenism, received a significant measure of public recognition at the First International Congress of Orthodox Theologians in Athens. Both the polemical and the constructive dimensions of his program were announced in two landmark communications: “The Western Influences in Russian Theology” and “Patristics and Modern Theology.” Florovsky’s appeal to the foundational role of patristic theology had precedents in Russian Orthodox theology—particularly in the works of Ivan Kireevsky and Aleksei Khomiakov—but the sharp anti-Renaissance thrust that this appeal took was quite unprecedented.

As the first half of the twentieth century was drawing to a close, with most of the Renaissance “fathers” in their grave, Florovsky emerged as the leading Orthodox voice on the international scene. After the war, he continued to pursue neopatristics as a research project and as a theological program. In 1948, he spoke of neopatristic theology as a foundation of ecumenical consensus between the Christian East and the West.11

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9 Vostochnye ottsy IV-go veka, 5.
11 Florovsky, “The Legacy and the Task of Orthodox Theology,” 70.
Despite Florovsky’s increasing tensions with the Russian émigré community, the neopatristic direction gradually gained more adherents. I distinguished three main phases in the reception of Florovsky’s neopatristics: (1) engagement and conflict with the Renaissance “fathers” (1920s–1930s); (2) general acceptance by his younger contemporaries (1940s–1990s); (3) emerging critical revision (2000s–present). Florovsky’s call for a return to the Fathers was answered by Vladimir Lossky, who took Pseudo-Dionysius’s mystical theology and Palamite theology of the divine energies as his patristic foci; by Leonid Ouspensky, who criticized the westernization of iconography and called for a Neo-Byzantine revival in Orthodox religious art; by Alexander Schmemann, who connected dogmatic theology and liturgical practice; by Christos Yannaras, who applied Florovsky’s historiography of the western pseudomorphosis to the history of modern Greek theology, to name only a few examples discussed in chapter 14. The second phase was also characterized by a general endorsement of the polarizing narrative.

The emerging third phase is marked by a more critical attitude towards Florovsky’s legacy. One group of Florovsky’s critics consists of Orthodox scholars, who work within a broadly defined neopatristic paradigm, but call for a refinement of Florovsky’s historical methods. The most prominent voices in this group include Andrew Louth, John Behr, John McGuckin, Marcus Plested, and Hilarion Alfeyev. The second group of Florovsky’s critics consists of those who have questioned the hegemony of the neopatristic paradigm and are exploring new paradigms under the umbrella term of “contextual theology.” The representatives of this group include Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Aristotle Papanikolaou, Radu Preda, Assad Kattan, Brandon Gallaher, and so on. The present study questions a sharp opposition between neopatristics and Orthodox theological modernism (and its contemporary analogue, “contextual theology”). This book is a contribution to the critical phase of receiving Florovsky’s legacy.

REMAINING TENSIONS AND DIFFICULTIES

Each thinker probably deserves as much empathy (Einfühlung) as he afforded his contemporaries. Considering the Church Fathers to be his true contemporaries, Florovsky consistently employed sympathetic imagination, when he interpreted the orthodox patristic authors. However, Florovsky was less charitable when criticizing the work of his Russian contemporaries, preferring a more inquisitorial stance instead. He approached the Church Fathers with a hermeneutic of trust, while he read modern Russian theologians with a hermeneutic of suspicion. He offered a harmonizing reading of the Church
Fathers, while exaggerating discontinuities and distortions in the history of Russian theology. This study has found problems with both readings.

Florovsky’s appeal to re-Hellenize Orthodox theology was provocative and potentially misleading. Those who were not familiar with his comprehensive critique of non-Christian Hellenism—particularly what he considered to be its pagan and German Idealist expressions—could mistake such an appeal for a version of Greek cultural chauvinism. While Florovsky was no Greek nationalist, his exclusive preference for Greek theological categories sent a mixed message and was often misunderstood in the Greek context. In principle, Florovsky welcomed the future creative Orthodox appropriation of western theology. But in practice, as a historian, he fiercely attacked all forms of western influences in modern Russian theology, condemning them as distortions.

His anti-western rhetoric encouraged lesser minds to embrace isolationism, for which there was already fertile ground in nationalist and traditionalist Orthodox circles. Although Florovsky did not intend such an outcome, his version of Orthodox universalism, unlike that of the Renaissance “fathers,” was predicated on the assumption that the Greek patristic tradition provided the common theological foundation for the dialogue between the East and West. While he had a high regard for Augustine, Jerome, and some other Latin Church Fathers, Florovsky valued them only to the extent to which they contributed to the totalizing narrative of Christian Hellenism. To be sure, Florovsky’s theological vision was not the only reason for twentieth-century Orthodox anti-westernism. Nevertheless, as Pantelis Kalaitzidis has successfully demonstrated, Florovsky was received in the post-war Greek Orthodox theology as providing theological justification for such an attitude. In this regard, Florovsky’s persistent conflation of the criterion of truth with the criterion of identity has bedeviled Orthodox theology ever since. It is a fallacy to condemn “western influences” merely on the grounds that they are western, without also taking the trouble to demonstrate why the underlying theological claims are false. In the spirit of Florovsky’s call for a “free encounter with the West,” I would like to urge a more positive and constructive Orthodox engagement of western theology.

Florovsky also provided few clues for reconciling his emphasis on the charismatic and dynamic character of the Church tradition with his theoretical rejection of doctrinal development. As a historical theologian, he was both committed to upholding the continuity of patristic tradition and rejecting a “theology of repetition.” To clarify this tension, more conceptual work needs to be done in contemporary Orthodox theology on the applicability of the category of development to the history of doctrine. Florovsky continued an important conversation that began at the religious-philosophical meetings in St Petersburg in 1901, but he hardly pronounced the definitive word.
For all of his emphasis on “ecclesial experience,” Florovsky wrote very little about the precise content of this experience, particularly as enshrined in the sacramental practices of the Church. Florovsky dedicated scant attention to the contributions of post-ninth century Byzantine theologians, even such central figures as Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas. Thus, as a research project, neopatristic theology remains a work in progress. In order to receive Florovsky fully and critically in the twenty-first century, it is important to grapple with these tensions and blind spots in his work.

**INTERPRETING THE WAYS OF RUSSIAN THEOLOGY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: BEYOND THE STANDARD NARRATIVE**

Writing in 1980, a year after Florovsky’s death, Alexander Schmemann remarked:

Reading Florovsky and Bulgakov, in light of the articles from “over there” [the Soviet Union], I kept thinking that we needed a simple, but serious account of the “ways of Russian theology” in the twentieth century. I am afraid of a deepening confusion, facile polarization, and so on. Now, with the death of Florovsky, the “last of the Mohicans,” this could become possible . . . I am personally tempted to write up such an account, but have little time . . . People would read Florovsky’s (in many ways correct) invectives against the “renaissance,” Bulgakov, and others—and the resultant picture will be a mess! One needs first of all to establish a *perspective*, relative weight, and so on . . . Florovsky, for example, was undoubtedly an outstanding historian, but he had never explained the essence and, first of all, the method of “neo-patristic” synthesis, which became a sign, a slogan. It is not difficult to debunk the “renaissance,” but is such a debunking fair without the recognition of at least a historical value of the “renaissance”?12

With characteristically sharp insight, towards the end of his life Schmemann hinted at the need to revise the standard narrative of twentieth-century Orthodox theology that he had inherited from Florovsky. The standard narrative involved a problematic polarization between the theological modernism of the Renaissance on the one hand and Florovsky’s neopatristic direction on the other hand. In this study, I have accepted Schmemann’s challenge to revise the standard narrative.

In line with Schmemann’s intimation, I have argued that it is not enough to merely jettison the achievements of the Renaissance in order to clear the way

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for neopatristics. The unique historical value of the Renaissance consisted in a
daring attempt at a comprehensive Christianization of philosophy, arts, cul-
ture, politics, indeed of all aspects of life. This attempt was brought to a
screeching halt in Russia after the Revolution, but against all odds, continued
abroad with a renewed vigor. Florovsky’s intellectual development was cast
against the background of the Renaissance in order not only to understand his
critique of the Renaissance, but also to determine how he was influenced by
the movement. The Renaissance problematic has shaped practically every
aspect of his work, and most especially his neopatristic theology. The conver-
sation with the Renaissance leaders, especially Bulgakov, formed the polemical
subtext of the neopatristic synthesis. Florovsky’s program needed to be under-
stood as a theological option within the Renaissance, not merely as a theo-
logical alternative to the Renaissance. To be sure, Florovsky did not see the
matter in this way, often casting his ideas precisely in terms of the opposition
to the Renaissance. Schmemann, however, perceptively described him as the
“last of the Mohicans”—that is, as the last representative of the Renaissance as
well as its unforgiving critic.

To return to Schmemann’s remark, the “facile polarization” that Florovsky
has set up requires a revision in order to establish a proper perspective. It is
precisely, then, from the new perspective of viewing Florovsky and his fol-
lowers within and not merely in opposition to the Renaissance, that one
should undertake any future account of the “ways of Orthodox theology” in
the past century.

Perhaps, the melody of neopatristic theology could be admired as a coun-
terpoint. Florovsky’s theology is like a musical theme, which while possessing
a beauty and power of its own, nevertheless elicits a deeper harmony, when
performed within the magnificent polyphony of the twentieth-century
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