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ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑ vs ΣΟΦΙΑ

The contribution of Fr. Georges Florovsky to the rediscovery of the Orthodox teaching on the distinction between the Divine essence and energies

Abstract

The objective of this essay is to discuss the re-emergence of the distinction between Divine essence and energies in Orthodox theology by focusing on the sophiological controversy in the first half of 20th century with a specific emphasis on the theology of Fr. Georges Florovsky and Fr. Sergei Bulgakov. In the works of Bulgakov the concept of Sophia, Wisdom of God, emerged as a theological construction somehow in parallel to the three hypostases of the Holy Trinity. Florovsky on the other hand viewed Bulgakov's sophiology as alien to Patristic theology. The two theologians were highly respectful to each other and engaged into an indirect theological debate in which it was not the understanding of Sophia but its implication for the Christian dogma on creation out of nothing that emerged as the real stumbling block. Bulgakov addressed the doctrine of creation from a sophiological point of view. Florovsky, addressed the doctrine of creation by focusing on the distinction between Divine nature and will and, respectively, between Divine essence and energies. The focus on the above objective pursues three goals. The first goal is to point out that the key reason for the rediscovery of the teaching of the Divine essence and energies was profoundly theological. This fact is being currently diluted by arguments about the existence of special personal motives of the Russian émigré theologians in Paris who were trying to justify their theological presence within the context

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of their new non-Orthodox cultural environment. The second goal is to contribute to the contemporary re-evaluation of the theology of Fr. S. Bulgakov which is becoming increasingly, but sometimes quite uncritically, popular amongst both Orthodox and non-Orthodox theologians. The analysis of his theology suggests that: i) his theological contributions should not be considered apart from the specific context of his proper theological motivations – the sophianic development of the theology of St Gregory Palamas, ii) his major contribution should be associated with his dialogical role in opening up the opportunity for a critical theological response to his own theology that would provide some of the key Orthodox theological insights in the 20th century. The third goal is to point out the role of Fr. G. Florovsky for the rediscovery of the teaching on the Divine essence and energies as one of his key theological contributions by focusing on some of his letters to Bulgakov that were written as early as 1925 and on his work *Creature and creaturehood* (1927). The analysis suggests that these early works have determined the main direction of Orthodox theological reflection in the 20th century. The research project associated with this work is part of the activities of the doctoral research program in the Faculty of theology, Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski,” Sofia, Bulgaria.

Keywords

Essence and energy, Sophia, Wisdom of God, S. Bulgakov, G. Florovsky.

I. Preamble

The teaching on the distinction between Divine essence and energies constitutes a fundamental part of Orthodox theology. It was articulated for the first time by the Cappadocian Fathers – St Basil the Great, St Gregory of Nazianzus and St Gregory of Nyssa, and later by St Maximus the Confessor and by the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 680-681). It was further refined theologically by St Gregory Palamas and by the Church Councils that took place in Constantinople in 1341, 1347, 1351 and 1368.¹ The Council of 1351 was the most important one from the doctrinal

¹ George Dragas, Book review, “Koutsourès Demetrios G., *Synods and Theology connected with Hēsychasm: The synodical procedure followed in the hēsychastic disputes*, An Edition of the Sacred Metropolis of Thebes and Levadeia, Athens 1997.” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 45, No. 1-4, 2000, pp. 631-646.

point of view.² At this Council St Gregory Palamas himself pointed out that his argumentation is based on the doctrinal formulations of the 6th Ecumenical Council.³ In its final decisions the participants made a clear distinction between four interrelated theological concepts by giving reference to St John of Damascus:

“We hold, further, that there are two energies in our Lord Jesus Christ. For He possesses on the one hand, as God and being of like essence with the Father, the divine energy, and, likewise, since He became man and of like essence to us, the energy proper to human nature. But observe that energy and capacity for energy, and the product of energy, and the agent of energy, are all different. Energy is the efficient and essential activity of nature; the capacity for energy is the nature from which proceeds energy; the product of energy is that which is effected by energy; and the agent of energy is the person or subsistence which uses the energy. Further, sometimes energy is used in the sense of the product of energy, and the product of energy in that of energy, just as the terms creation and creature are sometimes transposed. For we say ‘all creation,’ meaning creatures.”⁴

In the way that it was used by the Byzantine Church Fathers, the distinction between essence and energy accepted a universal meaning, i.e. it applied to both God and creation. For example, St John of Damascus defines energy as “the natural force and activity of each essence” or the activity innate in every essence, “for no essence can be devoid of natural energy. Natural energy again is the force in each essence by which its nature is made manifest.”⁵ In his *Triads* St Gregory Palamas also points out that “As Basil the Great says, ‘The guarantee of the existence of every essence is its natural energy which leads the mind to the nature.’ And according to St Gregory of Nyssa and all the other Fathers, the natural energy is the power which manifests every essence, and only nonbeing is deprived of this power; for the being which participates in an essence will

² See John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1974).

³ Hagiorite tomus, J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, Venice, 1784, t. XXII, col. 134; for more details see Jean-Claude Larchet, “Исихазам и Шести Васељенски Сабор. Има ли паламистичко богословље о Божанским енергијама основу у VI Васељенском Сабору? [Hesychasm and the 6th Ecumenical Council: Is the Palamite theology of the divine energies founded on the Sixth Ecumenical Council?]” in: *Proceedings of the International Scientific Colloquium 650 Years of Synodal Tomos (1351-2001) – Saint Gregory Palamas in the past and today* (Srbinje et Trebinje (Bosnie-Hezégovine), 19-21 octobre 2001, Врњачка Бања, 2003), pp. 66-80.

⁴ John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, III, 15, Concerning the energies in our Lord Jesus Christ, in: *Writings* (translated by F. H. Chase, New York: Fathers of the Church Inc.).

⁵ John of Damascus, Concerning Energy, *Orthodox Faith*, II, 23.

also surely participate in the power which naturally manifests that essence.”⁶

In other words, it is the essence that is manifested through the energies and not vice versa. Thus, the Church Fathers, and more specifically the Cappadocian Fathers, adopted the energetic terminology in the way it was articulated in book IX of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and semantically adapted it to the service of Christian theology by moving it away from its impersonalistic Aristotelian connotation. The Divine energy is what manifests that God is, while the essence is what He is. This is why St Gregory Palamas emphasizes that if there was no distinction between divine essence and divine energy, the fact that “God is” would have remained unknown:

“With respect to the fact of its existence but not as to what it is, the substance is known from the energy, not the energy from the substance. And so, according to the theologians, God is known with respect to the fact of his existence not from his substance but from his providence. In this the energy is distinct from the substance, because the energy is what reveals, whereas the substance is that which is thereby revealed with respect to the fact of existence.”⁷

St Gregory Palamas did not define in greater detail the nature of the distinction between essence and energy. For him the distinction is real and not just semantic or conceptual. At the same time, it is not real in the terms of scholastic terminology, where *distinctio realis* means a difference in substance.⁸ The Divine energy is not an independent substance. The word reality (originating from the Latin word *res*) presupposes a difference in substance and it is difficult to express it in the Greek language. The Greek *πράγμα* means ‘something existing,’ but not necessarily an independent substance or essence. It belongs to the same group as the concept *πρᾶξις* and also means ‘something actual.’⁹ St Gregory Palamas distinguishes the energies from the essence and calls them sometimes ‘things.’ He is referring to an ‘actual distinction’ (*πραγματική διάκρισις*), opposing it, on the one hand, to the ‘actual division’ that would destroy the Divine unity and simplicity and, on the other hand, to a merely mental distinction (*διάκρισις κατ’ἐπίνοιαν*).¹⁰ The energies do not refer to something other in

⁶ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, II.ii.7, p. 95.

⁷ Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 141 (Translation and study by Robert E. Sinkewicz, C.S.B., Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts 83), p. 247.

⁸ Georgi Kapriev, *Philosophie in Byzanz* (Wuerzburg: Koenigshausen und Neumann, 2005), p. 344.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Василий Кривошеин, „Аскетическое и богословское учение святого Григория Паламы,” *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, Praha, 1936, No. 8, p. 132.

God than His essence but to the Divine activities *ad extra*.¹¹ These activities *ad extra* include God's works such as creating, sustaining, providing, deifying etc. "When the activity is spoken 'objectively' as a divine work (*ἔργον*) or being (...) we are not to imagine a something existing between the divine essence and creatures. The terms work and being denote, (...) the reality of God's activity as a powerful presence."¹² God's works represent his activity or energies in respect to His creatures and God, as He is in Himself, should be distinguished from God as He relates to something other than Himself. The Divine energies, however, are proper to God's essence even before God relates Himself to anything other through them. It is the Divine will that actualizes the energies and actively manifests them *ad extra* in relation to everything other.¹³

For St Gregory Palamas the Aristotelian dyad nature-energy was insufficient to express the being of God in an adequate way "because the Divine action, or energy, is not simply 'caused' by the Divine essence, but is also a *personal act*. Thus, the being of God is expressed in palamite theology by the triad essence-hypostasis-energy."¹⁴ According to St John of Damascus, "the holy Fathers used the term hypostasis and person and individual for the same thing,"¹⁵ but also distinguished between the hypostases of animate and inanimate, rational and irrational beings. For them the essential differences are actualized in the hypostases and "are one thing in inanimate substances and another in animate, one thing in rational and another in irrational, and, similarly, one thing in mortal and another in immortal."¹⁶ The terms 'person' and hypostasis are both used in reference to Divine and human persons and, in this case, refer to someone who "by reason of his own operations and properties exhibits an appearance which is distinct and set off from those having the same nature."¹⁷

It is impossible however to reduce the hypostatic order to the natural (essential) one.¹⁸ Every actually subsisting being, living or inanimate, has a

¹¹ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 141.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, see a more comprehensive discussion on pp. 144-145.

¹⁴ John Meyendorff, "The Holy Trinity in Palamite Theology", in Michael Fahey, John Meyendorff, *Trinitarian Theology East and West: St. Thomas Aqionas – St. Gregory Palamas* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1977), pp. 25-43.

¹⁵ John of Damascus, *Philosophical Chapters*, 42, in *Writings* (Transl. by F. H. Chase, New York: Fathers of the Church Inc.), p. 66.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁸ Maxime le Confesseur, *Opuscules théologiques et polémiques XVI* (trad. E. Ponsoye, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998), p. 214; or Maximus Confessor, *Opuscula theologica et polemica 16* (PG 91, 205BC).

hypostasis which is related to the essence and manifests its natural energies. The hypostasis does not possess the natural energy but only manifests it according to its specific mode of existence which is expressed in specific hypostatic properties. The specific manner and the intensity of this manifestation depend on the way the hypostasis exists and not on the principle of the existence of its nature. The hypostatic characteristics shape out and provide the particular mode of the manifestation of the energies.¹⁹ In this sense, it is incorrect to talk about the manifestation of the natural energies of a particular being out of the context of its hypostatic existence – the energies are always the energies of a hypostasis, i.e. there are energies of something or of someone (of a person).²⁰ The Divine energies are therefore described as originating in the Divine nature but the Divine nature is tri-hypostatic and the energy manifests itself always personally:

“God is identical within Himself, since the three divine hypostases mutually co-inhere and inter-penetrate naturally, totally, eternally, inseparably, and yet without mingling or confusion, so that their energy is also one. This could never be the case among creatures. There are similarities among creatures of the same genus, but since each independent existence, or hypostasis, operates by itself, its energy is uniquely its own. The situation is different with the three divine hypostases that we worship, for there the energy is truly one and the same. For the activity of the divine will is one, originating from the Father, the primal Cause, issuing through the Son, and made manifest in the Holy Spirit.”²¹

God manifests Himself to creatures not as an impersonal God, but through the acts of the three Divine Persons in their co-inherence and mutual co-existence. It is the total and transcendently perfect co-inherence and mutual co-existence that make the three Divine persons indeed One God, so that “through each of His energies one shares in the whole of God (...)

¹⁹ I. Tchalakov and G. Kapriev, “The Limits of Causal Action Actor-Network Theory Notion of Translation and Aristotle’s Notion of Action,” in: *2005 - Yearbook of the IAS-STs*, Arno Bammé, Günter Getzinger, and Bernhard Wieser, Eds. (Graz-München: Profil, 2005).

²⁰ The Cappadocian Fathers were the first to identify hypostasis with person – person is the hypostasis of being and it is the personal existence that makes being a reality. For more details see Christos Yannaras, *Elements of Faith, an Introduction to Orthodox Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), p. 33; Georgios Martzelos, “Der Verstand und seine Grenzen nach dem hl. Basilius dem Großen,” in *Τόμος εόρτιος χιλιοστής εξακοσιοστής επετείου Μεγάλου Βασιλείου (379-1979)* (AUTH: Thessaloniki 1981), pp. 223-252; Γ. Δ. Μαρτζέλου, *Ουσία και ενέργεια του Θεού κατά τον Μέγαν Βασίλειον. Συμβολή εις την ιστορικοδογματικήν διερεύνησιν της περί ουσίας και ενεργειών του Θεού διδασκαλίας της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας* (Θεσσαλονίκη 21993).

²¹ Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, 112.

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”²² A careful reading of the works of St Gregory Palamas will clearly demonstrate that the teaching on the distinction between Divine essence and energies is deeply rooted in Trinitarian theology. In this sense, “A discussion of Palamism which would ignore the fact that the God of Palamas is personal, *Trinitarian* God is bound to lead into a dead end.”²³

It is very often forgotten that for St Gregory Palamas the distinction between essence and energies, independently of its strong philosophical connotation, did not serve any philosophical purposes. For him the reality of the distinction is associated with his theological point of departure – the confession of the real possibility for the knowledge of God *Himself* and the deification humans in this present life.²⁴ Deification and knowledge of God imply a participation of human beings in the uncreated life of God²⁵ but God’s essence remains transcendent and unparticipable.²⁶

Today, the same as before, the teaching on the distinction between Divine essence and energies goes right through the heart of Orthodox theology and affects the whole body of Christian doctrine.²⁷ One could point out a number of Orthodox theologians who have provided a synthesis that makes them theologians of the Divine energies *par excellence*. For example, Fr. John Meyendorff is well known for translating the *Triads* of St Gregory Palamas²⁸ in French and providing the details of the historical background of the 14th century Councils dealing with the distinction between Divine essence and energies.²⁹ In all of his works Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae underlined the organic synthesis between God’s transcendence and his reality in creation, history and humanity. He provided an integral approach to spirituality by integrating St Maximus’ doctrine of the *λόγοι*, St Dionysius’ concept of *σύμβολον/λόγος* and participation, and the Palamite

²² John Meyendorff, “The Holy Trinity in Palamite Theology”, p. 39; Matti Kotiranta, “The Palamite Idea of Perichoresis of the Persons of the Trinity in the light of Contemporary neo-Palamite Analysis,” in *Byzantium and the North, Acta Byzantina Fennica*, Vol. IX, Helsinki, 1997-1998, pp. 59-69.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁴ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor*, p. 140.

²⁵ John 17:3: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

²⁶ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), p. 186.

²⁷ George Florovsky, “St Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers,” *Sobornost* 4, 1961, pp. 165-76. See also Christos Yannaras, “The Distinction between essence and energies and its importance for theology,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 19, 1975, pp. 242-43, available at: <http://www.geocities.com/trvalentine/orthodox/yannaras.html> (15.08.2010).

²⁸ Grégoire Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes* (Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par J. Meyendorff, coll. “Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense: études et documents”, volumes 30-31, Louvain, 1973).

²⁹ John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: The Faith Press, 1964).

doctrine of the uncreated energies.³⁰ Fr. John Romanides has also emphasized the relevance of this teaching by pointing out that “The teaching of the Church Fathers on God’s relation to the world can be understood if one knows: a) the difference between ‘created’ and ‘uncreated;’ b) the distinction between ‘essence’ (οὐσία) and ‘energy’ (ἐνέργεια) in God; and c) the teaching of the Fathers concerning the world.”³¹ According to Christos Yannaras “the Theology of the Church interprets the reality of existence, the appearance and disclosure of being, starting from these two fundamental distinctions: It distinguishes essence or nature from the person or hypostasis, as it distinguishes the energies both from the nature and from the hypostasis. In these three basic categories, nature - hypostasis - energies, theology summarizes the mode of existence of God, the world, and man.”³² Finally, Fr. Georges Florovsky, one of the theologians discussed in this paper, has provided a resounding statement which clearly indicates the place and the relevance of the teaching in contemporary Orthodox theology:

“This basic distinction (i.e., between divine essence and energies) has been formally accepted and elaborated at the Great Councils of Constantinople in 1341 and 1351. Those who would deny this distinction were anathematized and excommunicated. The anathematisms of the council of 1351 were included in the rite for the Sunday Orthodoxy, in the Triodion. Orthodox theologians are bound by this decision.”³³

The scope of the present paper does not allow to discuss in greater detail all of the theological implications of the teaching on the distinction between Divine essence and energies. More details and references can be found in the works of Fr. John Meyendorff³⁴ as well as in more recent works.³⁵

³⁰ Kevin Berger, “An integral approach to spirituality – the *Orthodox Spirituality* of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 2004, p. 125.

³¹ John Romanides, *An outline of Orthodox Patristic Dogmatics* (Rollinsford, New Hampshire, 2004), p. 3.

³² Christos Yannaras, *Elements of Faith*, Ch. 6, p. 43.

³³ Georges Florovsky, “Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View,” in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol. I, Ch. 7 (Vaduz, Europa: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), pp. 105-120.

³⁴ John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: The Faith Press, 1964); idem, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems* (London: Variorum Press, 1974).

³⁵ Jean-Claude Larchet, *La théologie des énergies divines: Des origines à saint Jean Damascène* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2010); *La divinization de l’homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996); Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford University Press, 2008); Georgi Kapriev, *Philosophie in Byzanz* (Wuerzburg: Koenigshausen und Neumann, 2005); David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West – Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Robert E. Sinkewicz, “The Doctrine

II. Objectives

The Orthodox teaching on the distinction between the Divine essence and energies was rediscovered in the first half of the 20th century, seven centuries after the decisions of the Church Council in 1351. The reasons for the need of this rediscovery are rather complex but could be probably summarized as follows: i) the fact that, after the Fall of Constantinople under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the teaching lost the scope of its theological articulation to predominantly monastic circles, and ii) the Western theological influence in Russia, South-Eastern Europe and the Middle East in the 18th and 19th centuries. The objective of this paper is to discuss the re-emergence in theology of the distinction between Divine essence and energies by focusing on a theological controversy that was associated with two 20th century Orthodox theologians – Fr. Georges Florovsky and Fr. Sergei Bulgakov. Fr. Georges Florovsky was one of the most prominent Orthodox theologians of the 20th century. Fr. Sergei Bulgakov is claimed by some to have been one of the most prominent Orthodox theologians of the 20th century. Fr. Bulgakov was the Dean of the St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris and was the one who invited the young Florovsky to teach Patristics. He became known for his teaching on the Divine Sophia and in 1930 some of his works were found to be non-Orthodox by the newly formed Synod of the Russian Church abroad and by the Metropolitan of Moscow Sergius. The following developments led to the need for a formal theological clarification on the part of Bulgakov. Florovsky was unwillingly involved in these developments and was forced to express his criticism. Going through this experience was painful for both Bulgakov and Florovsky, but the two men remained highly respectful to each other.³⁶ It is, however, evident from their letters to each other that there was a profound disagreement and divergence between their views on the legacy of Solovyov's philosophy, and specifically, on its inherent sophiological component.

The influence of Solovyov's philosophy on Bulgakov's thought seems to have been inspired by his close friendship with Pavel Florensky.³⁷

of Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian," *Medieval Studies* 44, 1982, p. 189; Stoyan Tanev, "Essence and energy: An exploration in Orthodox theology and physics," *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1-2, 2009, pp. 89-153; see also the special issue "Богословское и философское осмысление исихатской традиции," *Христианская мысль*, No. 3, Kiev, 2006.

³⁶ Bryn Geffert, "The Charges of Heresy against Sergei Bulgakov. The Majority and Minority Reports of Evlogii's Commission and the Final Report of the Bishops' Conference," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 1-2, 2005, pp. 47-66.

³⁷ Bernice Rosenthal, "The Nature and Function of Sophia in Sergei Bulgakov's Prerevolutionary Thought," in *Russian Religious Thought* (Eds. Judith Deutsch

Florensky was clearly influential in Bulgakov's return to the faith as well as in his adoption of a specific concept of Sophia.³⁸ It was as a result of Florensky's influence that Bulgakov took a renewed interest in Solovyov's theoretical constructions³⁹ and it was in the *Unfading Light* (1917)⁴⁰ that Sophia started to emerge as a theological construction somehow in parallel to the three hypostases of the Holy Trinity to become a cornerstone in his worldview and theology.⁴¹

Florovsky on the other hand viewed Solovyov's influence on Russian intellectual history as "unequivocally pernicious."⁴² He considered Bulgakov's sophiology as an unnecessary and dangerous attempt to develop a philosophically-driven, non-patristic alternative of the Christian teaching on creation *ex nihilo* and the Trinitarian relationship between God, man and the world. In his *Ways of Russian Theology* Florovsky provided a direct critique of the metaphysics of Vladimir Solovyov. He remained deeply respectful towards Bulgakov but passionately, although not personally, rejected his most fundamental ideas as wrong and harmful to the Church.⁴³ Interestingly, in this indirect debate with Bulgakov it was not the understanding of Sophia but its implication for the Christian dogma on creation out of nothing that emerged as the real stumbling block. Bulgakov addressed the doctrine of creation from a sophiological point of view. Florovsky, addressed the doctrine of creation within the context of his "neo-patristic" synthesis by focusing on the distinction between Divine essence and will and, respectively, between Divine essence and energies. By doing so he contributed to the rediscovery of the teaching on the Divine essence and energies and provided a theological reflection that became the source of the key Orthodox theological themes in the 20th century. In this sense, "one cannot really understand Florovsky's 'neo-patristic' synthesis without understanding that in the

Kornblatt & Richard F. Gustafson, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), p. 157.

³⁸ As described in the last four chapters of Pavel Florensky's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004). These chapters were additionally added to the text of Florensky's dissertation that was earlier deposited in fulfillment of the requirements of a Masters degree from the Moscow Theological Academy.

³⁹ V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, v. 2 (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 897.

⁴⁰ С.Н.Булгаков, *Свет невечерний: Созерцания и умозрения* (Москва: Путь, 1917).

⁴¹ Cited in *The Cross and the Sickle*, p. 138, from С. Булгаков, "Природа в философии Владимира Соловьева," *Вопросы философии и психологии*, No. 5, 1910.

⁴² Alexis Klimoff, "Georges Florovsky and the sophiological controversy," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 1-2, 2005, pp. 67-100.

⁴³ John Meyendorff; "Creation in the history of Orthodox theology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol.27, No.1, 1983, pp. 27-37.

background lurks Bulgakov,"⁴⁴ i.e. Florovsky's theology, including his emphasis on the relevance of the distinction between Divine essence and energy, was articulated in opposition to Bulgakov's thought.

By focusing on the above objective we follow three main goals. Our first goal is to point out that the key reason for the rediscovery of the teaching of the Divine essence and energies was (the same as its role in the middle of the 14th century) deeply theological. This fact seems to be currently diluted by arguments about the existence of special personal motives of the Russian émigré theologians in Paris in the 1920s who were trying to justify their theological presence within the context of their new non-Orthodox cultural environment. Without any doubt, such arguments might have had some relevance. However, as it will be shown, the theological issues were the key reason for the need to recapture the theology of St Gregory Palamas. In fact, it was Bulgakov's specific (non-patristic) interpretation that forced Fr. George Florovsky to engage in reaffirming the place of St Gregory "within mainline patristic tradition, in this sense refuting Bulgakov's claim that St Gregory can be seen as one of the originators of Sophiology."⁴⁵ Bulgakov's reading of St Gregory Palamas was driven by a very specific context - his commitment to provide a theological defense for the Name-Worshipers at the Russian Church Council of 1917-1918. The Name-Worshipers were Russian monks on Mount Athos that were associated with a controversy (1912-1913) due to their claim that the name of God was God Himself. The monks believed that they follow the theology of St Gregory Palamas. The commission was established to address the heresy and it was Bulgakov who provided the most systematic dogmatic elaboration in support of the Name-worshipers by trying to read the theology of St Gregory Palamas within an entirely sophiological perspective.⁴⁶ He interpreted the adoption of Palamism during the Council of 1351 as Church's first serious commitment to a sophiological agenda but also found it in need of further sophiological development. In reply to such interpretation Fr. G. Florovsky articulated his 'neopatristic synthesis' by organizing some of the key resources of Patristic theology from St Athanasius the Great to St Gregory Palamas and

⁴⁴ Aristotle Papanikolaou, "*Sophia! Orthoi!* The Trinitarian theology of Sergei Bulgakov," unpublished paper presented at *Catholic Theological Society of America Conference on June 5th, 2009*. I express my gratitude to Dr. Papanikolaou for providing me with the manuscript of his article.

⁴⁵ Alexis Klimoff, "Georges Florovsky and the sophiological controversy," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 1-2, 2005, p. 96; see also comments at: <http://ishmaelite.blogspot.com/2009/05/palamas-florovsky-bulgakov-and.html> (15.08.2010).

⁴⁶ Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy* (Ithaca/London, 1997), p. 210.

beyond. The confrontation between these two approaches materialized in different understandings of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*:

“The debate on the doctrine of creation, as found in Soloviev, Florensky, Bulgakov and Berdyaev, was probably the most interesting episode in the history of Orthodox theology in the twentieth century. Their most brilliant and constant critics were Georges Florovsky and, on a slightly different level, Vladimir Lossky. Florovsky gave a critique of the metaphysics of Vladimir Soloviev in his well-known book *The Ways of Russian Theology* (Paris, 1937), but it can be said that practically the entire oeuvre of Florovsky dealing with Greek patristic thought and published in the prewar period was directed against the sophiological postulates of Sergius Bulgakov, Florovsky’s older colleague at the Theological Institute in Paris. However, the name of Bulgakov is nowhere directly mentioned in these works. Lossky, on the other hand, criticized sophiology directly, agreeing with the main positive points of Florovsky’s ‘neopatristic synthesis.’ On the idea of creation, both Florovsky and Lossky simply reaffirmed the position of St. Athanasius, discussed above, as opposed to the views of Origen.”⁴⁷

In what follows we will: i) provide a comparative analysis of the theological interpretation of the doctrine of creation in the way it was articulated by Fr. S. Bulgakov and Fr. G. Florovsky, and ii) show that the distinction between essence and energies emerged as a response to sophiology.

Our second goal is to partially address the need for a contemporary evaluation of the theology of Fr. S. Bulgakov. It is a fact that the theology of Fr. Bulgakov is becoming increasingly popular amongst both Orthodox and non-Orthodox theologians and a fresh evaluation of his works seems to be very much needed. The key assumption here is that his theological contributions should not be considered apart from the specific context of his proper theological motivations – the sophianic development of the theology of St Gregory Palamas. Bulgakov has never rejected the teaching on the distinction between the Divine essence and energies. He rather used it as a theological starting point and foundational background for his philosophically inspired theological elaborations. It could be even suggested that some of the sophianic insights of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov have been driven by his philosophical appropriation and specific interpretation of the theology of St Gregory Palamas. A proof of this can be found in the Appendix which contains all the references to St Gregory Palamas made by

⁴⁷ John Meyendorff, “Creation in the history of Orthodox theology,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol.27, No.1, 1983, pp.27-37.

Bulgakov in his entire trilogy on the Divine-humanity.⁴⁸ In what follows we will provide additional analysis in support of this thesis. At the same time, although very important, the link between Bulgakov's sophiology and the teaching of St Gregory Palamas should not be oversimplified. It would be completely wrong for example to try seeing Fr. Sergei as a palamist, or St Gregory Palamas as a sophiologist (as Bulgakov himself was trying to do). At the end, the teaching of St Gregory provides a clear answer to sophiology: "the distinction between the divine essence and energies implies that the world, which has been created by God's energies, can never become identical with God's essence."⁴⁹ The appreciation of this link however provides a hermeneutical key to understanding Bulgakov's philosophico-theological system by showing that, instead of using his sophiological prism as a key to understanding the entire body of Orthodox theology, everyone (Orthodox or non-Orthodox) interested in Bulgakov's later thought should rather have a more integrative look at his works in parallel with a more comprehensive engagement with the theology of St Gregory Palamas. What one would certainly find is some of the key sources of his theological inspirations somehow independently of his sophiological constructions. According to Joost van Rossum, this was, "in fact, the tragedy of Fr. Sergius - who himself was aware of the 'tragedy of philosophy' (the title of one of his earliest books) - that he was more a philosopher than a theologian, and that his 'sophiology' as a system contradicts his theological intuitions."⁵⁰ It could turn out then, as Fr. George Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky were trying to demonstrate, that Bulgakov's sophiology appears as no more than an unnecessary attempt for a semantic upgrade of the theological integrity of Byzantine theology in the way it was articulated by St Gregory Palamas. This unsuccessful attempt however should not diminish the dialogical role of Bulgakov in formulating some of the questions that would generate the initial momentum for the authentic articulation of Orthodox theology in the 20th century – a role that should be continuously highlighted as a tribute to his life and works.

Our third goal is to point out the role of Fr. G. Florovsky for the rediscovery of the teaching on the Divine essence and energies as one of

⁴⁸ Including the three major works of Fr. Sergei Bulgakov that were published in English as: *The Bride of the Lamb*, 2002; *The Comforter*, 2004; *The Lamb of God*, 2008; all translated by Boris Jakim and published by Grad Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

⁴⁹ Joost van Rossum, "Deification in Palamas and Aquinas," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3-4, 2003, p. 375.

⁵⁰ Joost van Rossum, "Паламизм и софиология," *Христианская мысль*, No. 3, Kiev, 2006, p. 66; English version published online at: <http://www.byzantineimages.com/Palamas.htm> (15.08.2010).

his contributions to Orthodox theology in the 20th century. It has become commonly accepted that the rediscovery of the theology of the Divine energies was the result of the works of Vladimir Lossky and Fr. John Meyendorff that appeared in response to polemical articles by catholic theologians arguing against the orthodoxy of the theology St Gregory Palamas.⁵¹ One also usually points out the earlier works by Archimandrite Basil Krivoshein (1936) and Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae (1938).⁵² It is however important to realize that in some of his letters to Bulgakov written as early as 1925, Florovsky already argues against the sophiological ideas of Solovyov using arguments from the theology of St Gregory Palamas.⁵³ Last but not least, his paper *Creature and creaturehood*, which Florovsky himself considered as one his finest theological works,⁵⁴ was first published as early as 1927 and 1928⁵⁵ and was perceived by his Russian compatriots in Paris as a direct reaction against Bulgakov's sophiology. It appears then that the rediscovery of the theology of St Gregory Palamas, and the Orthodox teaching on the Divine essence and energies in particular, were predominantly driven by a deeply theological reason, namely, by the necessity to provide an Orthodox theological response to the sophiological tendencies in Russian religious philosophy. It is true that the inter-confessional theological polemics may have certainly played

⁵¹ See for example, Jeffrey Finch, "Neo-Palamism, Divinizing Grace, and the Breach between East and West," in *Partakers of Divine Nature – The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Tradition*, (M. Christensen & J. Wittung, Eds., Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), p. 233-249. Finch shares a relatively common opinion that it was a polemical article by Martin Jugie (1925) on St Gregory Palamas that "prompted Vladimir Lossky, whose own Parisian teacher, Etienne Gilson, had instructed him in the importance of St. Thomas's 'real distinction' within creatures between *esse* and *essentia*, to begin a spirited and protracted defense of Palamas's theology – one that would come quickly, with the help of John Meyendorff and many other Orthodox theologians.... For this reason, Lossky is generally regarded as the founder of the neo-Palamite school of thought, which is properly called *neo-Palamism* because Palamas had been almost forgotten within Eastern Orthodoxy until Lossky and Meyendorff revived interest in his thought.", p. 233.

⁵² Basil Krivoshein, "The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas," *The Eastern Churches Quarterly*, Vol. 4, 1938 (published earlier in Russian – Василий Кривошеин, „Аскетическое и богословское учение святого Григория Паламы,” *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, Praha, 1936, No. 8); Dumitru Stăniloae, *Life and teachings of Gregory Palamas*, Sibiu, 1938, in Romanian.

⁵³ А.М. Пентковски, "Письма Г.Флоровского С.Булгакову и С.Тышкевичу," *Символ – Журнал христианской культуры при Славянской библиотеке в Париже*, № 29, 1993, с. 205.

⁵⁴ Sergey Horuzhy, "Neo-Patristic Synthesis and Russian Philosophy," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 3-4, 2000, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Г. Флоровский, „Тварь и тварьность,” *Православная мысль*, No. 1, 1928, p. 176-212; English version: Georges Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood," Chapter III, *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Vol. III: Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 43-78.

some role in accelerating this process but this role should have been secondary and complementary in nature. Florovsky's key role in shaping the tone of Orthodox theology in the 20th century could be illustrated by the content of a letter to him by Archimandrite Sophrony (Saharov) written on Pascha, 1958:

“Dear Fr. Georges, while reading again Lossky's *Mystical Theology* just before my presentation about him on the event dedicated to his memory, I was amazed to realize for the first time to what extent the great majority of the positions expressed in his work were articulated some fifteen years earlier by you in your paper ‘Creature and creaturehood’. Of course nobody works alone and independently of the others: including the language, the references etc., and the entire structure of the treatise itself, - everything is so much influenced by the specific times of author's life, but despite all of that the entire book of Lossky was so much prepared by you, that I found it really striking. Before, I was not noticing that since I read first and long time ago your paper, and then afterward Lossky's book. But now I read them both at once, starting first with Lossky, then reading you, and again going back to Lossky.”⁵⁶

The Elder Sophrony continues by asking Fr. Georges to give a permission for the translation of his paper ‘Creature and creaturehood’ in French so that the French speaking public could become aware of his early contribution and influence on Lossky's work. In his reply (April 8, 1958) Florovsky provides valuable details about the context of the first publication of his paper:

“Dear Fr. Sophrony! (...) Your impression is absolutely correct. At that time my paper *Creature and creaturehood* was accepted *with silence*, because it was seen (not without a reason) as an opposition to sophiology and, at that time in Paris, that was considered to be an unforgivable tenacity. Even now the professors at the theological institute do not mention it, even when they write about ‘creaturehood’ (for example, Fr. Zenkovsky). In some circles the

⁵⁶ Софроний (Сахаров), архимандрит, Переписка с протоиереем Георгием Флоровским. Изд. 1-е. Свято-Иоанно-Предтеченский монастырь, 2008, Письмо # 10 (Sophrony (Saharov), Archimandrite, Correspondence with Fr. Georges Florovsky, First edition, St John the Baptist Monastery, Essex, UK, 2008, Letter # 10 (in Russian)): “Дорогой отец Георгий, читая снова книгу Лосского «Théologie mystique» перед докладом о нем на собрании в память его, я на сей раз был удивлен, до какой степени подавляющее большинство высказанных им в его труде положений за пятнадцать лет до того были изложены Вами в Вашей статье «Тварь и тварность». Конечно, никто не работает так, чтобы все создать самому: и язык, и цитаты, и прочее, и самую структуру своего трактата, - так как все это обусловлено временем, в которое живет автор, но все же работа Лосского была настолько подготовлена во всем Вами, что я просто поражен. Раньше я этого не замечал, читая сначала и давно Вашу статью, а затем уже книгу Лосского. А теперь это совпало по времени: сначала я прочитал немного Лосского, затем читал Вас, затем снова Лосского...”

independence in thinking and the commitment to the Church Fathers is not much tolerated. ... My paper was published in French, in a somewhat uncompleted form and before its publication in Russian, in an edition that was practically inaccessible and even unknown, even though in the same issue there were papers by Berdyaev and Karsavin (as early as 1927). It was in the *Logos* that started to be published in Romania but the publication of the journal was interrupted after the first two issues and was not sent to any library.”⁵⁷

Fr. Florovsky continues his letter by pointing out that based on the Russian text⁵⁸ he prepared an English version of his paper that was published much later in 1948 in *Eastern Churches Quarterly*. He also mentions that he has no problem with the translation of its Russian version in French and, more importantly, that if it was going to be translated, it would have needed only an update of its references. It appears then that more than 30 years after the first publication of *Creature and creaturehood*, Fr. Georges did not have to add anything to its content, i.e. he stayed behind all the theological positions expressed in it.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Florovsky's reply to letter # 10: “Дорогой отец Софроний! ... Ваше впечатление совершенно справедливо. Моя статья «Тварь и тварность» была в свое время замолчана, так как в ней (не без основания) усмотрели оппозицию софианству, и в то время это считалось в Париже непростительной дерзостью. И теперь профессора Богословского института ее не упоминают, даже когда пишут как раз на тему о «тварности» (например, отец В. Зеньковский). Независимость мысли и верность отеческому преданию в некоторых кругах мало поощряется. ... Моя статья была напечатана по-французски, в неразработанном виде, прежде ее появления по-русски, но в издании практически недоступном, даже мало известном, хотя в том же номере появились статьи Бердяева и Карсавина (еще в 1927 году). Это был «Logos», который начали издавать в Румынии, издание оборвалось на втором номере, и его не достать ни в какой библиотеке. Я сам сделал экстракт из русской статьи, с небольшими дополнениями по-английски для нашей конференции в Англии, на которую не попал из-за отъезда в Соединенные Штаты, но статья появилась в *The Eastern Churches Quarterly (Supplement)* в 1948 году. Против перевода русской статьи на французский ничего не имею и буду очень рад, если это сделаете. В случае, что найдется, где ее напечатать, нужно будет сделать небольшие дополнения - указания к литературе и кое-где добавить отеческие тексты, да и проверить еще раз ссылки.”

⁵⁸ Here Fr. G. Florovsky refers to the version of the paper that was published in Russian: Г. Флоровский, „Тварь и тварность,” *Православная мысль*, No. 1, 1928, pp. 176-212.

III. ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑ vs ΣΟΦΙΑ

1. Bulgakov's Sophia

The concept of Sophia and the Holy Trinity

The key to understanding Bulgakov's sophiology is to unfold what he means by "Sophia" as well as to answer the question why the concept of Sophia is necessary for his theology at all. In fact, as it has been recently pointed out by Mikhail Sergeev⁵⁹ and A. Papanikolaou⁶⁰, this question should be as asked within the context of Trinitarian theology since Bulgakov's sophiological problematics emerges within an entirely Trinitarian perspective. According to Sergeev, it is the logic of his religious-philosophical evolution that leads him to extend his sophiology to the Trinitarian problem and "[w]ithout betraying his 'first love,' Sophia, he turns to the eternal love of Christianity, the Holy Trinity."⁶¹ Interestingly, it is precisely the implications from the adoption of this logic that were criticized even by own colleagues at the theological institute St Sergius in Paris. His critics at St Sergius include not only G. Florovsky and V. Lossky. For example, Vasilli Zenkovsky, an authority of the history of Russian thought, criticizes him for reconstructing his system theologically by applying the metaphysics of All-Unity along with sophiology to Trinitarian dogmas, thus, adopting a position of sophiological monism that was doomed to fail.⁶² The introduction of Sophia into concept of the Trinity manifested the "highly provocative dualism existing in the concept of Sophia itself which consisted of the combining in it of both good and evil principles and making the God responsible for the origin of evil."⁶³

Papanikolaou summarizes Bulgakov's Trinitarian theology in two key points: first, the "formal acceptance of the categories of *ὑπόστασις* and *οὐσία* that were hammered out during the trinitarian controversies of the fourth century" and, second, the adoption of "an Augustine-inspired interpretation of the Trinity as the Father's self-revelation in the Son, with the Holy Spirit being the love that unites the Father and the Son, and, as

⁵⁹ Mikhail Sergeev, "Divine Wisdom and Trinity: a 20th Century Controversy in Orthodox theology," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 45, No. 1-4, 2000, pp. 573-582; Mikhail Sergeev, *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy. Solov'ev, Bulgakov, Loskii and Berdiaev* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), p. 103.

⁶⁰ Aristotle Papanikolaou, "*Sophia! Orthoi!* The Trinitarian theology of Sergei Bulgakov," p. 4.

⁶¹ Mikhail Sergeev, *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy*, p. 103.

⁶² V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, v. 2 (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 908 (as referenced by Sergeev, *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy*, p. 104).

⁶³ Mikhail Sergeev, *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy*, p. 93.

such, completes the self-revelation of the Father in the Son.”⁶⁴ Bulgakov sees Augustine’s identification of the Holy Spirit as the love that binds the Father and the Son as advancement on the trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers, arguing at the same time that neither Augustine nor the Cappadocians did “elaborate on the doctrine of the Trinity in such a way as to make sense of how God can be in communion with what is not God.”⁶⁵ For him the proper meaning of Sophia can be found in a proper understanding of the term substance (οὐσία) or nature (φύσις) but it is a category that was not fully developed in Trinitarian theology. It was taken from ancient Greek philosophy and applied by the early Christian theologians to the concept of the Trinity. In his own words “the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity, as well as the actual conception of substance or nature, has been (...) apparently, almost overlooked”⁶⁶ and was entirely neglected in respect to the Creator as related to creation. The concept of Sophia emerges therefore out of the necessity to further elaborate on the implications of the ὁμοούσιος, or the consubstantiality that exists in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, especially in terms of God’s self-revelation and in terms the God-world relation as Trinity.⁶⁷ “Sophia, then, for Bulgakov is God’s being as the self-revelation of the Father in the Son and the Holy Spirit. As Bulgakov himself states, ‘Sophia is Ousia as revealed,’ or ‘Sophia is the revelation of the Son and the Holy Spirit, without separation and without confusion,’ or ‘Divine Sophia is God’s *exhaustive* self-revelation, the fullness of divinity, and therefore has absolute content.”⁶⁸ Thus, Divine self-revelation is a key aspect of Bulgakov’s sophiology. Papanikolaou sees its relevance in providing Bulgakov the opportunity to engage a theological deduction of the trinitarian dogma since for Bulgakov there is a need to ‘show’ and ‘prove’ the ontological necessity of God, as a Trinity, to be in precisely three hypostases:⁶⁹ “the trinity in Divinity in unity, as well as in the distinction of the three concrete hypostases, must be shown not only as a divinely revealed *fact*, valid by virtue of its facticity, but also as a *principle* owing to which Divinity is not a dyad, tetrad, etc., (...) but precisely a trinity, exhausting itself in its fullness and self-enclosedness. (...) Of course, deduction is incapable of establishing the fact of divine Trinity, which is

⁶⁴ Aristotle Papanikolaou, “*Sophia! Orthoi!* The Trinitarian theology of Sergei Bulgakov,” p. 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Wisdom of God. A Brief Summary of Sophiology* (New York-London: The Paisley Press-Williams and Norgate, 1937), p. 44.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

given by Revelation; but thought is called to fathom this revealed fact to the extent this is possible for human knowledge.”⁷⁰

Papanikolaou sees the biggest problem with Bulgakov’s Trinitarian sophianic vision in the inconsistency it creates in his own system by defining God as an absolutely free Spirit or Subject and then subjecting Him to the necessity of the logic of His self-revelation: “In the Divine Spirit’s self-positing of self, that is, in the divine self-revelation, God’s knowledge of God’s self, i.e., God’s οὐσία as Sophia is fully transparent to God’s personal consciousness, and lived as the very being of God. This knowledge of God’s self, this self-revelation, is the revelation of God’s οὐσία in the Son, meaning that such a self-revelation is οὐσία as Sophia.”⁷¹ It appears therefore that for Bulgakov “in order for God to know Godself, God must reveal God to Godself.” In this way he could not escape the use of necessity language appearing to subject God to a principle of necessity of self-revelation, i.e., to a principle other than God’s own being.⁷² In doing so, continues Papanikolaou, “he saw that the categories of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις could not by themselves do the work of conceptualizing God’s being as one of communion with the not-God” and Sophia “emerges from the insight that a third term is needed in order to account God’s communion with the world.”

The reason to provide a more detailed reference to Papanikolaou’s thoughtful paper was to use the opportunity to point out some of the key aspects of Bulgakov’s sophianic vision. First, this is the Trinitarian context of its theological articulation, or rather its peculiar positioning on the borderline between the Trinity and the Divine Unity. One could even say that Bulgakov’s approach dilutes itself by getting trapped between the articulations of the two different modes of Divine being. Second, this is the commitment to a systematic theological agenda that is called to fathom the facts of Divine revelation to the extent that this is possible for human knowledge (an agenda that goes against the patristic theological attitude which usually operates ‘on demand’, driven by the necessity to deal with specific deviations from “the faith once delivered to the Saints,” Jude 1:3). Third, this is the commitment to a ‘necessity language’ by subjecting God to a principle of necessity of self-revelation other than God’s own being. Fourth, this is Bulgakov’s forced terminological restriction to the categories of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις and the persistent avoidance of the patristic term ἐνέργεια which, as shown in the introduction to this essay, is

⁷⁰ Sergei Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (Grad Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), p.8.

⁷¹ Aristotle Papanikolaou, “*Sophia! Orthoi!* The Trinitarian theology of Sergei Bulgakov”, p. 14.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

fundamentally important for the articulation of God's communion with the world. Interestingly enough, he shows a clear awareness of the energetic terminology in the theology of St Gregory Palamas (please see Appendix) but consistently tries to work out his own way without it by opening up the possibility for Sophia to emerge as kind of semantic replacement. It is worth highlighting a key passage at the end of the patristic section of Bulgakov's discussion of the creation *ex nihilo* in his *The Bride of the Lamb*:

"In Eastern theology, the development of theology after St. John of Damascus is broken off in connection with a general stagnation of thought. Thought is squandered on a fruitless, scholastically schismatic polemic with Rome concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit. The sophianic-cosmological problematic lies dormant for six centuries. Byzantine theology once again approaches this question in St. Gregory Palamas's doctrine of energies, which is essentially an unfinished Sophiology. The fundamental idea of Palamism is that, alongside God's transcendent 'essence,' there exists His manifold revelation in the world, His radiation in 'energies,' as it were. But Palamas' doctrine of essence and energies is not brought into connection with the dogma of the Trinity, in particular with the doctrine of the three hypostases as separate persons and of the Holy Trinity in unity. The fundamental idea of Palamism concerning the multiplicity and equi-divinity of the energies in God discloses *polypoikilos sophia tou theou*, 'the manifold wisdom of God' (Eph. 3:10). Palamas considers the energies primarily in the aspect of grace, the supracreaturely 'light of Tabor' in the creaturely world. But these energies have, first of all, a world-creating and world-sustaining power which is a property of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, in both of her forms: the Divine Sophia, the eternal proto-ground of the world, and the creaturely Sophia, the divine force of the life of creation. The sophianic interpretation and application of Palamism are yet to come in the future. By accepting Palamism, the Church has definitely entered onto the path of recognizing the sophianic dogma. But the theological realization of this recognition still requires a long path of intellectual labor. Essential here is the connection with onomadoxy, which has recognized the divine reality and power of the divine-human name of Jesus and, in general, the power of the name of God in the world. It is not by chance that onomadoxy is linked with Palamism. However, these particular applications of Sophiology do not yet go to the root of the sophianic problem."⁷³

This passage provides important details about the nature of Bulgakov's sophiological inspirations: his desire to provide a sophiological correction to patristic theology; his appreciation for the relevance of the theology of St Gregory Palamas which he considers as an unfinished sophiology; and the relationship of the whole problematic to the theological the Name-

⁷³ Sergei Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (Eerdmans, 2002), p. 18.

Worship controversy (Onomatodoxy). For anyone versed in the writing of St Gregory Palamas, the point about the lack of connection between the Trinitarian dogma and the distinction between Divine essence and energies would not be understandable. The fact that for him the doctrine of essence and energies is not brought into connection with the dogma of the Trinity shows that he may have not been familiar with the entirety of the works of St Gregory Palamas.⁷⁴ Interestingly, in the forward to his major work on St Gregory Palamas,⁷⁵ Fr. John Meyendorff expresses his hope that his study will help those Orthodox writers who have previously analyzed the Palamite system and “have had at their disposal only a relatively limited selection of Palamas’ works, all dating from a time when the Palamite formulation was established, and in which his thought could no longer be seen in its whole Christological and Biblical context.” These words of Fr. John Meyendorff could be considered as silently referring to Fr. Sergei Bulgakov. Fr. John Meyendorff was also one of the first to contribute to a better understanding of the Trinitarian aspects of St Gregory’s teaching.⁷⁶

It seems therefore that Bulgakov’s sophianic constructions are not based on any insight about the need of a third term in articulating the relationship between God the Trinity and the world but, rather, on a terminological commitment to Solovyov’s Sophia. The categories of οὐσία and ὑπόστασις are clearly insufficient in the articulation of the Divine-human communion and the Church Fathers have never restricted themselves to them alone by adopting the concept of ἐνέργεια.⁷⁷ This concept of ἐνέργεια has properly served Orthodox Christian theologians for more than 15 centuries and the claim about the need of another (third) term that comes somehow on top of it as a terminological replacement appeared to Florovsky as a mere nonsense.

⁷⁴ For a more recent discussion of the relationship between the teaching of St Gregory Palamas on the distinction between Divine essence and energies and his Trinitarian theology see: Georgi Kapriev, *Philosophie in Byzanz*, Section 6.3, p. 282; Matti Kotiranta, “The Palamite Idea of Perichoresis of the Persons of the Trinity in the light of Contemporary neo-Palamite Analysis,” in *Byzantium and the North, Acta Byzantina Fennica*, Vol. IX, Helsinki, 1997-1998, pp. 59-69; John Meyendorff, “The Holy Trinity in Palamite Theology,” in: Michael Fahey & John Meyendorff, *Trinitarian Theology East and West: St. Thomas Aquinas – St. Gregory Palamas* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1977), pp. 25-43.

⁷⁵ John Meyendorff, *A study of Gregory Palamas* (The Faith Press, London, 1964), p. 202.

⁷⁶ John Meyendorff, “The Holy Trinity in Palamite Theology,” pp. 25-43.

⁷⁷ David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West – Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Bulgakov and Palamism

Bulgakov has obviously seen the Palamite way of dealing with the God's communion with the world.⁷⁸ Why is it then that he did not follow that way? A possible answer to this question can be found in the historical context of his involvement as a theologian in the Onomatodoxy controversy. Bulgakov's participation as a key lay theologian at the Council required him to immerse himself in some of the works of St Gregory Palamas. However, it should be pointed out that the discussion of the theological issues associated with the Onomatodoxy controversy had already begun in 1912, right after the emergence of the controversy. From 1912 on, some of the followers of Solovyov's philosophy of All-Unity and Divine-Humanity, including Florensky, Bulgakov, Ern and Losev, grouped around the publishing house "Put'" and started studying the Name-Worship problem by focusing on the Hesychast sources of Orthodox spirituality.⁷⁹ Most of them, including Bulgakov himself, turned into active advocates of the teaching of Name-Worshippers and came to the conclusion that "the metaphysics of All-Unity should be complemented with the Palamite concept of Divine energy and, after being modified in this way, it will be able to provide the philosophical base for this teaching. ... All the approaches by the Muscovite philosophers share the same basic ontological structure, the platonic ontology of All-Unity complemented by the concept of Divine energy."⁸⁰ This ontological structure could be characterized with a type of "panentheism," according to which the world and all its phenomena are imbued with the essence which is in God.⁸¹ Providing a philosophical and theological support to defend the Name-Worshippers was seen as an opportunity for Russian religious philosophy since at that time it has already become clear that the metaphysics of All-Unity did not evolve to the degree of incorporating some of the vital aspects of Orthodox spirituality, such as anthropology and the Orthodox understanding on man in relation to God, as well as of adapting its conceptual apparatus to Orthodox spiritual problematics and terminology.⁸² The growing awareness of All-Unity metaphysics' insufficiency of theological resources made its adherents agree that both

⁷⁸ In his *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity* one can find one of his first claims that in his approach he is adapting the theology of St Gregory Palamas (see Anastassy Brandon Gallaher and Irina Kukota, "Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov: Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to *The Unfading Light*," *St Vladimirs Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 1-2, 2005, p. 7).

⁷⁹ Sergey Horujy, "The idea of energy in the Moscow school of Christian Neoplatonism," *Online publication of the Institute of Synergetic Anthropology*, p. 1, available at: http://synergia-isa.ru/?page_id=1402 (15.08.2010).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁸¹ Sergey Horuzhy, "Neo-Patristic Synthesis and Russian Philosophy," p. 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*

the dogmatic and philosophical support of the Name-Worshippers could only be provided by St Gregory Palamas' fourteenth-century teachings on Divine Energies. "Newly armed with Palamas' ideas, Russian philosophers tried to expand the existing base of Russian metaphysics."⁸³ One could say now that from the very beginning such an approach was doomed to fail since "[t]he important new elements contained in Hesychasm and Palamism could not be brought into philosophy as mere complements to the basis of the metaphysics of All-Unity (nor could they justify Name-Worshippers). The advancement of Russian thought required the rejection of this basis."⁸⁴ And this is exactly what G. Florovsky and V. Lossky did by taking another road in theology by completely cutting off the metaphysics of All-Unity, by abandoning any claim to any philosophy or philosophical movement and by focusing on the patristic emphasis on the immediate practical experience of mystical and ascetic life in Orthodoxy. The turn to this theological road was initiated in Florovsky's work *'Creature and creaturehood'*⁸⁵ and later in the work of an Athonite monk, Basil (Krivoshein), *The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of St Gregory Palamas* (1936).⁸⁶ It was at the First Congress of Orthodox Theology in Athens where Florovsky presented his programmatic lecture *Patristics and Modern Theology* proclaiming the need of a neo-patristic theological synthesis and pointing out that in Orthodox theology the "Patristic mind is too often completely lost or forgotten (...). Palamite teaching on the divine *ἐνέργειαι* is hardly mentioned in most of our text-books. The peculiarity of our Eastern tradition in the doctrine of God and His attributes has been forgotten and completely misunderstood."⁸⁷ The new turn resulted in the rediscovery of the Orthodox teaching of the distinction between Divine essence and energies and the comprehensive articulation of its theological implications. The dogmatic formulations of the Orthodox Council of 1351 stated that it is possible for man to be united with God not by essence but by energy only. According to Sergey Horuzhy the mere foundations of such 'energetic' communion between God and man represent a certain type of ontology which is radically different from the neo-platonic ontology of the metaphysics of All-Unity.⁸⁸ These foundations also imply an active Divine realism and epistemology based on both Divine and human freedom which

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸⁵ Г. Флоровский, „Тварь и тварность,” *Православная мысль*, No. 1, 1928, pp. 176-212.

⁸⁶ Василий Кривошеин, „Аскетическое и богословское учение святого Григория Паламы,” *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, Praha, 1936, No. 8.

⁸⁷ Georges Florovsky, „Patristics and Modern Theology,” *Procès Verbaux du Premier Congrès de Théologie Orthodoxe a Athènes*, 29 Novembre – 6 Décembre, 1936 (Athènes: Pyrsos, 1939), p. 289.

⁸⁸ Sergey Horuzhy, „Neo-Patristic Synthesis and Russian Philosophy”, p. 11.

was simply missing in the metaphysics of All-Unity. Interestingly, Mikhail Sergeev has recently made a case about the independence of the sophiological theme from any particular epistemological or ontological positions.⁸⁹ According to Valliere, “this actually is a discovery on Sergeev’s part; or at the very least a power corrective to mainstream interpretation” since most scholarly interpreters of Sophia have felt compelled to treat the subject as an exercise in systematic philosophy or ontology.⁹⁰ One would easily agree with Sergeev about the lack of any specific epistemological vision in Sophiology. This is an important point that clarifies one of the key differences between Sophiology and the theological insights of St Gregory Palamas which emerged within an entirely epistemological context in an attempt to deal with a dominating agnosticism (but also with pantheism!⁹¹). It seems however that it is precisely the specific ontological commitments of Sophiology that made it foreign to mainstream Orthodox theology. The radically different ontological presuppositions of the sophiological metaphysics of All-Unity could explain the specific motivation behind Bulgakov’s commitment to adapt (and not to adopt) the insights of the Palamite theology of the Divine energies in articulating his sophianic vision for Orthodox theology.

There is a growing awareness about the relationship between the sophiology of Fr. S. Bulgakov and the theology of St Gregory Palamas. For example, Bishop H. Alfeev has shown that most of the discussions during the Name-Worshiper controversy were anchored around the Palamite theology of the Divine energies by pointing out the key role of the philosophical circle around Florensky, Bulgakov, Ern and Losev who were the first to seriously uncover it to their opponents who did not know very much about it.⁹² According to him, the appropriation of Palamite insights

⁸⁹ Mikhail Sergeev, *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy*. Solov’ev, Bulgakov, Loskii and Berdiaev (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), p. ii.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ See Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, *Saint Gregory as a Hagiorite* (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, Trans. Esther Williams, First edition, 1997), p. 23: “We can see clearly the great significance of his [of St Gregory Palamas] teaching for Orthodoxy on the important question of epistemology. When we say epistemology we mean the knowledge of God and, to be more precise, we mean the way which we pursue in order to attain knowledge of God. The situation in St. Gregory’s time was that Orthodoxy was being debased; it was becoming worldly and being changed into either pantheism or agnosticism. Pantheism believed and taught that God in his essence was to be found in all nature, and so when we look at nature we can acquire knowledge of God. Agnosticism believed and taught that it was utterly impossible for us to know God, just because He is God and man is limited, and therefore man was completely incapable of attaining a real knowledge of God.”

⁹² Hilarion Alfeev, *Le Mystère sacré de l’Église – Introduction à l’histoire et à la problématique des débats athoniques sur la vénération du nom du Dieu* (Academic Press Fribourg, 2007), p. 393.

in Fr. Bulgakov's *Philosophy of the name*,⁹³ unlike his teaching on the Divine and creaturely Sophia for which he was rightly critiqued, has made it one of his finest theological works and, probably the greatest contribution to Orthodox theology in the 20th century that needs to be further studied. Fr. Sergei completed his *Philosophy of the name* in 1920 but it was not published until 1953, after his death, with just one change – the addition of a short *Post scriptum* chapter that was, most interestingly, titled: *A sophiological interpretation of the teaching on the name of Jesus*.⁹⁴ One must agree with Bishop Alfeev for the need to further study the philosophy of the name of Fr. Sergei. It would be important for example to see how, on one hand, he could be a sophiologist in his theology and, on the other hand, completely Orthodox in his philosophy of the name.

Antoine Arjakovsky has also pointed out the relationship between Bulgakov's sophiology and the theology of St Gregory Palamas⁹⁵ by admitting that in Bulgakov's theology there were certain innovations with respect to patristic theology. He however sees these innovations, somewhat uncritically, as a necessary development of and not as mere deviations from Patristics. According to him, Palamite theology focuses on answering the question "How?" in the relation between Divine essence and energies, while the question "Who?" remains unanswered. Most interestingly, Arjakovsky positions the theological contribution of Fr. Sergei exactly within the context of its relation to Palamite theology: "Bulgakov reconsidered the relationship between essence, energy and hypostasis"⁹⁶ and, six centuries after the Palamite Councils in the 14th century, went "beyond their restriction on employing logic in theologizing about the relationship between essence, energies and the hypostases of the Trinity, thus enabling the emergence of a creative momentum for an entire generation of intellectuals, including those who believed to have been protecting the tradition of the Church."⁹⁷ In Arjakovsky's works one can find a passionate apology of the philosophical theology of Fr. Sergei. His contributions have made a real difference in the scholarship on Bulgakov's intellectual legacy. It should be pointed out however that the theological motivation for Arjakovsky's advocating approach to the

⁹³ С. Булгаков, *Философия имени* (YMCA-Press, Paris, 1953); Père Serge Bulgakov, *La philosophie du Verbe et du nom* (Lausanne: L'age de l'homme, 1991).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 207, "Interprétation sophiologique du dogme relatif au nom de Jésus."

⁹⁵ Антуан Аржаковски, *Журнал Путь (1925-1940) - Поколение русских религиозных мыслителей в эмиграции* (Киев: Феникс, 2000), p. 424; "The sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov and contemporary Western theology," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 1-2, 2005, p. 219-235.; *Essai sur le père Serge Boulgakov (1871-1944): Philosophe et théologien Chrétien* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2006).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Антуан Аржаковски, *Журнал Путь (1925-1940) - Поколение русских религиозных мыслителей в эмиграции*, p. 425.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

sophiology of Fr. Sergei remains unconvincing. In some cases his elaborations on Bulgakov's theology turn into mere reiterations of his opinions. In other cases, Bulgakov's deviations from mainstream Orthodox theology are uncritically considered as contributions to its body. For example, Arjakovsky refers to Olivier Clément, who "insisted on the importance of the theme of created Wisdom in Father Sergius Bulgakov as an indisputable continuation of the theology of uncreated energies begun by St. Gregory Palamas."⁹⁸ At the same time, right after that, he refers to Paul Evdokimov who has written that "the Wisdom of God is even the common energy of the three [Divine] persons"⁹⁹ – a statement which undermines the necessity of introducing the concept of Sophia in general. It seems then that in his attempt to acknowledge the unique personality, the philosophico-theological contributions, and the intellectual capacity of Fr. Sergei, Arjakovsky is actually blurring out the main point about his dialogical role in opening up the opportunity for a theological response to his own theology that would provide some of the key Orthodox theological insights in the 20th century.¹⁰⁰

The relation of Bulgakov's philosophical theology to the theology of St Gregory Palamas did not escape the attention of non-Orthodox scholars as well. One good representative example would be the philosophers and theologians associated with the Radical Orthodoxy movement for which Russian religious philosophy, and Bulgakov's theology in particular, represent a valuable theological resource.¹⁰¹ For example, Adrian Pabst

⁹⁸ Antoine Arjakovsky, "The sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov and contemporary Western theology," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 1-2, 2005, p. 226.

⁹⁹ Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Steven Bigham, trans., Crestwood NY: Oakwood/St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), p.348.

¹⁰⁰ For example, it is well known that in 1924 it was Bulgakov who suggested to the young Florovsky to turn to Patristics: "Why don't you turn to Patristics, no one else is doing it." It was him again who invited Florovsky to teach at St. Sergius and "[b]y the time he assumed his post at St. Sergius in 1926, Florovsky was well versed in Patristics, but his mastery of the field came through teaching a required course of four years duration, with two lectures per week each term." See Andrew Blane, Ed., Georges Florovsky. Russian intellectual. Orthodox Churchman (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1993), p. 49.

¹⁰¹ It is worth noting that in the introductory chapter of Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider "Transfiguring the World through the Word" in the book *Encounter between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*, Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider, Eds., Ashgate, 2009, pp. 1-25, the authors appear to be more than just interested in the theology of Fr. S. Bulgakov: "Most of today's Orthodox theologians operate within a theological framework that is close to the 'Neopatristic synthesis' advocated by Vladimir Lossky, Georges Florovsky and others. Very few theologians try to work along the lines of the circle around Sergii Bulgakov, which developed a more sophisticated understanding of a 'living tradition' and which was much better equipped for a constructive *and* critical engagement with other denominations and contemporary thought," p. 7. They identify Bulgakov's theology as a challenge and

and Christoph Schneider point out that “[t]he theologies of language developed by the Russian philosophers Pavel Florensky, Sergii Bulgakov and Aleksei Losev ... draw on specifically Eastern Orthodox doctrines such as the theology of icons or the essence-energy distinction.”¹⁰² In addition, John Milbank, the founder of the Radical Orthodoxy movement, has clearly indicated that his “growing interest in Eastern Orthodoxy has led him to develop his account of ontology in the direction of a metaphysical-theological *methexis* of donation which draws on the Eastern Orthodox thematic of energy (ἐνέργεια) and wisdom (σοφία).”¹⁰³ According to him:

“Above all, we cannot distinguish, in Gregory Palamas’ fashion (and I think that Bulgakov in the end implies a rejection of this), between divine essence and the divine uncreated energies which enable the economy of human redemption. It is clearly not the case that Palamas distinguished them in any simple fashion that would entirely forego the divine simplicity. Nonetheless, the distinction which he did make appears to have something in common with the almost contemporary Western Scotist ‘formal distinction’ – less than a real one, more than merely one made by our minds: rather a kind of latent division within a real unity permitting a real if partial separation on some arising occasion. In this respect the Palamite theology does appear slightly to ontologise the epistemological truth that God ‘in himself’ remains beyond the grasp of even the beatific vision, as though this reserved aspect were a real ultimate ‘area.’ (...) Clearly, for Bulgakov, the Palamite energies played the same role as Sophia, and infused human actions with theurgic power; nevertheless, sophiology is superior to the Palamite theology precisely *because* it moves away from a literal between and allows the energies simultaneously to be identical with the divine essence itself and yet also to be created as well as uncreated. This actually brings Eastern theology more in line with best of Thomism for which has to be created as well as uncreated if it is ever to reach us – but occupies no phantom and limboesque border territory.”¹⁰⁴

Without going into a more detailed analysis of the above statement, it could be pointed out that the question about the difference between the distinctions made by St Gregory Palamas and Duns Scot has already been addressed elsewhere.¹⁰⁵ In addition, as it was already shown, Bulgakov’s

even a stumbling block for Orthodox theology and point out to their way of engagement with it as a lesson learned, especially for Orthodox theologians.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 20

¹⁰⁴ John Milbank, “Sophiology and theurgy: the new theological horizon”, http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_SophiologyTheurgy.pdf, p. 41.

¹⁰⁵ John Romanides, “Notes on the Palamite controversy and related topics,” part 1, *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Winter, 1960-61, p. 193-202; Georgi Kapriev, *Philosophie in Byzanz*, p. 344.

sophiological approach to Palamism was rather more subtle than a mere rejection. Milbank's opinion only demonstrates the need of a more careful analysis of any possible relationship between Bulgakov's sophiology and the teaching of St Gregory which, to a certain degree, this essay is expected to offer. What is more interesting however in the above quotation is the point about the potential relationship between Sophiology and Thomism. A similar point was also recently made by Joost van Rossum in a paper about Vladimir Lossky's reading of St Gregory Palamas.¹⁰⁶ Joost van Rossum discusses Bulgakov's essentialistic approach to sophiology by characterizing it as thomistic as far as it does not clearly distinguish between Divine essence and existence and 'internalizes' the energy of the Divine Wisdom (Sophia) by identifying it with the Divine essence. The link between Bulgakov's sophiology and the essentialistic aspects of thomistic thought touches on an important issue since it provides another hermeneutical tool in the analysis of the sophiological controversy. It is definitely helpful in providing some insights about the philosophico-theological background on and against which the teaching on the Divine essence and energies reemerged in the 20th century – a background that seems to be very similar the one in the middle of the 14th century.¹⁰⁷ It may also help in identifying some of the reasons for the sophiological "excitement" of the Radical Orthodox movement. According to Milbank, the sophiological tradition of Pavel Florensky and Sergii Bulgakov is crucial in refining and extending the key concepts of Radical Orthodoxy in terms of participation, mediation and deification since it conceives mediation between the persons of the Trinity in terms of substantive relations.¹⁰⁸ For Milbank relations at the level of the substance mean that (the same as for Bulgakov) there is no need of any third term in addition to essence and person, i.e. there can be no third term between the two natures of Christ, nor between both the natures and the divine hypostasis. There is no need of a third term because "there is nothing more general or fundamental than the three divine persons and the Trinitarian relations that pertain between them." At the same time (the same as for Bulgakov), there is a need of the term *Sophia* which however is seen as not introducing any semantic inconsistency since "*Σοφία* names a relation or *μεταξύ* (a term central to Bulgakov's work) which is not situated between two poles but rather remains – simultaneously and paradoxically – at both

¹⁰⁶ Joost van Rossum, "Vladimir Lossky et sa lecture de Grégoire Palamas," *Contacts*, No. 229, Janvier-Mars 2010, p. 42.

¹⁰⁷ Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, *Saint Gregory as a Hagiorite* (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, Trans. Esther Williams, First edition, 1997), p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Adrian Pabst & Christoph Schneider, Eds., *Encounter between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy* (Ashgate, 2009), p. 20.

poles at once.”¹⁰⁹ Sophia is not a fourth divine person, “but is equally (though also differently) of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a kind of energy that both unifies and differentiates the One triune God and infuses his glorious creation with the wisdom of knowing him as the Creator.”¹¹⁰ One could provocatively summarize the logic of the Radical Orthodox position as follows: a) there is no need of a third term, however, b) there is a need of the term Sophia which, c) is a kind of energy, i.e. exactly the term that seems to be not needed.

The similarity between the Radical Orthodox and Bulgakov’s positions is obvious and comes from their common ontological presuppositions.¹¹¹ The reason for us to discuss it in more detail here was to point out that for Bulgakov the introduction of the term Sophia was not an attempt to elaborate a necessary third theological term in addition to οὐσία and ὑπόστασις but rather an attempt to (unnecessarily) replace one that was already in patristic use – ἐνέργεια, by forcing into it a meaning that was alien to patristics. Using the similarity with the Radical Orthodox ontological presuppositions has shown a tendency in sophiology to collapse the Divine persons into substantive relations and, thus, into the substance or essence. Such collapse seems to exhausts the possibility for an epistemological opening between God and man. It defines a static *a priori* relation between God and man that does not leave space for a relationship based on love and personal freedom. Sophia *a priori* contains in itself the whole of creation. Containing all of creation and being also God’s substance or nature, Sophia implies no difference between the Creator and His creation and removes the freedom in the relationship between them, thus, infecting Bulgakov’s sophiological system with the seeds of pantheism.¹¹² In response to such static relation one could use a statement by the late Fr. Dumitru Popescu according to which “the Holy Trinity cannot become a prisoner of unity, because it is moved by love, through the uncreated energies, imparted by the Holy Spirit. If the person and the relations were simultaneous, man would have to elevate himself to reach out to the Holy Trinity, because the Trinity would not descend to reach man. The uncreated energies, radiating from the internal constitution of the Holy Trinity, are the means through which the incarnate Logos descends into the world, so that the world may ascend to

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ For a more detailed analysis of the Radical orthodox position from an Orthodox perspective the reader could refer to Nicholas Loudovikos, “Ontology Celebrated: Remarks of an Orthodox on Radical Orthodoxy,” Ch. 5 in *Encounter between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*, Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider, Eds., Ashgate, 2009, pp. 141-155.

¹¹² Mikhail Sergeev, *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy*, p. 109.

God. If the Trinity remained closed upon Itself, it would be hard to see that God loved the world so much, that He gave His only begotten Son as a redeeming price for it. In its turn, the world is not representing a monad closed upon itself, like a monolithic divine nature, but it has an internal ontological rationality, which stems from the Divine rationalities, which proceed from the Logos and have their center of gravity in the Logos. This rationality, which manifests itself in the created energies of the world, constitutes the means through which the Divine reasons (λόγοι) work within creation, with man's participation, to evolve to its final perfection, according to God's will."¹¹³ In his statement Fr. Popescu refers to the *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae.¹¹⁴ It is in full agreement with Fr. Florovsky's teaching on the distinction between Divine essence and energies¹¹⁵ and demonstrates the link between the sophiological theme, the teaching on the Divine energies and the doctrine of creation.

The doctrine of creation in 'The Bride of the Lamb'

It was already pointed out that the indirect theological debate between Fr. George Florovsky and Fr. Sergei Bulgakov focused on the Christian doctrine of creation. For both of them the doctrine of creation played a keystone role for a proper understanding of Christian theology. For Bulgakov the concept of Sophia naturally emerges as a theological prerequisite for the understanding of the relationship between God as Trinity and the world. The doctrine of creation, therefore, is crucial to understanding Bulgakov's sophiology, and he devotes almost the entire first half of *The Bride of the Lamb* to a detailed treatise on the nature of created beings and the relationship between Creator and creation including some of the specific aspects of *creatio ex nihilo*. According to Bulgakov's translator Boris Jakim, *The Bride of the Lamb* is "the greatest sophiological work ever written," and "the most mature development of his sophiology."¹¹⁶ The next sections will focus on a parallel exploration of some of the diverging points between Bulgakov and Florovsky aiming at showing that the teaching on the distinction between the Divine essence

¹¹³ Dumitru Popescu, "Logos, Trinity, Creation," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2010, p. 63.

¹¹⁴ Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God – Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 2, *The World: Creation and Deification* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), p. 13.

¹¹⁵ Georges Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood," Chapter III of *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol. III: *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, Massachusetts: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 43-78.

¹¹⁶ *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. xiii.

and energies emerges as a solution to Bulgakov's sophiological problematics.

In Bulgakov's terminology, the Divine nature can be analyzed in two aspects, namely, as οὐσία - the Divine nature in the aspect of God-for-Himself, and Σοφία - the Divine nature in the aspect of God-for-Others. Sophia can be understood only in relation to but not as οὐσία, because without God-in-Himself there is no God-for-Others. Οὐσία is necessarily more than Sophia, because God never completely reveals Himself. Nonetheless, they both represent the same nature of God in relation to the Creator Himself (οὐσία) or the creature (Σοφία). In this sense, Divine Wisdom or Sophia is understood as the nature of God revealed to creation and, respectively, in creation:

*"One and the same Sophia is revealed in God and in creation. Therefore, if the negative definition, 'God created the world out of nothing' eliminates the idea of any nondivine or extradivine principle in creation, its positive content can only be such that God created the world out of himself, out of His essence. And the idea that the content of world was invented ad hoc by God at the creation of the world must be fundamentally rejected. The positive content of the world's being is just as divine as its foundation in God, for there is no other principle for it. But that which exists pre-eternally in God, in His self-revelation, exists in the world only in becoming, as becoming divinity. And metaphysically the creation of the world consists in the fact that God established His proper divine world not as an eternally existing world but as a becoming world. In this sense, He mixed it with nothing, immersing it in becoming as another form of being of one and the same divine world. And this divine world is the foundation, content, entelechy, and meaning of the creaturely world. The Divine Sophia became also the creaturely Sophia. God repeated Himself in creation, so to speak; He reflected Himself in nonbeing."*¹¹⁷

One of the main concerns of Bulgakov in *The Bride of the Lamb* is to re-establish the place of the world in its ontological relation to God and, in a sense, to reconcile the world to God. "If there is such a place, it must be established by God, for there is nothing that is outside of or apart from God and that in this sense is not-God."¹¹⁸ It is here that the dogmatic formula on the creation *ex nihilo* comes into play. In looking at the problematic of creation *ex nihilo*, Bulgakov transfers the question, in his words, from a static to a dynamic plane. To do that he starts with Plato and Aristotle in whom, he asserts, we find 'Divinity without God.'¹¹⁹ In Plato the createdness of the world finds no role in his ideas and the ideas are

¹¹⁷ *The Lamb of God*, p. 126.

¹¹⁸ *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

hovering above the world in the eternal Divine Sophia, and are 'duplicated,' as it were, in the empirical world. There is no answer to overcome this 'ontological hiatus', and Platonism remains 'only an abstract sophiology', which slides into idealism or monism.

Aristotle on the other hand transposed these ideas from the domain of the Divine Sophia to the domain of the creaturely Sophia, in a system of 'sophiological cosmology.'¹²⁰ 'God' (the Prime Mover) and the world merge to the point of indistinguishability,¹²¹ where in the final analysis Aristotle equates God with the world. His cosmology "is nothing but a sophiology," but a sophiology that is impersonalistic and "deprived of its trinitarian-theological foundation."¹²² Sophiology can be justified not in itself but "*only in connection with theology,*" when the former occupies its proper place in the latter, "but does not supplant it."¹²³ At the same time, Bulgakov believes that ancient religion and philosophy attested so powerfully to the *sophianicity* of the world, that their contribution has yet to be illuminated in its full significance.

Moving to the discussion of patristics Bulgakov employs an approach that could be characterized as typical of him – he sees the Church Fathers through his sophiological prism and ends up identifying them as bad 'sophiologists.' He finds the key flaw of patristic theology in "the confusion of sophiology with logology"¹²⁴ and openly argues against the patristic identification of the Logos, the second hypostasis in the Holy Trinity, with the Divine Sophia, calling this identification "the primordial defect of all patristic sophiology." His approach to patristics therefore is to take the core of patristic theology for a sophiology and then judge it on the basis of his own understanding of what sophiology is and what it should be. All of his theological reflections show a continuous unhappiness with the underdeveloped sophiology of the Church Fathers and a clear commitment to its constructive renewal. This is a point that will become a key issue in the indirect theological debate between him and Florovsky for whom a proper understanding of the Church Fathers becomes the most authentic resource for a constructive contemporary theological reflection.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

The doctrine of the Divine prototypes or ideas

Bulgakov finds a patristic sophiological opportunity in the fact that “logological sophiology does not exhaust the entire content the patristic doctrine of Sophia” leaving space for the emergence of what he calls an “*applied sophiology*” – the doctrine of the prototypes, paradigms, or ideas of creaturely being in God in the way it was articulated by St Gregory the Divine, St John of Damascus, St Maximus the Confessor, Pseudo-Dionysius and St Augustine. But, again, he ends up with the criticism that while patristic and scholastic doctrines converge in the necessity of accepting the paradigms or ideas of creaturely being in God, they are incomplete because of a lack of sophiology. For him the lack of sophiology leads to the attribution of an “accidental” character to the Divine ideas whereas a full understanding of patristic sophiology requires considering both “logological sophiology, on the one hand, and the theory of ideas in their mutual interrelation and harmonization, on the other.”¹²⁵ Bulgakov points out that in connection with this “arises a fundamental question, which, however, is not understood as such in patristics itself, and therefore does not find an answer for itself there: the question of how one should properly understand the relation of these prototypes of the world to Logos, and then to Divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia. In particular, do these ideas have a divine and eternal character? Do they refer to Divine being? Or are they created ad hoc, so to speak, as the ideal foundation of the world, a ‘heaven’ in relation to ‘earth’? In other words, is it a question here of the Divine Sophia or of the creaturely Sophia?”¹²⁶ These questions again demonstrate the peculiarity of Bulgakov’s approach – he imposes his sophiological presuppositions on patristic theology and keeps asking questions that would have never emerged from its own premises. As a result, he finds solutions that are alien to it:

“In the first place, these divine ideas of the world can be equated with the Divine Sophia, since the Divine Sophia includes the ideal *all*, the ontic seeds of the Logos. By a creative act these seeds are implanted in ‘nothing’ and form the foundation of the being of the creaturely world, that is, the creaturely Sophia, who also shines with the light of eternity in the heavens, in the Divine Sophia. In the Divine Sophia, these seeds belong to the self-revelation of divinity in the Holy Trinity or to the divine world, whereas in the creaturely world they are its divine goal-causes, or entelechies. (...) The main trait of these prototypes of creaturely being is that they are *not* created, but have a divine, eternal being proper to them. This is the uncreated heaven, the glory of God. But these prototypes, or ideas,

¹²⁵ *Bride of the Lamb*, p. 17.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

can also be considered as *created* by God as the prototypes of the world *before* creation, as it were. They ontologically presuppose creation but are connected with it. (...) If one calls this too Sophia (of course, with violence done to terminology), one would have then to say that Sophia is created, and that in general only the creaturely Sophia exists, although she is not an independent part of this created world but only its plan. This is indeed the understanding of some of the theologians, though for us this idea of a solely creaturely, *ad hoc* created Sophia contains a number of irreconcilable contradictions and dogmatic absurdities. In particular, it introduces changeability into the very essence of God. God in creation is different from God before creation: He creates something new even for himself, namely, the creaturely Sophia."¹²⁷

We can return now to the point about the similarity between Bulgakov's sophiology and the theology of Thomas Aquinas in their relation to the doctrine of creation (in the section of the *Bride of the Lamb* dedicated to the creation of the world out of nothing, the discussion of the teaching of Aquinas and Western theology is the largest in volume).¹²⁸ In the quotation above one could identify an affinity to Aquinas' concept of creation in which the beginning of the world is decoupled from its creation in time and 'being created' is not equivalent to 'having began to exist' but just to 'being depended on someone' – an approach that could be considered as an 'audacious novelty' for Thomas' times.¹²⁹ It seems again that, although Bulgakov appears to be quite critical towards Aquinas, considering Bulgakov's sophiological ideas in parallel with Thomas' doctrine of creation would be quite worthwhile in providing another hermeneutical insight for a contemporary re-evaluation of his theology and a new fresh look at the sophiological controversy.

Divine necessity vs freedom in 'The Bride of the Lamb'

A key point in Bulgakov's sophiology is emphasizing the contrast of the difference between creation by Divine necessity and by Divine freedom. For him "patristics affirmed only the general notion of the creation of the world by God's free will, in contradistinction to the necessity that reigns in divinity's internal self-determinations."¹³⁰ He sees "an anthropomorphism in the acceptance of this dishonourable doctrine of (and even opposition)

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19

¹²⁹ François-Xavier Putallas, "Audace et limites de la raison," Forward to Josef Pieper, *Le concept de création – La "philosophie négative" de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Ad Solem, 2010), p. 14; see also Michael Heller, "Where Physics Meets Metaphysics," in A. Connes, M. Heller, Sh. Majid, R. Penrose, J. Polkinghorne, A. Tylor, Eds., *On Space and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 238-277.

¹³⁰ *Bride of the Lamb*, p. 29.

in God between necessity and freedom.”¹³¹ These latter are permissible, he writes, only for creaturely limitedness, and the “antinomic conjugacy of freedom and necessity” not only determine creaturely life, but “the very distinction and opposition between the two finds its origin here.”¹³² For God, “all is equally necessary and equally free”, and “occasionalism (...) is not appropriate to God’s magnificence and absoluteness.”¹³³

“If God created the world, this means that He *could not have refrained from creating it*, although the Creator’s act belongs to the fullness of God’s life and this act contains no external compulsion that would contradict divine freedom.

And if one can speak of the *will* to creation in God, this will, as synonymous with freedom, is not an anthropomorphic will, which can desire or not desire, but the divine will, which invariably and absolutely desires. In general, the distinction between God’s being and his creation, defined according to the feature of freedom and understood in the sense of different *possibilities*, must be completely eliminated, for such a distinction does not exist. Having in himself the power of creation, God cannot fail to be the Creator. (...) The world’s ‘creation’ is not something *extra*, not something *plus* to God’s proper life. This creation enters into the divine life with all the force of ‘necessity,’ or of the freedom that, in God, is completely identical with ‘necessity.’”¹³⁴

It appears then that for Bulgakov the world’s creation is “God’s own life, inseparable from *personal* divinity, as his self-revelation”, and he emphasises the importance of understanding the Divine Sophia as divinity in God in her connection with the hypostases of the Trinity. As divinity, she does not have her own hypostasis, but is eternally hypostatized in the Holy Trinity and cannot exist otherwise. She belongs to the tri-hypostases as their life and self-revelation.¹³⁵ Thus “the Divine Sophia is God’s *exhaustive* self-revelation, the fullness of divinity, and therefore has absolute content. There can be no positive principle of being that does not enter into this fullness of sophianic life and revelation. (...) The Divine Sophia (also known as the divine world) is therefore a *living* essence in God. However, she is not a ‘hypostasis’ but ‘hypostatizedness’ which belongs to the personal life of the hypostasis, and because of this, she is a living essence.”¹³⁶

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Bride of the Lamb*, 38-39.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

God as trihypostatic Person?

In discussing the meaning of Divine Sophia in relation to creation Bulgakov provides another key passage:

“Sophia must also be understood in the sense of *creative* self-determination, the supra-eternal creative act of the Holy Trinity, the self-creativity of the Holy Trinity, the *actus purus* of God. (...) In our theology there exist certain ossified formulae that fundamentally contradict this divine self-creative actuality. This includes the usual dogmatic formula relating to the Holy Trinity: God ‘has’ three persons and one nature. The formulation that God has three persons is imprecise if it is not also stated that God himself is a tri-hypostatic person. But we can ignore this imprecision; it will not necessarily lead to incorrect conclusions. But the formula that the Holy Trinity *has* one *nature* is, in this form, unsatisfactory in general. For what this ‘nature’ and this ‘has’ signify? (...) ‘nature,’ to be sure is divinity itself, God’s own life in its self-revelation. (...) this life is divinity’s eternal *act*. (...) God’s nature is, in this sense, the creative self-positing of divinity, God’s personal – trihypostatic – act. This act is the Divine Sophia, the self-positing and self-revelation of the Holy Trinity. (...) she is the creative act of the divine trihypostatic person (...) Only on the basis of such a conception of the divine nature, or Sophia, as God’s self-creative act can we wholly overcome the rationalistically reified concept of God and think of him not statically, but dynamically, as *actus purus*.”¹³⁷

There are two significant points in this passage. The first one is Bulgakov’s comfort in using the concept of *actus purus* which, for an Orthodox ear, clearly indicates a tendency to collapsing the essence or nature of God and His activities and manifestations *ad extra*. The second one is the discussion of Divine Sophia as the creative act of the divine trihypostatic *person*, i.e. Bulgakov makes a distinction between the three hypostases in God and His person. According to A. Arjakovsky, if one has to state in a few words the principal response of Bulgakov to the enigma of Chalcedon, one would say “God does not have three persons, God is Himself a tri-hypostatic Person.”¹³⁸ Such a view opens the important question about the specific nature of the relation between the three Divine hypostases and the Divine essence or nature. A more careful look in his earlier work *The Lamb of God* may provide some additional insights about the nature of this relation:¹³⁹

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹³⁸ A. Arjakovsky, “The sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov and contemporary Western theology,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 1-2, 2005, pp. 219-235.

¹³⁹ At the same time, any comparative analysis of Bulgakov’s different works should be done very carefully. It could easily create a sense of conceptual confusion due to the fact that his opinions have developed in time.

“The Divine nature entirely and totally belongs to God; it is personally realized in Him as ‘His eternal power and Godhead’ (Rom. 1:20). But in virtue of this realized state, even if the nature in God must be distinguished from His personality, one must not oppose to it, as another principle, a ‘fourth’ in the Holy Trinity, a ‘Divinity’ in God (...). The Divine nature is totally transparent for the Divine hypostases, and to that extent it is identified with them, while preserving its proper being. The nature is eternally hypostasized in God as the adequate life of the hypostases, whereas the hypostases are eternally connected in their life with the nature, while remaining distinct from it.”¹⁴⁰

In relation to this passage Bulgakov points out that there is fundamental relation between personality and nature in Divinity. It is not entirely clear what the difference between the Divine personality or the tri-hypostatic Divine Person and each of the three hypostases is, however it seems that by personality he refers to some kind of pre-hypostatic state of uncontrollable intentionality or an autonomous dynamic living principle in association with the Divine nature that makes it to be hypostasized. It should be therefore fully open or transparent for the three hypostases. “This transparence of the nature for the hypostases and its total adequacy are realized in the unity of the tri-hypostatic life in conformity with the try-hypostatizedness of the Divine Person. God has his nature by a *personal* self-positing, but one that is personally tri-hypostatic (...). The principle (ἀρχή) of the nature of Divinity, as of the entire Holy Trinity, is God the Father. He has his own nature, and His possession of it is a hypostatic, co-hypostatic, and inter-hypostatic act... The Father actualizes *His own*, His own hypostatically transparent nature, in the hypostasis of the Son, who is His Word, the ‘image of his person [ὑπόστασις]’ (Heb. 1:3). (...) In the Divine Spirit the relation between person and nature is defined in another manner. In the Divine Spirit, there is nothing in a given or unrealized state. (...) Therefore, although nature is other than hypostasis in God as well, it is entirely hypostasized, rendered conscious in the personal life of the Divinity, manifested and actualized.”¹⁴¹

Reading the above quotations makes it difficult to disagree with A. Arjakovsky about Bulgakov’s theological innovativeness with respect to Patristics. It is however equally difficult to agree with him that this theological innovativeness is a natural development of patristic theology. During Bulgakov’s own times it was Vladimir Lossky who reacted vigorously to such statements because “it seemed to him a mixing of the

¹⁴⁰ S. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, p. 97.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

nature and the person of God.”¹⁴² Today there is not much to add to such criticisms, especially when one could see the theological implications of the collapsing of the Divine essence into the Divine activities, and of Divine nature into the Divine ‘person’:

“Only the divinity of the existent God *is*, and there is nothing apart from and outside divinity. (...) The existent God has being, that is, essence and existence. The tryhypostatic Person of God has His own nature or His own divine world, and all belongs to this life and world. Therefore, the assertion that there is nothing apart from God is only a negative expression of this positive conception. In fact, such an extra-divine nothing simply does not exist. (...) And if we believe that the world is created out of nothing, then, in the positive sense, this can mean only that God created the world out of Himself. (...) One must include the world’s creation in God’s own life, correlate God’s world-creating act with the act of His self-determination. One must know how to simultaneously unite, identify, and distinguish creation and God’s life, which in fact is possible in the doctrine of Divine Sophia, Divine and creaturely, identical and distinct.”¹⁴³

For Bulgakov there cannot be a basis for the separation in God of His being and creativity, contrary to His self-identity and simplicity.

“It is thought that God did not have to become the Creator, that He does not need the world, that He could remain in the absolute solitude and glory of His magnificence. Corresponding to this is the confused notion that God supposedly began to be the Creator in a time that proceeded the time of his being *before* creation. But all such attempts to measure God’s being by time, namely before and after creation, or to define different modes of necessity and freedom in God, as well as their degree, are exposed as absurd, as contradicting God’s eternity and unchangeability. (...) God’s all simple essence is one and unchanging, and if God is the Creator, He is the Creator from all eternity.”¹⁴⁴

“Thus, God is both God in Himself and the Creator, with a completely equal necessity and freedom of His being. In other words, God cannot fail to be the Creator, just as the Creator cannot fail to be

¹⁴² Cited by A. Arjakovsky in: Антуан Аржаковски, Журнал Путь (1925-1940) - Поколение русских религиозных мыслителей в эмиграции, Киев: Феникс, 2000, p. 425; See also Владимир Лоски, „Спор о Софии,” in <http://proroza.narod.ru/VLossky.htm> (17.01.2011). In a recent private communication Fr. Nicholas Lossky pointed out to me that his father V. Lossky did not want this last text to be openly published. For him it was part of a private report requested by the Metropolitan of Moscow and, if it was to be openly published, it should have been much more positive towards Fr. Sergei Bulgakov. According to Fr. N. Lossky, his father had a great respect towards Fr. Sergei as a theologian and believed that, with small corrections, his theology could easily become fully Orthodox.

¹⁴³ *Bride of the Lamb*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

God. The plan of the world's creation is as co-eternal to God as His own being in the Divine Sophia. In this sense (but only in this sense), God cannot do without the world, and the world is necessary for God's own being. (...) For this reason, we must consider inadmissible and contradictory the anthropomorphic principle that God 'freely' or accidentally, as it were, created the world, and the world therefore did not have to be created."¹⁴⁵

Based on his analysis Bulgakov concludes that the Divine Sophia is not only God's project or His pre-eternal ideas of the creaturely world but its eternal and uncreated foundation and essence. In this sense, the creaturely world does not contain any ontological novelty for God and is not subject to time. "Rather, it is eternal with all of God's eternity, as eternal as the Holy Trinity and its self-revelation in the Divine Sophia, as eternal as God's life."¹⁴⁶

2. Florovsky and Energeia

Florovsky on Sophia

Interestingly enough, Florovsky rarely talks about Sophia. "It is particularly startling to discover that there seems to be absolutely nothing" in Florovsky's lifetime corpus of published writing that could qualify as an explicit attack on sophiology.¹⁴⁷ However, Florovsky's writings abound in what can be characterised as indirect criticism of sophiology. Most of them were scholarly studies which aimed "to expose weaknesses in the theoretical or historical underpinnings of the sophiological edifice, doing so, however, without referring to the sophiological teaching by name."¹⁴⁸ One of the few places where Florovsky discusses the concept of Sophia is in a letter written to Bulgakov on July 4/22, 1926, where he argues that acquaintance with Palamas would have made his Sophia unnecessary:¹⁴⁹

"As I have been saying for a long time, there are *two* teachings about Sophia and even *two* Sophias, or more accurately, *two images* of Sophia: the true and real and the imaginary one. Holy churches were built in Byzantium and in Rus' in the name of the former. The latter

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Alexis Klimoff, "Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological controversy," p. 75.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁴⁹ The letter has been published in Russian: А.М. Пентковски, "Письма Г.Флоровского С.Булгакову и С.Тышкевичу," *Символ - Журнал христианской культуры при Славянской библиотеке в Париже*, № 29, 1993, с. 205, and recently translated in English. The English version can be found online at: <http://ishmaelite.blogspot.com/2009/05/palamas-florovsky-bulgakov-and.html> (15.08.2010).

inspired Solovyov and his Masonic and western teachers - and goes right back to the Gnostics and Philo. Solovyov did not at all know the *Church Sophia*: he knew Sophia from Boehme and the Behmenists, from Valentinus and Kabbalah. And *this* Sophiology is heretical and renounced. That which you find in Athanasius relates to the other Sophia. And one may find even more about Her in Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, from which there is a direct line to Palamas. The very terminology - *ousia* and *energeia* has its beginning in Basil the Great. I see no difficulty in this terminology. Aristotle has nothing to do with this. The basic thought of Cappadocian theology can be reduced to a precise distinction of the inner-divine Pleroma, of the Triune fullness of all-sufficient life, and it is this that is the *ousia*, *pelagas*, *tis ousias* in Damascene, - and: the 'outward' [*vo vne*] direction of Mercy, Grace, Love, *Activity* - *Energeia*. The entire question (speculatively very difficult) is in this distinction. In the perceptible sense, this is the explanation of the very idea of *creation*, as a Divine *plan-will about the other, about not-God*. *Ousia* - according to Basil the Great and according to Palamas - is unreachable and unknowable, it is 'in light unapproachable.' But '*the very same God*' (Palamas' expression) *creates*, that is, offers *another*, and for that reason is revealed 'outward' [*vo vne*]. It is this that is 'Energy,' 'Glory,' 'Sophia' - a non-hypostatic revelation of "*the same*" God. Not 'essence,' not 'personhood,' not 'hypostasis.' If you like, yes, - Divine *accidentia*, but *accidentia* of 'the very same' God or God '*Himself*.' And it is precisely to this that Palamas' thought leads - the accent is on the fullness and full meaning *tis Theotitos*. If you like, Sophia is Deus revelatus, that is, Grace. Grace - this is God to the world, *pros ton kosmon* (and not *pros ton Theon*, as in John 1:1 about the Logos). Sophia is eternal, inasmuch as it is thought - the will of the Eternal God, but it is willed - a thought about *Time*. There is much on this theme in Blessed Augustine. Sophia - is not only thought, 'idea,' *kosmos noitos*, but is will, power... And in God there is not, God does not have non-eternal powers and wills, but there is will about time. Sophia never is world. The world is *other*, both in relation to grace and in relation to the 'original image.' Therefore 'pre-eternity' and 'pre-temporality' of will - thoughts about time does [sic] not convert time into eternity. 'Ideal creation,' 'pre-eternal council,' *toto genere* is different from real creative *fiat*. Sophia is not the 'soul of the world.' This negative statement distinguishes the Church teaching about Sophia from the Gnostic and Behmenist teachings about her. Sophia *is not* a created subject, it is not a substance or substrata of created coming-into-being [*stanovleniia*]. This is *gratia* and not *natura*. And *natura* = *creatura*. Sophia - is not *creatura*. Along with this, it is *not hypostasis*, but *thrice-radiant glory*."

This letter is most representative for the identification of some of the key characteristics of Florovsky's theological approach: the rejection of Solovyov's legacy in Russian religious philosophy; the firm foundation of his theology in Patristics starting with the theological contribution of St

Athanasius the Great; the clear distinction between Divine nature and will as well as the location of the solution of the sophiological problematics in the Palamite distinction between Divine essence and energies; and last but not least, the relevance of the doctrine of creation for Christian theology in general. Florovsky will further develop his ideas in a number of future works.¹⁵⁰

The doctrine of creation in Florovsky

Florovsky summarizes the Christian teaching on creation *ex nihilo* in his 'Creation and creaturehood' and 'The idea of creation in Christian philosophy.' For him the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* was a striking Christian innovation in philosophy and still a stumbling-block for philosophers who, up to the present day, are still thinking in Greek categories. At the same time for Florovsky, in the same way as for Bulgakov, an adequate idea of Creation is the distinctive test of the integrity of Christian mind and faith.

Some of the first messages that could be found in *Creation and Creaturehood* are that there is no necessity whatsoever in the creation of the world; creation became possible as a result of the Divine will; there is a fundamental difference between created and uncreated:

"The world exists. But it began to exist. And that means; the world could have not existed. There is no necessity whatsoever for the existence of the world. Creaturely existence is not self-sufficient and is not independent. In the created world itself there is no foundation, no basis for genesis and being. (...) By its very existence creation points beyond its own limits. The cause and foundation of the world is outside the world. The world's being is possible only through the supra-mundane will of the merciful and Almighty God, 'Who calls the things that be not, to be' (Rom. 4:17). But, unexpectedly it is precisely in its creaturehood and createdness that the stability and substantiality of the world is rooted. Because the origin from out of nothing determines the otherness, the 'non-consubstantiality' of the world and of God. It is insufficient and inexact to say that things are created and placed *outside of God*. The '*outside*' itself is posited only in creation, and creation 'from out of nothing' [*ex nihilo*] is precisely

¹⁵⁰ Georges Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood," Chapter III of *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Vol. III: Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, Massachusetts: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 43-78; "The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius," *Studia Patristica*, Vol. VI, Papers presented at the Third Conference on Patristic Studies, held at Christ Church, Oxford, September, 1959 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), pp. 36-57; "The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy," *Eastern Churches Quarterly*, Vol. 8, 1949, Supplementary issue on Nature and Grace; "St Gregory Palamas and the tradition of the Fathers," *Sobornost*, Vol. 4, 1961, pp. 165-176, and also in *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol. 1, pp. 105-120.

such a positing of the 'outside,' the positing of an 'other' side by side with God."¹⁵¹

The difference between Divine and human nature

The striking difference between Florovsky's and Bulgakov's theological positions can be easily identified: for Florovsky the world could not have existed and there is no necessity whatsoever in God for the existence of the world since the world's being became possible through the Divine will. In addition, there is an infinite distance between God and creation which is due to the differences in nature, i.e. there is no relationship whatsoever between the Divine nature and created nature, except the creative act of the Holy Trinity which is related not to the Divine nature but to the Divine will:

"In creation something *absolutely new*, an extra-divine *reality* is posited and built up. It is precisely in this that the supremely great and incomprehensible miracle of creation consists - that an 'other' springs up, that heterogeneous drops of creation exist side by side with 'the illimitable and infinite Ocean of being,' as St. Gregory of Nazianzus says of God. There is an infinite distance between God and creation, and this is a *distance of natures*. All is distant from God, and is *remote* from Him not by place but *by nature* - οὐ τόπων ἀλλὰ φύσει - as St. John Damascene explains. And this distance is never removed, but is only, as it were, overlapped by immeasurable Divine love. As St. Augustine said, in creation 'there is nothing related to the Trinity, except the fact that the Trinity has created it' - *nihilique in ea esse quod ad Trinitatem pertineat, nisi quod Trinitas condidit*".¹⁵²

"Will and volition precede creating. Creating is *an act of will* [*ek vulimatos, εκ βουληματος*], and therefore is sharply distinguished from the Divine generation, which is an *act of nature* [*γεννᾶ κατὰ φύσιν*]. A similar interpretation was given by St. Cyril of Alexandria. The generation is out of the substance, κατὰ φύσιν. Creating is an act, and is not done out of the creator's own substance; and therefore a creation is heterogeneous to its creator."¹⁵³

A key of difference with respect to Bulgakov can be found in the statement that "in creation something *absolutely new*" and "an extra-divine *reality* is posited and built up."

"Any transubstantiation of creaturely nature into the Divine is as impossible as the changing of God into creation, and any 'coalescence' and 'fusion' of natures is excluded. In the one and only hypostasis and person of Christ - the God-Man - in spite of the

¹⁵¹ *Creation and creaturehood*, p. 45.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

completeness of the mutual interpenetration of the two natures, the two natures remain with their unchanged, immutable difference; 'without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the specific property of each nature being preserved.' (...) The vague 'out of two natures' the Fathers of Chalcedon replaced by the strong and clear 'in two natures,' and by the confession of the double and bilateral consubstantiality of the God-Man they established an unshakeable and indisputable criterion and rule of faith. The real existence of a created human nature, that is, of an other and second nature outside of God and side by side with Him, is an indispensable prerequisite for the accomplishment of the Incarnation without any change in or transmutation of the Divine nature."¹⁵⁴

In all the quotations given above there are no references to Bulgakov or Sophiology. They however appear as almost antithetically developed and articulated against positions that could be found in the works of Bulgakov. For example, the point that it is the Divine will, and not the Divine nature, that is the source of the Divine creative act implies the reality of the existence of the created human nature independently of the Divine one. It is important to identify the theological point of reference of this claim – the independent and autonomous existence of the created human nature is an 'indispensable prerequisite for the accomplishment of the Incarnation.' The reference to the Incarnation shows Florovsky's ultimate soteriological concerns as well as the Christological grounds of the Divine-human communion and human Salvation in general. If it was not God himself, the second person of the Trinity, who became incarnate for us by uniting our human nature His Divine nature, the Salvation of man would have been impossible. This is why the fundamental difference between the Divine and human natures is critically important in Christian theology and it is exactly this difference that makes the Divine plan of creation and salvation so great and beautiful. By preserving his Divine nature intact and unmixed with the creaturely one, God opens and secures the way to Himself by providing the meaning, the direction and the ultimate goal of human existence and perfection. Man, however, is not programmed *a priori*, by force, to reach Divine communion and needs to embrace on his own will the road to perfection by following Christ and His commandments in freedom and love.

Florovsky's focus on Christology shows a key difference in the two points of departure. For Bulgakov, as it was already shown, all theological articulation of the relationship between God and man, including creation, starts from within a Trinitarian perspective and this perspective for

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Bulgakov is necessarily sophiological, i.e. it is positioned within the one essence of the Trinity itself in its two aspects as Divine and creaturely Sophia. For Florovsky the only proper approach to Trinitarian theology is Christological, since it is only in Christ that the Trinitarian worship is revealed¹⁵⁵ and it is only from history and from historical experience that we could understand the creaturehood of creation and the eternity of the Divine thought-will about it. For him Bulgakov's way leads to a kind of automatic deification of man and makes his communion with God too naturalistic and human centered by cutting it away from the reach and the operation of the Divine Grace.¹⁵⁶

Divine ideas or prototypes

In a way similar to Bulgakov, Florovsky concentrates on a detailed discussion of the Divine prototypes or ideas focusing on the writings of St John Damascene, Pseudo-Dionysius and St Maximus the Confessor – the same Church Fathers that were discussed by Bulgakov. According to St John Damascene God contemplated everything in His mind before the beginning and each thing receives its being at a determinate time according to His timeless and decisive thought, image, and pattern. This “counsel” of God is eternal and unchanging, pre-temporal and without beginning since everything Divine is immutable. It is the *image of God* turned towards the creation. According to St. Maximus the Confessor the eternal counsel is God's design and decision concerning the world and must be rigorously distinguished from the world itself.

“The Divine idea of creation is not creation itself; it is not the substance of creation; it is not the bearer of the cosmic-process; and the ‘transition’ from ‘design’ [ἐννόημα] to ‘deed’ [ἔργον] is not a process within the Divine idea, but the appearance, formation, and the realization of another substratum, of a multiplicity of created subjects. The Divine idea remains unchangeable and unchanged, it is not involved in the process of formation. It remains always outside the created world, transcending it. The world is created *according to the idea*, in accordance with the pattern - it is the realization of the pattern - but this pattern is not the subject of becoming.”¹⁵⁷

Here Florovsky turns to St Augustine for whom “Things before their becoming are as though non-existent, they both were and were not before they originated; they were in God's knowledge: but were not in their own

¹⁵⁵ А.М. Пентковски, “Письма Г.Флоровского С.Булгакову и С.Тышкевичу,” *Символ - Журнал христианской культуры при Славянской библиотеке в Париже*, № 29, 1993, с. 205

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61

nature.”¹⁵⁸ In creation there is a new reality which is projected from out of nothing to become the bearer of the Divine idea and realize it in its own becoming.

“In this context the pantheistic tendency of Platonic ideology and of the Stoic theory of ‘seminal reasons’ [σπερματικοὶ λόγοι] is altogether overcome and avoided. For Platonism the identification of the ‘essence’ of each thing with its Divine idea is characteristic, the endowment of substances with absolute and eternal (beginningless) properties and predicates, as well as the introduction of the ‘idea’ into real things. On the contrary, the *created nucleus* of things must be rigorously distinguished from the *Divine idea* about things.”¹⁵⁹

The last paragraphs use the full power of the patristic theological arsenal to directly reject Bulgakov’s positioning of the co-eternity of the created world in the Divine ideas and prototypes. The Divine pattern of a thing before its creation is not its substance or hypostasis but, rather, its truth, and the truth of a thing and its substance are not identical. It is therefore out of question to talk about any possible aspects of co-eternity between the Divine ideas about things before creation and the created things themselves after creation:

“The idea of the world, God’s design and will concerning the world, is obviously *eternal*, but in some sense *not co-eternal*, and *not conjointly everlasting* with Him, because ‘distinct and separated,’ as it were, from His ‘essence’ by His *volition*. One should say rather that the Divine idea of the world is eternal by *another kind* of eternity than the Divine essence. Although paradoxical, this distinction of types and kinds of eternity is necessary for the expression of the incontestable distinction between the *essence (nature)* of God and the *will* of God. This distinction would not introduce any kind of separation or split into the Divine Being, but by analogy expresses the distinction between *will* and *nature*, the fundamental distinction made so strikingly explicit by the Fathers of the fourth century. The idea of the world has its basis *not in the essence, but in the will of God*. God does not so much have as ‘think up’ the idea of creation. And He ‘thinks it up’ in perfect freedom; and it is only by virtue of this wholly free ‘thinking up’ and good pleasure of His that He as it were ‘becomes’ Creator, even though from everlasting. But nevertheless He could also not have created.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56

Divine and human freedom vs necessity

In contrast to Bulgakov, who emphasizes the relationship between necessity and freedom in God's creative act, Florovsky focuses on creaturely freedom as a key for understanding the idea of creation:

"The reality and substantiality of created nature is manifested first of all in *creaturely freedom*. Freedom is not exhausted by the possibility of choice, but presupposes it and starts with it. And creaturely freedom is disclosed first of all in the equal possibility of two ways: to God and away from God. ... As St. Gregory the Theologian says, 'God legislates human self-determination.' 'He honored man with freedom that good might belong no less to him who chose it than to Him Who planted its seed.' Creation must ascend to and unite with God by its own efforts and achievements."¹⁶¹

For Florovsky it is critically important to emphasize the freedom in the mutual relationship between God and man.

"The reality and substantiality of created nature is manifested first of all in *creaturely freedom*. Freedom is not exhausted by the possibility of choice, but presupposes it and starts with it. And creaturely freedom is disclosed first of all in the equal possibility of two ways: to God and away from God. This duality of ways is not a mere formal or logical possibility, but a real possibility, dependent on the effectual presence of powers and capacities not only for a choice between, but also for the following of, the two ways. Freedom consists not only in the possibility, but also in the *necessity* of autonomous choice, the resolution and resoluteness of choice. Without this autonomy, nothing happens in creation."¹⁶²

By stepping into being creation is given the freedom of will to the extent of being able to reject the Creator Himself. And the beauty of creation consists in the fact that human freedom cannot be left unused. The creaturehood of humanity makes it impossible for man to avoid or abandon that choice:

"In her primordial and ultimate vocation, creation is destined for union with God, for communion and participation in His life. But this is not a binding necessity of creaturely nature. Of course, outside of God there is no life for creation. But as Augustine happily phrased it, *being and life do not coincide* in creation. And therefore *existence in death* is possible. (...) The possibility of metaphysical suicide is open (...). But the power of self-annihilation is not given. Creation is indestructible - and not only that creation which is rooted in God as

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

in the source of true being and eternal life, but also that creation which has set herself against God.”¹⁶³

All this is because the world was created so that “it might have being.” In creation God and man fell into a personal relationship and the personal freedom of both, God and man, is a key for the proper understanding this relationship. It could be interpreted as a kind of realistic Christian ‘anthropological maximalism’ – the road to salvation and deification is fully open to everyone but it has to be willed and followed through spiritual struggle cooperation with God.

Florovsky addresses directly the question about any internal necessity in God’s creation of the world and somewhat rhetorically points out that it is not so easy to demonstrate the absence of any internal necessity in this revelation of God *ad extra*: “Is the attribute of Creator and Sustainer to be considered as belonging to the essential and formative properties of the Divine Being?” He seems to be rhetorically introducing the reader into the problematic of the theories on the Divine necessity of creation in order to sharply and unconditionally express his own firm opinion which is based again on the distinction between Divine nature and will: “And it must be said at once that any such admission means introducing the world into the ultra-Trinitarian life of the Godhead as a co-determinant principle. And we must firmly and uncompromisingly reject any such notion.”¹⁶⁴ This firm rejection is very representative in demonstrating the differences between Bulgakov’s and Florovsky’s approaches. By focusing on the distinction between Divine nature and will Florovsky augments his argumentation by introducing the discussion of the distinction between the essence and energies:

“One has to admit distinctions within the very co-eternity and immutability of the Divine Being. In the wholly simple Divine life there is an absolute rational or logical order [τάξις] of Hypostases, which is irreversible and inexchangeable for the simple reason that there is a ‘first principle’ or ‘source’ of Godhead, and that there is the enumeration of First, Second, and Third Persons. And likewise it is possible to say that the Trinitarian structure is antecedent to the will and thought of God, because the Divine will is the common and undivided will of the All-Holy Trinity, as it is also antecedent to all the Divine acts and ‘energies.’”¹⁶⁵

Divine essence vs energies

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Florovsky opens the discussion of the distinction between Divine essence and energies by pointing out that the absolute creatureliness and non-self-sufficiency of the world leads to the distinguishing of two kinds of predicates and acts in God. In this he follows again the legacy of the Church Fathers, where a primary distinction between “theology” and “economy” has already been made. “The Fathers and Doctors of the Church endeavored to distinguish clearly and sharply those definitions and names which referred to God on the ‘theological’ plane and those used on the ‘economical.’ Behind this stands the distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘will.’ And bound up with it is the distinction in God between ‘essence’ and ‘that which surrounds the essence,’ ‘that which is related to the nature.’”¹⁶⁶ According to St John Damascene the Divine essence is unattainable and only the powers and operations of God are accessible to knowledge. This distinction is connected with God’s relation to the world. For Florovsky, the same as for Bulgakov, the theological response to sophiology should be found in Trinitarian theology since it is the Trinitarian theology of the Fathers of the fourth century that has already provided a basis for an adequate formulation of God’s relation to the world: the whole entire and undivided operation (*energie*, ἐνέργεια) of the consubstantial Trinity is revealed in God’s acts and deeds. But the essence (*usia*, οὐσία) of the undivided Trinity remains beyond the reach of knowledge and understanding. St Basil the Great affirms that “we know our God by His energies, but we do not presume that it is possible to approach the essence itself. Because although His energies descend to us, His essence remains inaccessible.”¹⁶⁷ The Divine energies are real, essential, life-giving manifestations of the Divine life. They are real images of God’s relation to creation, connected with the image of creation in God’s eternal knowledge and counsel. They are that aspect of God that is turned towards creation.

Florovsky points out that the doctrine of the energies of God received its final formulation in the Byzantine theology of the fourteenth century, and above all in St. Gregory Palamas, for whom there is a real distinction, but no separation, between the *essence* or *entity* of God and His *energies*. The creatures have access to and communicate with the Divine energies only, but this participation is critical for them to enter into a genuine and perfect communion and union with God – the ultimate goal of their creation and existence, their deification. Any refusal to make a real distinction between the Divine essence and energy removes the boundary between generation and creation and they both appear then to be acts of essence.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

“And as St. Mark of Ephesus explained, ‘Being and energy, completely and wholly coincide in equivalent necessity. Distinction between essence and will [θέλησις] is abolished; then God only begets and does not create, and does not exercise His will. Then the difference between foreknowledge and actual making becomes indefinite, and creation seems to be coeternally created.’ None of these energies is hypostatic, nor hypostasis in itself, and their incalculable multiplicity introduces no composition into the Divine Being. The totality of the Divine ‘energies’ constitutes His pre-temporal will, His design - His good pleasure - concerning the ‘other,’ His eternal counsel. This is God Himself, not His Essence, but *His will*. The distinction between ‘essence’ and ‘energies’ - or, it could be said, between ‘nature’ and ‘grace’ [φύσις and χάρις] - corresponds to the mysterious distinction in God between ‘necessity’ and ‘freedom,’ understood in a proper sense.”¹⁶⁸

The real distinction between Divine essence and energies is directly related to the distinction between Divine nature and will and appears as critically important for the articulation of the Orthodox teaching on creation. In his final discussion Fr. George unfolds the implications of the distinction between essence and energies within a context that addresses many of the issues raised by Bulgakov. The section below will follow very closely the logic of his argumentation.

The distinction between Divine essence and energies enables the use of a “necessity language” with respect to the Divine essence and “with permissible boldness” one may say that God cannot but be the Trinity of persons. However, the Triad of Hypostases is above the Divine Will and its necessity is a law of Divine nature which is expressed in the consubstantiality, the indivisibility and the mutual co-inherence of the Three Persons. Florovsky refers to St Maximus the Confessor in pointing out that it would be inappropriate to introduce the notion of will into the internal life of the Godhead for the sake of defining the relations between the Hypostases, because the Persons of the All-Holy Trinity exist together above any kind of relation, will or action, and the ground of Trinitarian being is not in the economy or revelation of God *ad extra*.

At the same time creation and the act of creation presuppose the Trinity and creation cannot be considered apart from the Trinity. The natural fullness of the Divine essence is contained within the Trinity including the free actualization of the Divine plan for creation as a result of a creative act through the operation of the common to the Trinity Divine will.

“The distinction between the names of ‘God in Himself,’ in His eternal being, and those names which describe God in revelation, ‘economy,’

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

action, is not only a subjective distinction of our analytical thinking; it has an objective and ontological meaning, and expresses the absolute freedom of Divine creativity and operation.”¹⁶⁹

The Divine freedom includes the economy of salvation in which from everlasting times the Son of God is destined to the Incarnation and the Cross. However, the predicates referring to the economy of salvation do not coincide with the predicates referring to the Hypostatic Being of the Second Person of the Trinity since Revelation is an act of love and freedom and does not affect the Divine nature. It is through a similar creative act that the world was created out of nothing in freedom and love. It should however advance in accordance with its own creaturely freedom, the standard of the Divine economy and the standard of its pre-temporal image in God. God sees and wills each and every being in the completeness of its destiny including both its future and sin beholding all and manifesting himself to each one of them in a different way by means of an inseparable distribution of His grace or energy. His grace and energy is beneficently imparted to thousands upon myriads of thousands of hypostases and

“[e]ach hypostasis, in its own being and existence, is sealed by a particular ray of the good pleasure of God’s love and will. And in this sense, all things are in God in ‘image’ [ἐν ιδέα καὶ παραδείγματι] *but not by nature*, the created ‘all’ being infinitely remote from Uncreated Nature. This remoteness is bridged by Divine love, its impenetrability done away by the Incarnation of the Divine Word. Yet this remoteness remains. *The image of creation* in God transcends created nature and does not coincide with ‘the image of God’ in creation.”¹⁷⁰

In creation the free participation in and union with God is set as an invitation and challenging goal. This is a challenge that transcends created nature, but it is only by responding to it that created nature reaches its completeness in a process of created becoming which is real in its freedom, and free in its reality. It is by this becoming that what is out of nothing reaches its authentic fulfillment - deification:

“With the Incarnation of the Word the first fruit of human nature is unalterably grafted into the Divine Life, and hence to all creatures the way to communion with this Life is open, the way of *adoption* by God. In the phrase of St. Athanasius, the Word ‘became man in order to *deify* [θεοποίησθαι] us in Himself,’ in order that ‘the sons of men might become the sons of God.’ But this ‘divinization’ is acquired because Christ, the Incarnate Word, has made us ‘receptive to the Spirit,’ that He has prepared for us both the ascension and

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

resurrection as well as the indwelling and appropriation of the Holy Spirit. Through the 'flesh-bearing God' we have become 'Spirit-bearing men'; we have become sons 'by grace,' 'sons of God in the likeness of the Son of God.' And thus is recovered what had been lost since the original sin, when 'the transgression of the commandment turned man into what he was by nature,' over which he had been elevated in his very first adoption or birth from God, coinciding with his initial creation."¹⁷¹

In this way Florovsky provides a dynamic vision for the reality of the relationship between God and man and closes the laying down of his theological argument.

IV. As a way of conclusion

The main goal of the essay was to show that the teaching on the distinction between the Divine essence energies, in the way it was articulated by Fr. George Florovsky, emerges naturally as a response to Bulgakov's sophiology. The key difference in the approaches of these two theologians was found to be in the different perception or attitude to the legacy of patristic theology. For Florovsky, the legacy of the Church was the only source of theological reflection. For Bulgakov there was a need for a sophiological renewal of patristic theology and he tried to do that by imposing on it his philosophical presuppositions. "It is, in fact, the tragedy of Fr. Sergei ... that he was more a philosopher than a theologian, and that his 'sophiology' as a system contradicts his theological intuitions."¹⁷² The difference between the two theologians can be also expressed in terms of two different visions of a Christian anthropological maximalism. Bulgakov could be characterized by a radical maximalism with regard to the scope of human deification which seems to abolish the ontological difference between God and deified man. In describing the divine-like character of human nature he goes as far as to say that "if man were capable of freeing himself from his natural essence by the power of spiritual life, he would simply be God, and his life would be *fused* with Divine life."¹⁷³ According to Nicholas Sakharov "this is indeed a break with the Eastern patristic tradition."¹⁷⁴ In the case of Florovsky, one could talk about a realistic maximalism which is based on his commitment to remain faithful to the

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁷² Joost van Rossum, "Паламизм и софиология," *Христианская мысль*, No. 3, 2006, pp. 62-66.

¹⁷³ Nicholas Sakharov, *I Love Therefore I am – the Theological Legacy of Archimandrite Sophrony* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 2002), p. 155, referring to S. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, p. 94.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

patristic tradition with its foundation in ascetic experience¹⁷⁵ and on the explicit care to safeguard the ontological difference and the mutual freedom in the relationship between God and man. The fundamental difference between the created and uncreated natures however does not abolish the possibility for human deification which is based on the co-operation of the Divine and human energies.¹⁷⁶ The roots of such anthropological maximalism could be found in the theology of St Gregory Palamas: “man by grace possesses the infinite attributes of God – man becomes uncreated, omnipotent.”¹⁷⁷ Finally, the difference between the two theologians can be also expressed in terms of their different ways of interpreting the theology of St Gregory Palamas. It is in fact the chasm between these two different interpretations that could explain the theological struggle associated with the sophiological controversy and that should be always taken into account in its contemporary reevaluations.

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¹⁷⁵ The comparison of the Christian anthropological maximalisms of Fr. G. Florovsky and Fr. S. Bulgakov follows the logic of a similar comparison between Fr. S. Bulgakov and Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov that was done by Nicolas Sakharov in the reference above.

¹⁷⁶ George Dragas, “Divine and Human Synergy,” in *The Wedding Feast – Proceedings of the Colloquia of Orthodox Theology of the Univeristé de Sherbrooke 2007-2009*, P. Ladouceur, Ed., Montreal: Alexander Press, 2010, pp. 35-53

¹⁷⁷ John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, p. 176-77, referenced by N. Sakharov, *I Love Therefore I am*, p. 157.

Appendix: Bulgakov's references to St Gregory Palamas

This Appendix provides a number of quotations from Bulgakov's trilogy on the Divine-humanity including three of the key works of Bulgakov that were recently published in English: *The Bride of the Lamb*, *The Comforter*, and *The Lamb of God*. These are all the places where Bulgakov discusses the theology of Saint Gregory Palamas and his teaching on the distinction between the divine essence and energies.

1. The Divine essence and energies in "The Bride of the Lamb"

"The fundamental idea of Palamism is that, alongside God's transcendent 'essence,' there exists His manifold revelation in the world, His radiation in 'energies,' as it were. But Palamas's doctrine of essence and energies is not brought into connection with the dogma of the Trinity, in particular with the doctrine of the three hypostases as separate persons and of the Holy Trinity in unity. The fundamental idea of Palamism concerning the multiplicity and equi-divinity of the energies in God discloses πολυποίκιλος σοφία του Θεού, 'the manifold wisdom of God' (Eph. 3:10). Palamas considers the energies primarily in the aspect of grace, the supracreaturely 'light of Tabor' in the creaturely world. But these energies have, first of all, a world-creating and world-sustaining power which is a property of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, in both of her forms: the Divine Sophia, the eternal proto-ground of the world, and the creaturely Sophia, the divine force of the life of creation. The sophianic interpretation and application of Palamism are yet to come in the future. By accepting Palamism, the Church has definitely entered onto the path of recognizing the sophianic dogma. But the theological realization of this recognition still requires a long path of intellectual labor. Essential here is the connection with onomadoxy, which has recognized the divine reality and power of the divine-human name of Jesus and, in general, the power of the name of God in the world. It is not by chance that onomadoxy is linked with Palamism. However, these particular applications of Sophiology do not yet go to the root of the sophianic problem."¹⁷⁸

"How should one conceive this differentiation of the Divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia in their relation to God? It can be expressed in the following formulae: God has Divine Sophia, She belongs to God, and she herself in this sense is God, His eternal power and divinity, the untreated divine essence.* In contrast, the creaturely Sophia, or the world, belongs not to God, but to herself. She is created (or more precisely, is eternally

¹⁷⁸ Sergei Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (Eerdmans, 2002), p. 18.

being created) by God, is God's creation. Although she is grounded in divine power and is capable of limitless deification, she is *not* God (even in her limit). She is created; she is creaturely Sophia.

* There is a perfect analogy here with St. Gregory Palamas's doctrine: The divine energy, like the divine ousia, is God, although one cannot say that God, in His trihypostatizedness, is energy or even ousia. Rather, He has them. An irreversible proposition of identity results: God is Sophia as Divinity, but Sophia or Divinity is not the hypostatic God."¹⁷⁹

"But God is the Creator not only in relation to Himself as the Subject of the world-creating act but also in relation to the world as its object. In other words, He creates the creaturely Sophia; He forms the creaturely world by the power of the Divine Sophia. The Divine Sophia is not simply released, so to speak, into the freedom of autonomous being, by God's negative act of abstaining from the possession of her. In God there is no place for any passivity; all is creatively active in Him. And the relation of God to the creaturely Sophia, her very presence along with the Divine Sophia, as a special mode of the latter, is God's action upon His own nature. In the language of St. Gregory Palamas, it is the radiation of the energies of the creaturely Sophia from the darkness of the transcendental unfathomability of the divine Ousia-Sophia. And these lightnings illuminate the night of pre-being, of 'nothing.' In his relation to the creaturely Sophia, God does not abandon or reject her, for she is His own self-revelation. He has her, as He has the Divine Sophia, but in another way. Allowing her autonomous being, he 'creates' her together with the world. The uniqueness of the creaturely Sophia, or the world, consists in the fact that uncreated forces and energies, submerged in nothing, receive a creaturely, relative, limited, multiple being, and the universe comes into being. The world as the creaturely Sophia is uncreated-created. Ontologically the world consists of the Word's words, of divine ideas. It lives by God's life-giving power: it is joined together by the divine 'let there be.' That is the world's divine, uncreated ground in eternity. But this ground lays a foundation for being in itself, that is, for creaturely being not in God but alongside him, in the reality of creaturely life in contradistinction to divine life. This power of being is actually and creatively conferred by God, and this mysterious self-positing of God, which is inaccessible to the understanding of creatures, is what is called creation, to create. Creation in the precise sense of the word is, first of all,

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

the imparting of the image of the Divine Sophia to the creaturely Sophia, 'a prologue in heaven,' 'co-being' in Sophia."¹⁸⁰

"Sometimes this 'flame of things,' or divine light, bursts out onto the surface of consciousness and illuminates it. This is the light described by St. Symeon the New Theologian and by the hesychasts, the 'light of Tabor,' the grace manifested to Motovilov by St Seraphim of Sarov. Even when these illuminations are related to a specific divine hypostasis, to Christ or to the Holy Spirit, they intrinsically remain impersonal; they remain manifestations of divinity, not of the divine hypostases. In this sense, they are sophianic, although, to be sure, divine grace, or Sophia, cannot be completely separated from the hypostases. This distinction between God as a triune hypostasis and divinity, or Sophia, was primarily what St. Gregory Palamas had in mind in his doctrine of the 'uncreated energies,' which, like lightning flashes of divinity, penetrate into the world. On the one hand, these energies are divine (cf. Palamas's formula: energy is God, Theos); on the other hand, they are indeterminately multiple or multiform, since their reception depends on the degree of the recipient's spiritual growth. But according to St. Gregory Palamas these energies remain non-hypostatic and, in general, are not hypostatically qualified. This can be partly explained by the unfinished character of his doctrine, where, in general, the relation between the hypostases in the Holy Trinity and the energies remains unclarified."¹⁸¹

2. The divine essence and energies in "The Comforter"

"In the fourteenth century, into the Latin-Greek polemic concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit, there enters the productive writer St. Gregory Palamas, whose unpublished treatises on this subject are known only from fragments of his works cited by writers polemicizing against him. As far as one can judge on the basis of these excerpts, the treatises of Palamas do not contain any new arguments."¹⁸²

"Let us note the following feature of divine inspiration in the Old Testament: The Holy Spirit is bestowed and revealed here as a gift or a power but not hypostatically; and this is so to such a degree that this gift is depersonalized, as it were, and viewed merely as a gift of God in general or as the "spirit of God," and not as an express revelation of the Third hypostasis. In general, with regard to the Third hypostasis we distinguish its power and action from it itself. This is the case neither with regard to

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 308.

¹⁸² Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 2004, p. 109.

the Father (Who does not reveal Himself except through the Son and the Spirit) nor with regard to the Son. By contrast, the Holy Spirit is known in creation only as a gift, which, however, is, of course, inseparable from the Giver. The relation between the gift and the Giver here is similar to that between the Divine ousia and the Divine energy in the doctrine of St Gregory Palamas. This doctrine distinguishes the unknowable, one, and simple essence of God from the multiple 'energies' of Divinity, from God's actions in revelation. The relation between the ousia and the energy is such that the energy, though distinct from the ousia, is, like the latter divine, and in this sense is God (Θεός, not ὁ Θεός). Palamas virtually ignores the complex and essential problem of the relation of the energy to the hypostases (if we do not count a number of scattered and imprecise statements). Palamas' theory on this subject can be reduced to the following irreversible proposition: the energy is God, but one cannot say that God is the energy, since He is the ousia that includes many energies.

Likewise, regarding the relation between the hypostatic Holy Spirit and His gifts, the different forms of 'spirit' that are bestowed by the Spirit, one can say that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are the Holy Spirit. This proposition too is irreversible: one cannot say that the Holy Spirit is one gift or another, for He does not limit Himself to any particular gift. Rather, 'the Holy Spirit bestows all things' (as the Pentecost sticheron says). That is why this distinction between ousia and energy can be applied with great precision to this relation between an 'energy' or gift of the Holy Spirit and His divine hypostasis. Throughout the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit reveals Himself only by His energies, whereas His hypostasis, like His ousia, remains hidden."¹⁸³

"Both the Acts of the Apostles and the apostolic epistles speak of the different gifts of the Holy Spirit or of 'being filled' by Him, but this is not accompanied by that sense of His personal guidance which is spoken of in certain particular cases. In other words, there can be a reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit without His personal revelation (in particular, all sacraments have this character). That which is described in the Acts of the Apostles is therefore not the general norm which can be applied to any and all receptions of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, this was an exclusive event in the life of the Church, which has not been repeated (to be sure, we cannot say that it will never be repeated, for the Holy Spirit can repeat it whenever it pleases Him). Likewise, life in Christ, or His personal presence (and not merely a general sense of His power and life), is bestowed, if He wills it, in certain special and extraordinary cases: to the apostle Paul, to the first martyr Stephen, to certain saints. Similarly, the power of the Holy

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

Spirit is communicated in sacraments and gifts whereas His presence (His manifestation, as it were) is felt only in certain extraordinary cases, if He wills it. In the overwhelming majority of cases His presence is replaced by inspiration or, more precisely, by a divinely inspired state.*

* Perhaps, to this distinction between the personal revelation of the Holy Spirit and His grace-bestowing action, it is possible to apply (with certain modifications) the distinction between *ousia* and *energy* which lies at the basis of St. Gregory Palamas's theology. The personal revelation of the Holy Spirit corresponds to *ousia* (which Palamas considers to be totally transcendent), whereas the grace of the Holy Spirit corresponds to *energy*. Palamas's theology is so undeveloped and unfinished, however, that we still need a special study of the true meaning of the doctrine and of the real significance of its basic concepts."¹⁸⁴

3. The divine essence and energies in "The Lamb of God"

"In Himself God is thus the Absolute, but for the world He is the Absolute-Relative, existing in Himself but also outside of Himself.*

* St. Gregory Palamas expresses this antinomy in his dogmatic language when he speaks of the distinction between the hidden and proper being of God, His οὐσία, which is inaccessible to the creature, and His ἐνέργεια, which is accessible to the creature and reveals His essence. Leaving aside the issue of how apt these terms are, we see that it is a question here precisely of the relation of God to the world. In practice, God *exists* only as energy, whereas God in Himself, *Deus absconditus*, simply does 'exist.' In Himself, He is the darkness of the Absolute, to which even being is inapplicable. But in God's energy, His *ousia* is known; His *ousia* begins to *exist* only in relation. Thus, Palamas' fundamental schema is the idea of God as the Absolute-Relative, the inclusion of relation (but of course *not* relativity) in the very definition of God."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 2004, p. 288.

¹⁸⁵ Sergei Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (Translated by Boris Jakim, Grad Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), p. 122.