

# A page from Russian cosmology in the Trinitarian story of creation

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This article approached the doctrine of the Trinity from the vantage point of the science and religion dialogue, because the issue of faith and reason is integral to this concept. This approach requires humility and silence. A page from the cosmology of the Russian Silver Age sheds light on the notorious schism of 1054 between the Western and the Eastern theologians on the *Filioque* issue, which manifests the lack of an apophatic and antinomistic approach. The issue is thus whether God is intrinsically part of nature and yet is its Creator and Redeemer. This question touches upon God's transcendence and immanence, cataphatic and apophatic theology and even the complementarity of the two. Two protagonists of the 'Russian Religious Renaissance', Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) and Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944), presupposed Christian faith and belief by giving theology preference to philosophy in this debate. Reality is seen as an antinomy and placed within the broader context of human cultural activity.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** A socially oriented worldview was pursued that underscored the ontological priority of relationality. The conclusion was drawn from the Russian Orthodox theology that the doctrine of the Trinity has its roots in the God-human relationship in Christ by the (Holy) Spirit and it interprets the *homoousios* of the Godhead as *Sophia* and *antinomianism* as the most crucial features of this belief.

**Keywords:** Trinity; science and religion dialogue; Russian Silver Age; Bulgakov; Florensky; Sophology; antinomianism; theo-ecology.

## Introduction

Firstly, I would like to express my appreciation for participating on invitation in this special edition on the broad topic of 'The Triune God' in some way. Specialising in the topic of creation and ecology, with its corollary of the theology and science discourse, I would like to take this as my vantage point, endeavouring to shed light on the doctrine of the Trinity.

When it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity, the theology and science discourse is, of course, no novel angle or unknown territory. The reciprocity between faith and reason could contribute to this belief as it 'can help Christian theologians retrieve the illuminative power of Trinitarian reflection' (Shults 2006:489). The dialogue between cosmology and theology is an 'open-ended enterprise' (Nesteruk & Soldatov 2021:55) based on human conscious life and discernment. It requires humility and silence (*apophaticism* and *meditation*).<sup>1</sup>

Since the *Filioque* dispute,<sup>2</sup> the Western narratives have developed in a different direction from what Eastern theologians have pursued. A theologian such as Bulgakov regretted this dispute intensely and said it 'was to bedevil pneumatology for the next millennium' (Slesinski 2017:227). Grenz affirms that the Augustinian *filioque* Trinitarianism led to the Great Schism of 1054 and 'has continued to divide Eastern Orthodox and Western theologies even into the present' (Grenz 2005:316). This issue concerns the nature and grace dialectic of whether grace restores nature (Reformed) or elevates nature (Roman Catholic<sup>3</sup> and Orthodox). Is the Spirit of creation unequivocally the Spirit of redemption as well? Is the relation of the Spirit to the Father mediated through the Son? And is the Son, therefore, co-principle? The result then is

1. If theology is apophatic with respect to its truth claims about God, it should be apophatic to the same extent with respect to world and man himself as made by the infinite and incomprehensible Creator (on the general definition of apophaticism in knowledge as non-exhaustiveness of its object in terms of its signifiers' (Nesteruk & Soldatov 2021:59).

2. The dispute started when the Third Council of Toledo (589) added the so-called *Filioque* clause, expressing the double procession of the Holy Spirit, to the Nicene Creed.

3. Justin Anderson (2020), however, claims that the Catholic tradition initially also had a focus on restoring nature, but later developments changed their perspective.

whether there is a relation between prevenient grace and sanctifying grace.<sup>4</sup>

The issue is thus whether God is intrinsically part of nature and yet its Creator and Redeemer. This approach touches upon God's transcendence and immanence, cataphatic and apophatic theology and even the complementarity of the two (cf. Grenz 2005:322). The conclusion is that the doctrine of the Trinity has its roots in the God-human relationship in Christ by the (Holy) Spirit, interpreting the *homoousios* (one and same nature) of the Godhead as *Sophia* and *antinomianism* as the most crucial feature of this belief.

## Two eminent representatives of Russia's Silver Age

The Silver Age of Russia's intelligentsia is generally regarded from the 19th to the first quarter of the 20th century. It hallmarks a specific period in Russian thought and focus. 'It is no exaggeration to say that it was decisive for the problem of the relation between faith and reason (and within it faith and science)' (Obolevitch 2019:vii). The theologians of this era opposed both positivism and metaphysical naturalism.

It is possible to find two major vantage points about a worldview among the proponents of the Silver Age, namely the *existential experience* of humans spearheaded by Nikolai Berdayev (1874–1948) and the *apophatic antinomic approach*, spearheaded by Vladimir Solovyev (1853–1900), with his two renowned scholars: Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) and Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944). These two proponents presupposed Christian faith and belief by giving theology preference to philosophy. Harry Moore (2020:1) exemplifies them as the protagonists of the 'Russian Religious Renaissance'. They both supported the religious-philosophical concept of *imiaslavie* (Russian for onomatology<sup>5</sup>), meaning that 'the name of God is God Himself, but God is not Himself' (Obolevitch 2019:134). The whole reality is seen as an antinomy and placed within the broader context of human cultural activity. *Vis-à-vis* Western theology, they did not present a 'mangodhood', but the principle of the grace of God raising humanity into union with Himself, and thus the inverse: 'Godmanhood' (Nichols 2004:601).

There are differences between these two theologians from the Silver Age. Florensky, for one, rejected the Kantian distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal realms and fell back onto the Platonic tradition by 'restoring what Ockham took away' (Zammit 2019:38–39). On the other hand, Bulgakov remained faithful to the critical method of Kant (Sergeev 2000:4), which shows the difference (amidst superfluous similarities) between the two proponents. Bulgakov believed

4.The Lexham Bible Dictionary defines this tenet as follows: 'God foreknows that no one will freely place faith in Christ apart from the special prompting of the Holy Spirit. Humans can resist this prompting, which is analogous to prevenient grace, such that only some freely believe and receive regeneration from the Spirit' (MacGregor 2016). This, of course, is a Roman Catholic view taught at Trent and was not supported by the Reformers. Bavinck – for one – posits: 'Faith here too is not seen as central to justifying faith; it is only assent to the truth of Christianity. Taken by itself it does not justify; it is only preparatory to the infusion of sacramental grace' (Bavinck 2006:486).

5.The study of the 'Named God' as alluded to in Exodus 3:14.

that modern Russian Sophiology was compatible with Patristic theology, while Florensky argued for the opposite and regarded German Idealism as a revival of pagan Greek philosophy (Sergeev 2000:10). This difference should not be overemphasised as the so-called First Byzantine Humanism of the 9th century supported Aristotle's logic and ethics, advanced to physics and culminated in a (Neo)platonistic metaphysics (cf. Nicolaidis et al. 2016:547). There was never a fundamental dichotomy in Orthodox theology between Aristotelians and Platonists. Mathematics was regarded as scientific knowledge leading to true wisdom and reverence (Nicolaidis et al. 2016:551) said Florensky, had a Platonic orientation, focusing on geometry and astronomy rather than physics.

Instead of juxtaposing Florensky<sup>6</sup> and Bulgakov, I approach their theologies phenomenologically against the backdrop of the vantage point of this chapter (i.e. the theology and science dialogue). In my view, the most common denominators of their approaches are their understanding of *sophiology* and *antinomianism* (with their ramifications of onomatology and apophaticism), applied to the doctrine of the Trinity. I present these tenets without assessing the weight or rank of each of these denominators or their (un)-feasibility. I appreciate the significant difference in their respective foci, and perhaps one finds a solution in a paradoxical construction.<sup>7</sup>

*Pavel Florensky* was born on 9 January 1882 near Evlakh in the Elizavetpol'skaya district.<sup>8</sup> He spent his youth in Tbilisi, the main cultural and commercial centre of the Caucasus district. His father was a professional engineer on the railway. His mother was of Armenian origin and was 'haughty shy and a slave to a moral rectitude that bordered on unsociality' (Palini 2017:n.p.). His parents had a narrow view of education and tried to protect their children from foreign influences. They raised their children in an artificial bubble of isolation of warmth, affection, honesty and righteousness. This approach then led to a somewhat naïve view of life. It is noteworthy that Florensky's parents never took the family to church, nor was the absence or presence of God ever contemplated among family members. The children's religious conscience was formed by the values and examples of their parents. From nature, Florensky learned truth, beauty and integrity. He went to the Moscow State University, where he studied Physics and Mathematics from 1900 to 1904. His thesis was titled, 'On singularities of planar curves as places where continuity is disrupted' and was intended to become part of a more significant general philosophical work titled 'Discontinuity as

6.In another publication, Puglisi and Buitendag (2020) deal extensively with the life and work of Pavel Florensky. The following biographic paragraphs try to avoid repetition as far as possible, although his view on antinomy in the relevant paragraphs will source from that article too. See also Buitendag and Simut (2022) on the issue of Sophiology of the Russian Silver Age.

7.I believe Sergeev overemphasises the differences between their respective approaches: 'These two different approaches are vividly manifested in the polemics between Fr. Bulgakov and Fr. Florovskii, which centered around a more specific but still controversial problem of Trinitarian sophiology' (Sergeev 2000:3).

8.For a formal biography see Pyman (2010). A more concise version is available on the web by Palini, (2017) and the outline of these few biographical lines is taken from that. Available online at: [http://www.fondazionemicheletti.it/altronovecento/articolo.aspx?id\\_articolo=34&tipo\\_articolo=d\\_persone&id=145#dfnote19anc](http://www.fondazionemicheletti.it/altronovecento/articolo.aspx?id_articolo=34&tipo_articolo=d_persone&id=145#dfnote19anc) (Accessed on 21 September 2021).

an element of a worldview'. Alongside this, he began his theological studies at the Moscow Theological Seminary and his electives concentrated on subjects about a general worldview: philosophy, philology, archaeology and the history of religion. After completing his dissertation, 'On Spiritual Truth', he was appointed as an extraordinary professor at the same institution (Florensky 2017:loc.<sup>9</sup> 36). Because of his agitation against the Soviet system, he was offered several opportunities to accept exile in Paris, which he refused. He was eventually shot dead near St. Petersburg on 8 December 1837 by the *People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs* (NKVD).

In his *Early Religious Writings* (2017:25), Florensky wrote, 'there can be no consistent worldview without a religious foundation; there can be no consistent life, a life according to the truth, without religious experience' (Florensky 2017:25). In the Translator's Introduction to this publication, Boris Jakim explains this statement of Florensky's conviction as follows: 'Only Christianity can be the basis of an integral worldview, for only Christianity possesses the Absolute Truth. Behind the empirical shell of phenomena lies the divine world (the "Empyrean"), mystically connected with man' (Florensky 2017:loc. 102).

Teresa Obolevitch is very outspoken in her appraisal of Florensky by saying that his philosophy is perhaps the most impressive attempt at reconciling faith and science, not only in the Russian tradition but also globally. She uses other scholars' appraisals when saying that Florensky was unquestionably 'one of the most gifted personalities ever to appear on the scene of Russian intellectual history' and 'probably Europe's most dazzling intellect since Leibniz' and the 'Russian Leonardo da Vinci' (Obolevitch 2019:98–99).

Sergius Bulgakov was born on 16 July 1871 to an Orthodox priest and a mother of noble background in Livny, district Oryol, part of the Central Federal District of Russia.<sup>10</sup> He attended a parish school, and at the age of 14, he entered the seminary, which he quit three years later after losing his faith, as well as being annoyed with Orthodoxy and the aptitude of the teaching staff (eds. Zernov & Pain 2012:3). Bulgakov graduated in 1894 and directly began teaching Statistics and Political Economy at the Moscow Technical Institute. He later joined the Faculty of Law at the Moscow University and specialised in Political Economy. When he arrived in Moscow, Bulgakov took an interest in Marxism (Nichols 2004:599). In 1895, he published a review on Karl Marx's unfinished third volume of *Das Kapital* and was regarded as a significant representative of Marxism in Russia. He supported Marx's view of a better world for all. However, under the influence of Berdayev, Bulgakov abandoned Marxism completely (Copleston 1986:204, 239, 246). Nevertheless, the final straw for his conversion was his discernment of Marxism's lack of an ethical basis, exclusion of a religious dimension and the subordination of truth to experience (Copleston 1986:406).

<sup>9</sup>The location number is used where page numbers are not provided in Kindle editions.

<sup>10</sup>For a detailed account of Bulgakov's life and work, see Evtuhov (1997).

In 1894, Bulgakov was holidaying in the Caucasus Mountains on the Georgian border. He was overwhelmed by the beauty of the mountains, which became 'a pointer to a beauty that transcends matter, *going beyond it*' (Nichols 2004:600). The second decisive point in his conversion was by the turning of the century when he was spiritually moved by a painting of Raphael named the 'Blessed Virgin Mary', which he saw in the Zwinger Gallery in Dresden, Saxony. The third and conclusive point in his life was the death of his younger son at the age of four. 'At the child's funeral, Bulgakov had an experience he interpreted as awareness his child still lived in the life of the Resurrection' (Nichols 2004:602).

At the early age of 30, he was appointed as a professor of Political Economy at the University of Kyiv. In 1907, he was elected as a deputy in the *Second Duma*. Nichols (2004:600–601) believes that Bulgakov played a major role among the Russian intelligentsia of his time as they became more interested in the creative powers of the human mind and developed sympathy towards the Russian heritage of Orthodox Christianity. His personal life testifies to this three-pronged life change: from Orthodoxy to Marxism, from Marxism to Idealism and from Idealism to a Neo-Orthodoxy. Since the two Revolutions in Russia (1905 and 1917), Bulgakov was one of Russia's most influential Orthodox intellectuals. Jakim (the translator of Bulgakov's 'The Comforter') goes even further in his introduction to this volume and regards Bulgakov as 'the twentieth century's most profound Orthodox systematic theologian' (eds. Zernov & Pain 2012:loc. 33). Bulgakov lived in Paris from 1925 and became a rector of the *Paris Institute of Orthodox Theology* until he passed in 1944.

Slesinski sees in the contribution of Bulgakov an attempt to engage in dialogue with the prevailing secularist views and juxtapose them with a 'genuinely religious cultural outlook that truly makes the divine at one with the human' (Slesinski 2017:136–137). Human cognition should be understood so that the spiritual dimension immanent in the entire cosmos can be acknowledged from an epistemological perspective based on a Kantian transcendental subject of human knowledge (cf. Obolevitch 2019:137). 'All of the traits that Kant considers to be a priori suspended somewhere between being and non-being, belong to this subject and are assimilated by it into the cognitive process, as Fichte has rightly shown' (Bulgakov 2000:91). The Absolute is 'an unknowable and impenetrable mystery' (Papanikolaou 2017:329). The *homoousios* does not fully account for the relation between Creator and creation. Thus, for Bulgakov, 'the creation bears the imprint of Divine Wisdom and carries within itself the seeds of progressive sophianization' (Slesinski 2020:10).

In a recent article, Nesteruk and Soldatov (2021) conclude that the differences or similarities between cosmology and theology (or philosophy) are merely hermeneutical one and are solved anthropologically where philosophical concern shifts the centre of enquiry 'from its objective pole (i.e. from truth claims about objective reality) to the subjective (noetic)



pole by bringing on board an anthropological (existential) dimension of the problem' (Nesteruk & Soldatov 2021:61).

## Sophiology

Florensky opposed a Western understanding of separation between the phenomena and the noumena and expressed intuitive repulsion to Kantian philosophy. He believes that an a priori already shapes Kant's antinomies, and the real question is dealt with in 'Letter Ten: Sophia' of his monumental work, *The pillar and ground of truth*. This view is an ontological statement as God's original vision of creation should be restored: 'If Sophia is all of Creation, then the soul and conscience of Creation, Mankind, is Sophia *par excellence*' (Florensky 2018:xxii). Therefore, Sophia is an ecological vision seen as the sign of hope for a new life and is a feminine symbol. The creaturely Sophia is God's imprint in creation (Florensky 2018:251). 'Deducing the contingent reality from the absolute idea, the natural world of the phenomena from the world of divine essence', is, in the words of Copleston, 'not possible without a middle term' (Copleston 1986:226). The middle term is the human or rather humanity (Florensky 2018:253). Sophia is instead the all-integrated creation, and, therefore, *all* creation (Florensky 2018:237). Sophia merges with the Word and the Spirit and the Father. She is the 'Great Root' by which creation goes into the tri-hypostatic Divinity and the interior of the Trinity:

She is the Eternal Bride of the Word of God. Outside of Him and independently of Him, she does not have being and falls apart into fragments of ideas about creation. But in Him she receives creative power. One in God, she is multiple in creation and is perceived in creation in her concrete appearances as the ideal person of man, as his Guardian Angel, i.e. as the spark of the eternal dignity of the person and as the image of God in man. (Florensky 2018:239)

In Sophia, a person comes to the conviction that God is love. It is not a hypostasis in the strict sense of the word and, therefore, not identical to the Logos. 'In Florensky's eyes, creation ought to be shown as an expression of divine love, beauty and harmony' (Obolovitch 2019:103). God created the world not from his nature but his will, referring to Athanasius: 'Creating is *an act of will*... and therefore is sharply distinguished from the Divine generation, which is *an act of nature*' (quoted by Sergeev 2000:12).

Bulgakov relied not only on the Orthodox teaching but was also ready to accept the Idealistic revision of the Trinitarian dogmas and even respected Kant (opposed by Florensky, however). Bulgakov (2004) was prepared to say that the divine Sophia as God's idea of creation, belongs to God's essence, *ousia*:

The Son then is the hypostatic self-revelation of the nature of the Father, or the hypostatic Sophia, the self-consciousness or hypostatization of the Divine *ousia* of the Father; the Son is present before the Father as His Truth and Word, His knowledge of Himself in the Son. (*loc.* 992–993)

This view brings him to panentheism, as creation is founded ontologically in the work of the Holy Spirit. Sophiology offers an ontological justification of the cosmos. Sophia is not

a hypostasis but a 'hypostatizedness' (Bulgakov 2004:2881). The Holy Spirit is not identical with creation but is indwelling in it. Bulgakov understands the personhood of God as a hierarchy of persons within the unified and propositional act of personal life, the Father as subject, the Son as the predicate and the Spirit as *copula* (Heath 2021:22).

Bulgakov was concerned with constructing a worldview that addressed the real concerns of our life in the world (Bulgakov 2000:159). *Sobernost*, dubbed by Bulgakov, has become the technical term for community, wholeness and humanity overall. The problem of economy entails a scientific-empirical, transcendental-critical and metaphysical dimension. Therefore, God's sophic economy was an ethic of 'joyful labour'. Because Sophia, as the wisdom of the Word is the revelation of the second hypostasis, then glory is the self-revelation of God in the Third Hypostasis; in other words, *Sophia as the glory belongs to the Holy Spirit* (cf. Sergeev 2000:7).

Heath (2021) resolves this paradox concisely when he says (partly in the words of Bulgakov):

*Thus Divine Wisdom, or Sophia, is the predicate of the tri-hypostatic subject, is love as the content, the repeatable pattern of the mutual self-positing of the persons, on the basis of which God will create. Here we have the coincidence in a single act of the tri-hypostatic positing of the Absolute subject as I-I-I, of love as ousia, and the realisation or manifestation of the nature as Sophia. God names Godself: 'I (Love) am Sophia (Love)'. (p. 19)*

For Bulgakov, the 'Spirit is *natura naturans*, which, through the word implanted in it, engenders *natura naturata*, or becomes it. [...] This Spirit is the world in its extra-divine divine aseity' (Bulgakov 2004:*loc.* 2950–2951). The Holy Spirit is like the Logos involved in the world through the *energeia* of 'reality, life, beauty or glory' (Bulgakov 2004:*loc.* 2848). Moreover, what is more: 'the *earth* is [as] the ontological *place* of future creation' (Bulgakov 2004:*loc.* 2849).

In this way, Bulgakov successfully joined the tenet *creatio ex nihilo* with the theory of evolution through Sophia, which participates in God and the empirical world. This evolutionary approach leads to transfiguration or *theosis*. Its ontology provides the teleology of the world. It makes science sophic and is the solution to pragmatism and positivism. 'It is removed from Truth, for it is a child of this world, which exists in a state of untruth, but it is also a child of Sophia, the organizing force that leads this world to Truth, and it, therefore, bears the mark of *truthfulness*, Truth as a process, as becoming' (Bulgakov 2000:138).

In a very recent publication, Celia Deane-Drummond (2021) commends Bulgakov for transcending the hierarchical portrayal of the Godhead and the gendered character in the revelation of Sophia in the world's creation. She concludes that there is a definite unity between the creaturely Sophia and the divine Sophia in the work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit where 'matter is taken out of this world and borne into the world of grace of the future age, where God will be all in all' (cited from Bulgakov 2004:*loc.* 3294).

## Antinomianism

Both Florensky and Bulgakov used the concept of antinomy to construct elaborate philosophical and theological systems. 'This is namely a philosophical and theological dependence on unavoidable contradiction, paradox, or antinomy' (Moore 2020:1). The *New World Encyclopedia* describes the concept from its etymology, Greek *αντι-*, *against*, plus *νομος*, *law*.<sup>11</sup> 'Literally, it means incompatibility, real or apparent of two laws'. It dates to Kant, who tried to show that the faculty of reason necessarily contradicts if the practical reason is not distinguished. As already shown, one must distinguish between the phenomena and the noumena and acknowledge that space and time are not forms of existence but subjective forms of the mind. Before Kant, says Florensky, antinomy was a 'juridical and to some extent, a theological term' (Florensky 2018:114). It was a mere 'reflection on the complex opposite-combining structure of the life of the ancient Greeks, both personal and social' (Florensky 2018:114).

Florensky first used the term *antinomy* in 1908 in a publication titled, 'The cosmological antinomies of Immanuel Kant'. It is rather interesting, as we have already seen Florensky rejected Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal. Florensky countered the Western tradition of Reason by Symbolist. 'Christian doctrine is seen, as a web of antinomical statements about this Truth. Florensky's characterization of this antinomial Truth seems to have captured something of the epistemological spirit of Orthodoxy, which is grounded in apophatic theology' (Florensky 2018:xv). Thesis and antithesis together form the expression of truth: 'Truth is an antinomy, and it cannot fail to be such' (Florensky 2018:109). Florensky makes the critical remark that in the religious consciousness, 'the antinomy turns out to be an inwardly unified and inwardly integral spiritual value' (Florensky 2018:218). Contradictions should not be artificially resolved 'but rather willingly accepted as a proper expression of religious truth' (Rojek 2019:516).

In this process, he diminished the role of rationality in favour of faith. He found three spheres of the realisation of affinity: God (*in Deo sive natura naturante*), the world (*in natura naturata*) and the Spirit (*in abstracto*) (Obolevitch 2019:99). He was sceptical about a rational expression of revelation and supported a distinction between rational and spiritual knowledge. To believe means to think in contradiction to rationality: 'There are many kinds of atheism, but the worst is the so-called rational faith' (Florensky 2018:48). Antinomianism has both an ontological and epistemological character. Florensky distinguished three stages of faith: the *credo*, *quia absurdum est* of Tertullian, the *credo ut intelligam* of Anselm and finally, the *intelligo ut credam* when all rationality is transformed into a new essence (Obolevitch 2019:103).

It is beyond the article's scope to begin a technical discussion of Florensky's argument. However, it is proper to present a positive and critical appreciation of his application of

11. See: <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/antinomy> (Accessed on 29/09/2021).

antinomianism. Pawel Rojek thinks that 'Florensky's views might be interpreted and developed into a consistent and insightful theory of religious discourse, finding indeed, [...] a third way between the rational ontotheology on the one hand, and irrational fideism on the other' (Rojek 2019:517). The world is a fallen world and, therefore, fragmented and rational knowledge per definition antinomic. The religious experience transcends these contradictions. 'Florensky's original approach to the phenomena of nature lies in recognising not so much their conformity with established laws, but rather in the interior perception of the presence of mystery in every reality' (Zammit 2019:46).

However, Harry Moore is more critical and tries to demonstrate that Florensky fails to provide reasonable anticipation of the vertical antinomy of the Trinity in the horizontal antinomies of logic' (Moore 2020:3). Horizontal antinomies present an unavoidable contradiction of reason of philosophical reflection and vertical antinomies unavoidable contradiction of revelation or a self-contradictory dogma (Moore 2020:2). The flaw in Florensky's thinking, according to Moore (2020:16), has translated the Law of Identity ( $A = A$ ), into the Fichtean subjectivist term ( $I = I$ ). Hence, according to Moore, he offers the ground for some situations 'from outside' and ends up in a fideism. Ironically, Moore concludes that, unlike Florensky, Sergius Bulgakov did not restrict antinomianism to purely logical categories 'but engage closely with horizontal antinomies of aesthetics, language and subjectivity' (Moore 2020:22).

Bulgakov – clearly influenced by Florensky – perceived the whole of reality as an antinomy: 'An antimony testifies to the existence of a mystery beyond which human reason cannot penetrate. This mystery, nevertheless, is actualized and lived in religious experience' (cited by Obolevitch 2019:135). Contrary to positivism, he supported that science and rationality have an extra-scientific reference. Truth is beyond reason and revelation a necessity: 'all scientific knowledge exists only on the assumption that there is a Truth' (Bulgakov 2000:119). This mode of coming to grips with reality is 'a sort of *syzygy*, an organic whole, a symphonic interconnection' (Obolevitch 2019:138). Bulgakov's engagement with language is a distinctive characteristic of his antinomistic disposition. The contradiction is to overcome oneself by the real *theosis*: 'Love is a concrete antinomy: sacrifice and the finding of oneself through sacrifice. And this bliss of love in the Holy Trinity, the comfort of the Comforter, is the Holy Spirit' (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 1043–1044).

It has the following consequence for the doctrine of the Trinity. The participation of the Logos in creation is the *action* of the Logos and revelation is the *Sophia*. The Holy Spirit 'participates in creating the world not hypostatically but by His action, not as the Holy Spirit but as the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters. The work of the Spirit can be seen as a "life force"' (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 2846). God's action in creation corresponds to God's revelation in *Sophia*. The force of the Holy Spirit acts impersonally but

similar to the Logos, which sets up all creation (cf. Bulgakov 2004:loc. 3133).

The *energeia* of God are not the same as God's *ousia*, and God cannot be known in God's essence, yet it is impossible to say that one is more proper to God than the other: 'God is in no way diminished in His energies' (Heath 2021:4). This shows that God is both Creator and Redeemer yet fully part of the story of life on earth (cf. Deane-Drummond 2021). A subordinationism is, per definition, ruled out where each element corresponds to one of the three Persons of the Trinity, in such a way that the structure of a finite being bears the mark of the Creator: the pronoun or subject is 'the first hypostasis of being, in which is generated the second hypostasis, the word, and which, perceiving its bond with this verbal expression [...] accomplishes its third hypostasis [the copula]' (Heath 2021:4–5).

Creation can neither be identified with God nor separated from God as the Holy Spirit ontologically grounds it. 'An antinomy is a manifest sign of a certain transcendence of the subject of thought for thinking and at the same time the downfall of rational, gnoseological immanentism' (Bulgakov 2012:n.p.). It is necessary to understand and accept this natural grace of creation in all its inseparability from the natural world without being shocked by paganism or pantheism that opposes empty and dead deism that separates the Creator from creation (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 3106–3108).

## Final synopsis

Russian religious philosophy takes us back to some original thoughts (*ad fontes*) of the Greek Fathers and deconstructs the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Greek Byzantine theology by the (Roman) Catholic Church and reformed theology of both the first and the second halves of the last millennium.<sup>12</sup> This orientation has led to the investigation of the possibility of the cognition of God through the creation and, subsequently, the relation between theology and science (cf. Obolevitch 2019:11).

It has transpired that Eastern-Orthodox theologians understood the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of the doctrine of the energies resulting from a distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies. The divine essence is hypostasised in three distinct modes of being: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Contra Karl Rahner (and Karl Barth), the Eastern Orthodox theologians, do not equate God's inner being to God's activities. The immanent Trinity does not dissolve in the economic Trinity. Therefore, Grenz could conclude: 'In short, Western Trinitarianism appeared as the outworking of an a priori methodological principle, whereas Eastern Orthodoxy has been characterized by the acceptance of a doctrine' (Grenz 2005:317).

12. In the sixth century there is a crisis in the history of the relations between the Byzantines and the West; and this crisis is to be contrasted with the influence of Greek literature on European thought in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries' (Whitehead [1925] 2021:14).

Bulgakov is very explicit that the phrasing about the Holy Spirit of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed* is deficient and needs to be augmented: 'All references in the Creed to the Holy Spirit is *descriptively* expressing the belief in the divinity of the Holy Spirit without directly calling Him God' (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 652). This Creed offers no 'dogma' of the Holy Spirit. Neither do the Western *filioque* nor the rendering of John of Damascus ('through the Son') suffice: 'Who "proceeds from the Father" is by no means a dogmatic formula about the *procession* of the Holy Spirit (in the same way that *homoousios* was the formula of the consubstantiality of the Son)' (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 662–663). The Holy Trinity allows no place for either causality or origination. The Spirit offers the inner connection of the three hypostases and, therefore, the internal structure of the divine trinity, being tri-hypostatic consubstantiality (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 960). The relationships of the three hypostases of God are complex, participatory, reciprocal and perichoretic. 'Bulgakov identifies the Father as the revealing hypostasis, the Son as the revealed hypostasis and the Holy Spirit as the revelation' (Papanikolaou 2017:329).

A definition that is not descriptive but ontological appears when we realise that love expresses the essence of spirit and life. 'Thus, we must understand the Holy Spirit as the Spirit whose life is Love' (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 1044). Love is a concrete antinomy as it is characterised by sacrifice, and 'this bliss of love in the Holy Trinity, the comfort of the Comforter, is the Holy Spirit' (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 1044).

The distinction between *ousia* and *energeia* should be applied to the gift of the Holy Spirit and the subsequent divine hypostasis: 'Throughout the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit reveals Himself only by His energies, whereas His hypostasis, like His *ousia*, remains hidden' (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 3660–3661). God for Godself must also be understood as the nature of God for Others.

Sophia cannot be understood in terms of *ousia* because without God in Godself; there is no God for Others. *Ousia* is more than Sophia. Nonetheless, both stand for the exact nature of God concerning the Creator Himself (*ousia*) or the creature (Sophia) (Sergeev 2000:6). For this reason, it was the *Holy Spirit* who moved upon the face of the waters (Gen. 1:2) according to Orthodox theology (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 1138, 3000, *et passim*).

There is a place for natural grace in creation, and nature takes part creatively in its self-creation. The creaturely Sophia not only has her foundation in the divine Sophia but is permeated by her (Bulgakov 2004:loc. 3224). For Bulgakov, natural grace is intrinsically part of nature and an active force within creation. It is the same Spirit that creates and that sanctifies life and matter. This presence of the Spirit is non-hypostatically present in creation as the Comforter, from beginning to end.

Understanding the Spirit as Sophia and a hypostasis of God's *ousia* makes that the reference of the wind, ghost, or



spirit of God moved upon the face of the water in Genesis 1:2 – וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵם עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: – was clearly for Orthodox theologians the *Holy Spirit*, contrary to what Karl Barth thought:

For if we regard it [spirit on the waters] as conceivable that this curious function is indeed positively ascribed to the God of Israel, how meaningless and confusing it is in relation to what follows! [...]. Where in the Bible is there any suggestion that this passive-contemplative role and function is ascribed to God? (Barth, Bromley & Torrance 2004:107)

Barth connects Word and Spirit in his paragraph about the *Filioque* controversy, saying that it is only through revelation (and therefore through the Spirit in the soteriological sense of the term) that we become aware of the Spirit as the Creator Spirit being the ontological ground between the Father and the Son and the ‘inner divine guarantee of the creature’ (Barth et al. 2004:44).

There is much merit in Moltmann’s proposal that in interpreting the text of the Creed, we should speak of the *Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father of the Son, and receives his form from the Father and from the Son* (Moltmann 1981:171). Both the Eastern and the Western sentiments would be addressed with this maxim for it protects ‘the procession of the Spirit from the Father alone, and yet brings the Son so closely together with the Father so that the relation of the Son to the Spirit is made directly apparent’ (Moltmann 1981:168–169).

These insights into Orthodox theology have led to a system- or process-oriented view of the Triune God. Process and creativity have replaced substance and causality, resulting in a dynamic or event ontology instead of a static one. What is being pursued is ‘a new socially oriented worldview that emphasizes the ontological priority of relationships to the entities, both individual and corporate that are thus dynamically interrelated’ (Bracken & Joseph 2014:2). Niklas Luhmann is probably correct in this regard: ‘One would have to assert that the natural is artificial because it is produced by society and that the necessary is contingent because under different conditions it may have to accept different forms’ (Luhmann 1995:37).

For the Eastern Orthodox, God is not a deduction from either pure reason or religious experience but is its *content* – that which is experienced. Therefore, someone like Vladimir Solovyev (1853–1900) can claim that we ‘believe’ in the reality of the external world (Copleston 1986:220).

In Paragraph 74 of his encyclical letter of 1998, *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II expressed his appreciation and even admiration for the scientific achievements of his time (and even mentioned Florensky by the name). The Pope said this, subject to the specific condition, ‘without ever abandoning the sapiential horizon within which scientific and technological achievements are wedded to the philosophical and ethical values, which are the distinctive and indelible mark of the human person’ (Pope J-P II 1998:n 106).

The theologians of the Russian Silver Age paved the way for a Trinitarian theo-ontology and, eventually, a theo-ecology (Buitendag 2022). Cosmology was for the theologians of the Russian Silver Age through and through ‘trinitarianistic’, implying an existential hermeneutics about humanity as the ‘centre of disclosure and manifestation of the universe’ (Nesteruk & Soldatov 2021:67).

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