

REVIEW
FOR THE DISSERTATION OF RUSINA TOROSYAN
"THE GRACIOUS CREATIVITY OF MAN IN TIME
ACCORDING TO Fr. G. FLOROVSKY"
FOR THE AWARD OF THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC
DEGREE "DOCTOR" IN PROFESSIONAL FIELD 2.4. RELIGION
AND THEOLOGY
(History of Orthodox theology of the twentieth century)
by Prof. Nina Dimitrova, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology – BAS

Rusina Torosian became a Bachelor of Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", and in 2018 she successfully completed the master's program "Contemporary aspects of theology". Since September 2020, she is a doctoral student of independent training at the faculty.

The set of documents required for the dissertation defense procedure is complete. I was selected as a member of the scientific jury by order of the Rector No. RD 38 – 424 of 15.07.2022.

The dissertation is dedicated to an important and significant topic from the history of Orthodox theology of the 20th century – the ideological heritage of George Florovsky, his views on the gracious creation of man in time. As far as not only Orthodox anthropology, but also Florovsky's work as a whole is not often an object of study in today's Bulgarian theological thought, Rusina Torosyan's endeavor seems innovative and deserves respect. It makes a good impression that she is well aware of another dissertation on Florovsky defended in Bulgaria – that of Stoyan Tanev, appropriately used in this text.

The research is in a volume of 220 pages. It is structured into a preface, an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, several appendices and a bibliography. The list includes 126 titles – sources and commentary literature. Favorable for the success of the proposed dissertation is the possibility realized by the doctoral student to use the archive of the theologian from Princeton University. Several pages from various texts

by Florovsky are presented as an appendix. Mrs. Torosian has also deposited three articles in the journal "Theological Thought" – from 2018 and 2019, which fulfills the requirement for the minimum number of publications on the topic of the dissertation research.

In the preface, the author expresses her emotional commitment to the topic of the research, and the introduction is called upon to announce goals, tasks, methods, etc. mandatory components.

A good impression is made by the fact that authors from the Bulgarian theological tradition relevant to the topic of the study are noted. (Other, foreign authors are also indicated in the author's abstract.) Perhaps it would have been better if the doctoral student had been more comprehensive regarding the current state of research on Florovsky's theology – at home and abroad. The list of commentary literature could include notable Florovsky specialists such as Sergey Khoruzhiy, Paul Gavrilyuk, Andrew Blane, Nikolai Gavryushin, Inna Golubovich, etc.

Special attention is paid to the significance of the chosen topic in the entire work of the theologian. The methodological toolkit is described and the research intentions are outlined. Regarding the thesis of the dissertation – I did not find one formulated. On p. 9 it is noted: "In this theological study some theories were derived which were not previously planned" – isn't this about *theses*, not *theories*?

The detailed structure is a prerequisite for the clear and logical exposition of the author's thought. In the individual chapters, an analysis of various categories from the Orthodox anthropology of Fr. Florovsky, with the parts balanced and the "material" evenly distributed.

Chapter one is entitled "The Time of Grace" and deals with the study of the relationship between creation and time; time and eternity; time and grace; time and freedom; Christianity and History; history and eschatology – thought by Fr. Florovsky and expressed in various places, mostly in small works. In this first part, an emblematic article for theology is analyzed in detail – published in Berdyaev's magazine ("The Way") and entitled "The Controversy over German Idealism". This article is one of the keys to understanding Florovsky's ideas about history (and hence for everything else in his theology, given his original attitude of a historian, of a *Christian historian*), so its

presence here is quite appropriate. However, I am not sure to what extent the author has fully understood the meaning of Florovsky's criticism of idealism (he also talks about another type of idealism in his article), given her interpretation.

The second chapter is devoted to *the stamp of love* and emphasizes the relationship between personality, time and love. In this chapter, the relationship between divine essence and divine energies is well explained as fundamental to the theology of uncreated energies of Fr. Florovsky. For me, this part of the proposed study is the most convincing, the most indisputable.

In the third chapter, the relationship between the Divine Wisdom and creativity is foregrounded. In my opinion, this aspect of G. Florovski's ideological legacy is also key to understanding his main positions, and it is good that it was included and developed. But when speaking of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, in Florovsky's interpretation, the introduction of the context was mandatory. The "Sophia dispute" ("The Sophia Affair") is a dispute that reverberates to this day. It is not a question of going into the history of the events of the second half of the 1930s in detail, but of briefly sketching the main participants in the debate. Regarding this part of the thesis I want to ask the following – on p. 114 it is said: "Although he denies the connection between sophiology and creation as it is made by Russian philosophical thought, Florovsky in fact discovers a new connection between them..." – what is the relationship between *sophiology* and creation? And is "Russian philosophical thought" generally considered sophiological? I understand that Russian sophiology has been accused of "losing the hypostatic factor in theology" (p. 15), but how does this claim square with the introduction of a fourth hypostasis in Sergius Bulgakov's sophiology? (Dissertation quote: "Bulgakov follows the path of grace that Florovsky gives him, but he does not go to the Lord Jesus Christ, but "wanders" ideologically in the impersonal steppe, where there is no one and nothing", p. 133). That is why it was necessary to briefly outline the main points of Bulgakov's teaching in order to highlight Florovsky's principled criticism. What Mrs. Torosyan has done here, quoting from the correspondence between Florovsky and Bulgakov, is not enough. And it is also good that the citation is not from someone else's work (in this case – Stoyan Tanev's monograph), but from the letters published in the magazine "Symbol". Again, in this regard, I would like to comment on

the following statement from this chapter: "If the theology of personality is applied to sophiology, clearer spiritual and transcendental parameters are set for the weakness of human thought" – what does the author mean here by "transcendental"? The whole statement seems unclear to me.

In the fourth chapter, "The New Creation," a satisfactory analysis of Florovsky's interpretations of the questions of death and resurrection is offered. The theme of the Church and its sacraments is developed. The question of the origin of evil is also present, but in my opinion, Florovsky's proposals for a solution to this troubling problem for theology and philosophy do not find a satisfactory interpretation in the dissertation. The specific in the opinion of Fr. Florovsky on theodicy is not clearly distinguished. Considering that for Russian religious-philosophical thought, stimulated by Dostoevsky, the theme of evil, respectively of theodicy, has become traditional, a comparativist view would be too productive.

The text is wasteful in places; as I understand from the supervisor's opinion, it should have been shortened. The reader is often left with the impression that he is reading things that have already been read. To make it tighter and more organized, I will give the following suggestions for the organization of the material included – the main idea of George Florovsky in his capacity as a *Christian historian* could be brought out at the very beginning of the work; it would take on these functions (for logical order) and would also have an important explanatory meaning. What is missing from the thesis is the context in which Florovsky lived and created. A sentence or two about his biography would have been useful, but it was much more important to bring out the context of the Russian spiritual renaissance of the beginning of the twentieth century, of which the theologian was an inalienable part. P. 5 says how "Although the twentieth century was marked by the Russian philosophical-religious renaissance, he [Florovsky] was one of the few who did not get carried away by it." And more: due to the fact that "Florovsky's theology is dogmatically and patristically grounded, he was saved from the philosophical influence of the religious renaissance at the beginning of the twentieth century" (p. 143). Such statements should be specified, as the main importance here would be the use of Florovsky's capital work "Ways of Russian Theology", 1937, which clearly highlights his final position in relation to the so-called Russian religious

philosophy, especially to philosophy of all-unity, respectively to Vladimir Solovyov (his youth idol). Solovyov paves the way for this line of thought on native soil, while, as we know, Florovsky turns the direction to patristics. I will allow myself to quote the opinion of Mayendorff, who is categorical that neither by the originality of the approach, nor by the novelty of the content, nor by the amount of information, the books of Fr. George have that power and exhaustive depth with which "The Ways" were written: "From the ancient fathers, Florovsky adopted the norms and criteria of judgment, and turning to the history of Russian Orthodoxy, he applied these norms to living reality, to the experience of this culture to which he himself belonged..."

Paul Gavrilyuk's book on Florovsky's connection with the Russian Renaissance would also be very useful here – "George Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance", Oxford, 2014. And since there is no such thing as *the* "philosophy of the Russian spiritual renaissance" (in this exceptional period for Russian culture, and the variety of philosophical currents is exceptional), it should be explicitly noted how Florovsky's criticism is mainly aimed at *the philosophy of all-unity* with its inherent organicism, according to which the world (and especially human society) is seen as a single organism. And once something is an organism, it develops according to the plan-program laid down in it – and so history actually becomes impossible. It was this determinism that Florovsky denied and rejected; for him, history is a space of freedom, of the accidental and the spontaneous, the unexpected and the unforeseen, the dramatic and the catastrophic. A comparative look at the work of Berdyaev, for example, also an opponent of the metaphysics of all-unity and for whom the themes of time and eternity are also inherent, would be productive. Florovsky rejects the notion of history as *a development* in each of his texts, touching in one way or another on the problematic of history. That is why it was necessary to introduce the intellectual context, to present the main claim in the then most popular line of religious philosophy, in order to highlight Florovsky's arguments for the presence of freedom in history. The arguments against the philosophy of all-unity are precisely philosophical-logical, although they are made in the name of theology. In general, the suggestion in the dissertation that Florovsky seems to have nothing to do with philosophy is misleading.

I will repeat again – George Florovsky is not some external phenomenon of the Russian spiritual renaissance, but an inalienable part of it. (It is no coincidence that in 1995 a scholarship named after him was established at Odessa University for the best *philosophy* students.)

Reading the entire large text failed to convince me that the introduction of the terms "I-ial" and "I-iology" instead of personality, personhood, personology was necessary (and even contributory). (I suggest the author to familiarize herself with Gergana Dineva's monograph "The Birth of Personality", 2018, where she would find an alternative to her proposals). That is why I am reserved about the relevant wording in the reference for the scientific contributions of the dissertation research. Perhaps the number of these contributions is unnecessarily large, it could have been considered to consolidate them.

Incorrect use of philosophical terms and concepts is often allowed in the dissertation. Various passages of the text are subject to editing and refinement.

These essential notes do not cancel the already mentioned merits of the dissertation, in which the patristic basis of the Orthodox theology of Fr. G. Florovsky is maintained. The work in the American archive of the theologian undoubtedly contributes to the originality and innovation of the work. It shows the author's zeal to build a complete portrait of the person according to the ideas of the thinker she chose, to whom she has a certain emotional commitment, and the sincerity of the writing makes the text communicative.

The dissertation abstract adequately reflects the content of the work.

In conclusion: I believe that the presented work of Rusina Torosyan meets the academic criteria for a doctoral dissertation and as a member of the scientific jury in the procedure for her defense, I will vote "yes" for the doctoral student to receive the requested degree of Doctor of Theology, scientific direction 2.4. Religion and theology, specialty *History of Orthodox theology of the 20th century*.

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