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## MODERNITY AND ITS CRITIQUE IN 20TH CENTURY RUSSIAN ORTHODOX THOUGHT

**ABSTRACT.** Orthodox Christianity has often been understood as not pertaining to Modernity due to its different historical and theological trajectory. This essay disputes such a view with regard to 20th century Orthodox thought, which it examines from the point of view of a sociology of Modernity in order to identify where Orthodox thinkers of the Russian Diaspora and in Russia today position themselves in relation to modern society and philosophy. Two essentially modern positions within Orthodoxy are singled out: an institutional and an ontological response to the modernist paradigm.

**KEY WORDS:** Émigré theology, Georgij Florovskij, modernism, modernity, neo-patristic theology, post-modernity, Russian religious philosophy, Russian School theology, Sergej Bulgakov, Sergej Khoružij, *Social Doctrine*

### INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s, the historian of philosophy Frederic C. Copleston ends the book in which he has provided a history and study of major themes of religious philosophy in Russia from roughly 1890 to the 1920s with the question “Is Russian religious philosophy dead or alive?”<sup>1</sup> This blatant question contains in fact two separate issues: Copleston is, first, asking whether the Russian religious philosophers of the first half of the 20th century have present-day successors in or outside the Soviet Union. Secondly, however, he is asking whether their ideas and the ideas of those who stand in their tradition are dead in the sense that they do not and cannot have anything of real significance to say to the contemporary reader. Two issues are at stake here, first of all the historical continuity, and, in the

second place, the philosophical and theological relevance of a school of thought which pursues philosophy on the basis of the theological premises of Orthodox Christianity and which scrutinizes Orthodoxy in the light of theological and philosophical impulses coming from the West.

The first question, on historical continuity, can be answered with a rather straightforward history of ideas, and below I will provide some elements for a reconstruction of the heritage of the Russian religious philosophers. The term 'Russian religious philosophers' will be used in a strictly historical sense, denoting thinkers of the period described by Copleston; for the remainder of the 20th century, I suggest the deliberately broad term 'Orthodox-Christian thinkers' which includes theologians and philosophers in the Soviet Union, Russia and other parts of the world, thereby allowing a comprehensive view on the different modes of re-activation and accentuation of the heritage of the early 20th century religious philosophers. The second question, on philosophical and theological relevance, is more challenging, because it involves an evaluative statement. On which basis can we determine the place of Orthodox thought in today's philosophical and theological discourses? History does not provide us with such a basis, because it can historicize and contextualize, but it cannot evaluate. Nor does philosophy at first hand seem the appropriate realm to discuss the issue. Since modern philosophy itself is based on the separation of theology and philosophy, how could we make it the basis for an evaluation of a religiously inspired philosophy without running into logical inconsistency? Theology, on the other hand, is always a theology of a given confession, and while one can study the salience of Orthodox thought for Catholic or Protestant theology and its history in comparison with developments in the West, it hardly provides a basis general enough to tackle the issue, which interests us here. The historical development, philosophy, and theology of contemporary Orthodoxy are the objects of the present research, and what is therefore needed in order to discuss the place of Orthodox thought in Modernity is a fourth perspective. I thus want to put forward, as a suitable approach to our subject, a theory and sociology of Modernity,

which takes into account contingencies in historical development and ambiguities in philosophical thought. Such a viewpoint allows us to map the present-day landscape of ideas in terms of, on the one hand, a modernizing mainstream and, on the other hand, critical approaches; it offers a coordinate system within which contemporary Orthodox thought can be localized. This viewpoint also formulates a threshold, namely a threshold of what it means 'to be modern', and I will argue that we find within Orthodoxy today clear but conflicting stands on this issue.

In the first part of this essay, I present my theoretical framework, which then serves as a guideline for the interpretation of major trends in 20th century Orthodox thought. In this second part, I will focus on the 1930s and the 1990s, because the contours of the various expressions of Orthodoxy we can discern today emerge more clearly when interpreted in the light of the debates within Orthodox émigré theology. Positioning this history in a theoretical framework of Modernity not only indicates various connecting points between Orthodox and Western thought, but, more importantly, it allows us to draw an overall picture of these linkages, usually divided among the disciplinary fields of history, philosophy and theology.

### THREEFOLD MODERNITY

In sociology, the term 'Modernity' refers to the social-political and scientific-philosophical reality of Western societies from roughly the mid 18th century onwards, a period marked by a conscious rupture with the past and characterized by the gradual evolution of a series of modern institutions such as the democratic polity, market-based economy and autonomous knowledge-producing institutions. Sociologists have commonly conceptualized this constellation in terms of processes of 'modernization', as a linear development from pre-modern, traditional societies to modern societies, which are characterized by rationalism and positivism in philosophy and in the sciences, the striving for freedom and self-determination in

politics, and the idea of a self-regulation of the market in economics. Contemporary Western societies are usually taken to be paradigmatic in this respect.<sup>2</sup> Russia, on the other hand, is often believed not to have undergone such a development due to its Orthodox cultural background, and the modernization imposed on Russia by enlightened rulers such as Peter I and Catherine II is frequently considered to have been superficial.<sup>3</sup>

In philosophy, this process of modernization is commonly described with the term ‘Enlightenment’, and Jürgen Habermas’ rendering of Enlightenment as a contested paradigm can be helpful for a clearer understanding of what is at stake in theorizing Modernity.<sup>4</sup> Habermas distinguishes between two principled responses to Enlightenment, that of the Neo-Hegelians and that of Nietzsche.<sup>5</sup> Of these, the Neo-Hegelians do not put into question the achievements of the Enlightenment as such, including individual freedom, society protected by private law, equal political participation, and moral autonomy. They take a critical stance on the processes of modernization because they recognize that these can have negative effects, but they do not reject modernization itself. The case is different with Nietzsche, who completely changes the way of arguing about modern society. Nietzsche discards the whole project of Enlightenment rationality all together, and looks for different meanings of what it means to be modern, engendering almost a century later the philosophy of postmodernism.<sup>6</sup> Habermas thus presents us with a very clear model of three conflicting strands in modern thought. From his perspective, however, not all of the three strands are of equal weight, since Habermas himself quite clearly subscribes to the modernizing project and is especially critical of postmodernism. I will build on Habermas’ insight that Modernity is characterized by a struggle over the legacy of the Enlightenment, but my intention is to conceptualize the three paradigmatic strands not as exhaustive and hierarchical, but as interconnected approaches to shared concerns.

Habermas’ insight into the contested nature of Modernity finds an equivalent in contemporary sociology, where authors like Peter Wagner engage critically with modernization-theory

as the leading paradigm. In *Theorizing Modernity*, Peter Wagner makes an attempt to broaden the meaning of Modernity beyond the notion of modernization. He suggests that Modernity is insufficiently characterized if we view it only in terms of the rise of rationalism, modern science, democracy, liberalism, and capitalism. Wagner coins the term ‘modernism’ in order to describe this modernizing mainstream. Modernism, he writes, does indeed give Modernity meaning and direction, but it cannot exhaust the actual variety of realizations of what it means to be modern. His intention is “to create a space of reasoning about Modernity, an *interpretative space*, of which the modernist position occupies only a part.”<sup>7</sup> Just like Habermas, Wagner starts from the assumption that Modernity is made up of a –enlightened and modernizing– mainstream and two principled critiques, but unlike Habermas he argues that only when taken together do the three positions “open and map the interpretative space in which the theorizing of Modernity can take place.”<sup>8</sup>

What follows from this, is a concept of Modernity as a threefold constellation, made up of a modernist mainstream that is accompanied by two critical responses. The three poles qualify as modern without exhausting the meaning of what it means to be modern. What being modern implies in conceptual-philosophical terms has been addressed by Cornelius Castoriadis, who talks about Modernity as a condition in which a specific ‘double imaginary signification’ provides for the scope of possible societal and cultural configurations. Imaginary significations are interpretations of the world, operations by which society “defines and develops an image of the natural world, of the universe in which it lives, attempting in every instance to make of it a signifying whole... establishing, finally, a certain world order.”<sup>9</sup> The two imaginary significations which Castoriadis has in mind are the idea of autonomy of the human being as the knowing and acting subject, on the one hand, and the idea of the rationality of the world, i.e. its principled intelligibility, on the other. Both autonomy and mastery are open to interpretation, they are the crystallizing points of modern development, but they do not themselves determine

what that development will be. Being modern means taking a stand on these issues, but what exactly that stand will be is always subject to a concrete societal and historical elaboration.<sup>10</sup>

The interpretative space of Modernity, which emerges from this perspective, can be conceptualized as having three poles, which I will refer to as modernism, historical-institutional critique of modernism, and philosophical–ontological critique of modernism.<sup>11</sup> The first critique corresponds to Habermas’ Neo-Hegelians and its clearest examples can be found in what Wagner has called the “grand critiques of Modernity” – the 19th and 20th century critiques of political economy, of organization and bureaucracy, of morality, and of modern philosophy and science by Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and the Frankfurt School respectively.<sup>12</sup> We can call these critiques historical-institutional, because they were targeted at a specific institutional realization of the modernist paradigm, namely capitalism, rational mastery of the world, moral impoverishment in the course of the division of labor, and the categorization of spheres of knowledge in different disciplines. The second, the philosophical–ontological critique shares with the historical-institutional critique a feeling of unease with respect to modernism, but its critical edge is not directed against a specific form of institutionalization, but against the philosophical paradigm underlying modernism. Its target is not the bureaucratization of the world, but the concept of rationalism which underlies it, not the atomization of capitalist society, but the ontology of the human subject on which it is built, not the lack of morality in a functionally differentiated society, but the idea of morality as such. The starting point for this mode of thinking, which Habermas has labeled post-modern, is, as has been pointed out above, Nietzsche, who inaugurated a mode of thinking that does not only attack the foundations of prevailing philosophies, but – in a self-reflexive move – also recognizes the limitations of its own perspective. It is especially in the light of this last critique that Modernity comes to be seen as the sum-total of a modernist mainstream and a historical-institutional and philosophical–ontological critique, a tension-ridden

concept, which allows for different modes of accentuation and actualization of what it means to be modern. In the next section, I will argue that we can find such different modes in 20th century Orthodox thought, and I thereby want to offer a new perspective on the often disputed place of Orthodox Russia in modern Europe.

#### CONFRONTING MODERNITY: ORTHODOX THOUGHT IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Russian religious philosophy, the heritage of which is at stake in this essay, has its roots in the Slavophile movement of the 19th century, and its starting point in the philosophy of Vladimir Solov'ëv. His work, a philosophy in the sense of a general Christian interpretation of the world and human life, became a cornerstone for the religious thinking of the Silver Age.<sup>13</sup> Sergej Bulgakov (1871–1944), Nikolaj Berdjaev (1874–1948), Pavel Florenskij (1882–1937), Semën Frank (1877–1950), Lev Karsavin (1882–1952), Nikolaj Losskij (1870–1965), and several other thinkers drew on it for their own articulations of a religious philosophy opposed to positivism and materialism. In 1922, many writers and scholars who were not in agreement with the ideology of the new regime were expelled from the Soviet Union, among them Bulgakov, Berdyaev, Frank, Nikolaj Losskij and his son Vladimir Losskij (1903–1958).<sup>14</sup> These religious thinkers established themselves in Western Europe where they continued their work, while many of those who remained in or later returned to the Soviet Union, like Florenskij and Karsavin, perished in the Stalinist purges. Despite great diversity in their respective works, the shared context and patrimony of these thinkers in pre-revolutionary Russia allows us to consider them as participants in a common intellectual phenomenon – Russian religious philosophy – for which 1922 was a turning point. Bereft of the shared concern for a Russian society that was changing dramatically under the influence of Soviet communism, and dislocated from their home-country and -culture, the Russian émigré-philosophers and theologians developed and articulated their ideas in an ever more divergent

manner.<sup>15</sup> For the larger part of the 20th century, it therefore becomes increasingly difficult to refer to all these different approaches with one and the same term. With respect to the theological debates of the 1930s and the 1990s, these different schools can be distinguished by the principled stance they take on modernism – that of a historical-institutional and a philosophical–ontological critique respectively.<sup>16</sup>

In both periods we find a generation of philosophers and theologians directly affected by profound changes in intellectual and spiritual life, be it due to the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and exile, or on account of the collapse of communism. It should not come as a surprise that we find among these thinkers very clear articulations of Orthodoxy's standpoints on Modernity, since they are reflecting on their own experience of revolutionary change and rapid modernization. What made the theologians of the 1930s critics of modernism was, firstly, their critique of the West, which they experienced no longer as a model to be followed but as being in a crisis to be confronted, secondly, modernizing Russia, the transformation of which into a communist society they viewed with dread, and thirdly, modernized Orthodox theology, which they saw in a 'Western captivity.'<sup>17</sup> What makes the legacy of these thinkers 'modern' rather than pre- or anti-modern is, firstly, their recognition of and engagement with the achievements and limits of Western Modernity, and, secondly, their striving to overcome the anti-Western and anti-modernist stance common to much of Orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> Orthodox thought today perpetuates and re-accentuates the positions laid out in the debates of the 1930s. I will argue that it is this continuity, which can help us to understand the philosophical and theological salience of contemporary Orthodox thought.

#### THE DEBATE BETWEEN RUSSIAN SCHOOL THEOLOGY AND NEO-PATRISTIC THEOLOGY

Following the emigration of many theologians from the Soviet Union, the *Institut de Théologie Orthodoxe Saint Serge* was established in Paris in 1925 and became home to the Russian



émigré-theology. The dynamics at the St. Serge Theological Institute during the first two decades of its existence were characterized by the rivalry between two theological schools, which Paul Valliere has described as Russian school theology and Neo-Patristic theology.<sup>19</sup> Valliere's point is that two approaches to the modern world were available to Orthodox theology at the beginning of the 20th century, one a world-affirmative stance which sought to open Orthodoxy to the requirements and conditions of modern life, the other one a more restrained and contemplative approach, calling for the study of the patristic texts in order to purge Orthodoxy of what were perceived to have been harmful modernist influences over the past centuries. Valliere offers valuable insights into the development of Orthodox theology from the late 19th century until the 1930s and provides an important background for understanding the Orthodox relationship with the modern world.<sup>20</sup>

The term "Russian school" was first used by Alexander Schmemmann<sup>21</sup> (1921–1983), a theologian of the second émigré-generation, who describes its theological task in the following way: "Orthodox theology must keep its patristic foundations, but it must also go 'beyond' the Fathers if it is to respond to a new situation created by centuries of philosophical development (...) An attempt is thus made to 'transpose' theology into a new 'key', and this transposition is considered as the specific task and vocation of Russian theology."<sup>22</sup> The new situation Schmemmann referred to was, in Valliere's words, a modern society "consisting of relatively autonomous, unharmonized spheres of activity operating outside the tutelage of church or state."<sup>23</sup> The main thinkers to whom Valliere attributes this way of understanding the task of Orthodox theology are Aleksandr Bukharev (Archimandrite Feodor) (1842–1871), Solov'ëv, Florenskij, and Bulgakov.<sup>24</sup>

Before becoming a priest, Bulgakov, a Marxist in his early years, had been trained as an economist. As a theologian, he certainly understood himself as rooted in patristic theology, but in his own works he sought to advance from this basis, and to develop a theology of engagement with and involvement in the

secular world. He criticized the ascetic neglect of the world by the early Church and the Byzantine Church Fathers, who had been convinced that the end of the world was near and therefore did not concern themselves much with questions of social and economic life, an attitude which Bulgakov calls “social nihilism”. In Bulgakov’s view, the task of the Church is the development of a “Christian socialism.”<sup>25</sup> Bulgakov envisioned the social world as organized according to principles of Christian love, an idea which found its expression in his teaching of sophiology. *Sophia* expresses the resemblance of man to God: it stands for the divine presence of God in the world and at the same time for human creativity. In this sense, Bulgakov’s teaching of sophiology was an attempt to justify theologically Christian activity in the world.<sup>26</sup> But this ‘sacralization of the world’ was difficult to uphold from a dogmatic standpoint, and Bulgakov eventually faced fierce opposition.

In 1935, Bulgakov’s sophiology was attacked as heretical. Its speculative nature was criticized and qualified as being alien to Orthodoxy.<sup>27</sup> The figures behind the critique were the priest Georgij Florovskij (1893–1979), who had emigrated to Paris from Odessa, and Losskij. In his two-volume study *Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovskij had criticized Russian religious philosophy, which in his view contained too many elements of Western philosophical and speculative thought, and he was especially critical of the work of Bulgakov, whose teachings in sophiology he considered outright heretical.<sup>28</sup> He also found many faults with the theology of the Russian Orthodox Church, which he perceived as held in ‘Western captivity’ due to the influence of Catholic and Protestant theology. Instead, he proposed a thorough study of the works of the Byzantine Church Fathers and a re-appropriation of the Orthodox tradition. The most important element of the Neo-Patristic school was its fascination with the teaching of Gregorios Palamas (1296–1359), a monk from Athos, whose theology emphasizes the distinction between the ‘essence’ and the ‘energies’ of God. Palamas’ theology was apophatic insofar as it rendered God inaccessible in essence, but it affirmed the participation in God’s energies through life in the Church, in communion. The

primary pathway to this experience is a method of prayer called hesychasm, an ascetic tradition practiced by monks.<sup>29</sup> The renaissance of Palamism inspired a theology of the person, in which the concept of the individual as a closed entity, as an 'essence', was opposed by the notion of personhood, an energetic expression of being that is evoked only in relation.<sup>30</sup>

The conflict between the two schools has been described as a debate between modernists and traditionalists,<sup>31</sup> liberals and conservatives,<sup>32</sup> or as an opposition between leading Orthodox theology either 'back to the fathers' or 'beyond the fathers'.<sup>33</sup> A closer look at the Neo-Patristic position shows, however, that none of these designations quite exhausts what was at stake. The theological dispute between the two schools arose neither around the question whether the Church needed such a renewal – on this there was consensus –, nor on the issue whether the Church should be engaged in the world – this also was a shared view – but on the question on which basis such a renewal and engagement with the world could take place. It seems that Bulgakov thought that the two issues were linked: the renewal of the Church would take place on the basis of an engagement with the modern world. Florovskij, on the contrary, thought that the Church needed first and foremost to re-appropriate its dogmatic foundations, achieve a spiritual renewal, and from this a true engagement with the world would follow. What Florovskij had in mind was emancipation from Western ways of thinking about religion and the world. "It is not enough to merely repeat answers previously formulated in the West – the Western questions must be discerned and relived," he writes in a passage which is worth quoting in full:

"Russian theology must confidently penetrate the entire complex problematics of western religious thought and spiritually trace and examine the difficult and bewildering path of the West from the time of the Great Schism. Access to the inner creative life comes only through its problematics, and one must therefore sympathize with that life and experience it precisely in its full problematality, searching and anxiety. Orthodox theology can recover its independence from western influence only through a spiritual return to its patristic sources and foundations. Returning to the fathers, however, does not mean abandoning the present age, escaping from history, or quitting the field of battle. Patristic experience must not only be

preserved, but it must be discovered and brought into life. Independence from the non-Orthodox West need not become estrangement from it. A break with the West would provide no real liberation. Orthodox thought must perceive and suffer the western trials and temptations, and, for its own sake, it cannot afford to avoid and keep silent over them."<sup>34</sup>

Several things are noteworthy about this passage. First, Florovskij talks about emancipation from the ways of thinking about *problématiques* in the West, but not from the *problématiques* themselves. Second, speaking about "compassionate co-experience,"<sup>35</sup> Florovskij moves away from any simple anti-Westernism in the Orthodox Church. Anti-modern and conservative attitudes were and are of course a reality in Orthodoxy,<sup>36</sup> but the point here is that the Neo-Patristics were *not* conservatives of that kind, given their understanding of tradition as creative engagement with modern life and its problems. Third, Florovskij's passage is heavy with an anxiety about the world and one's own condition, which he shares with many contemporaries in the West: "We are summoned to theology precisely because we are already in this apocalyptic struggle."<sup>37</sup> He was certainly more pessimistic than Bulgakov, whose view that the Church should go into the world he criticized because both the Church and the world had become precarious for him. If we see Bulgakov's task, as described by Robert Bird,<sup>38</sup> in making Modernity speak a religious language rather than in making Orthodoxy speak in terms of Modernity, Florovskij is likely to have held against it that Orthodoxy needed to find its own language first.

During the first Orthodox theological congress in Athens in 1936, Florovskij stepped forward as the promoter of theology based on a "return to the fathers." In the following years, the Neo-Patristic school largely prevailed over Russian school theology. Schmemmann writes that Bulgakov left behind only a few disciples, and Robert Bird quite frankly states that Bulgakov's sophiology is a closed matter for theology.<sup>39</sup> Not only theological arguments were the reason for the success of the Neo-Patristic school, historical circumstances also favored its prevalence. The aim of the Russian school had been to provide theological answers to contemporary problems. With

the onset of communism in all countries of Orthodox Europe except Greece, and given the émigré-situation of the Orthodox scholars, such a theological project could only be of limited scope and interest. The group of Orthodox believers in the West was small, and the Orthodox communities that theologians might have referred to persisted only in an unclear fashion under communist repression. Neo-Patristic theology, on the other hand, promised solid foundations, a correction of the theological shortcomings of the last centuries, and it provided access to a Western theological scholarship receptive to what the Orthodox theologians had to offer.<sup>40</sup>

Robert Bird suggests that we should view Bulgakov's theology and the entire project of Russian religious philosophy as a *tragedy*, as an instance that opened up a cathartic space for Orthodox theology "where Orthodox theologians can gather in order to begin again, in the light of tradition and in the shadow of a breach in tradition."<sup>41</sup> This view, however, suggests that we are talking about a progressive development in Orthodox theology, a steady growth spurred by counter-reactions to forceful deviations (the 'Western captivity', the modernist interlude of Russian religious philosophy) which turn out to have been 'healing' instances insofar as they served to make Orthodoxy more aware of its roots. I would like to argue against Bird here, because I think that he is trying to come to a synthesis too early. It rather seems to me that the tension expressed in the conflict between the Russian school and the Neo-Patristic thinkers is a basic tension when taking a stand on Modernity, and it is therefore likely to remain an issue for Orthodox theology.

I want to suggest that this basic tension is best understood in terms of the framework laid out above. We can interpret the Russian school and Neo-Patristic theology as two ways in which the émigré-theologians of the 1930s responded to the challenges of the modern world. The word 'response' is important here, because it means that both schools took issue with Modernity and sought to come to terms with it in very different ways. We find in Bulgakov an attitude that is structurally comparable to the historical-institutional critique of

modernism described by Wagner. When he suggests that the Church ought to take an active role in the world in order to remedy the shortcomings of modern secular life, he is calling for the modernization of the Orthodox Church and he is at the same time acknowledging the modern conditions under which the Church should be operating. The response of the Neo-Patristic theologians proceeds from an entirely different premise, namely from the insight that the intellectual and spiritual coordinates of the modern world are derived from a particular, predominantly Latin understanding of God, man, and the world, which subsequently became important also for Orthodox theology, but which in principle ‘could be otherwise’, a view they derive from the critique of the ‘Western captivity’ of Orthodoxy and from the study of Palamas. Neo-Patristic theology thereby offered the basis for a more general philosophical–ontological critique of modernism, the full potential of which was realized only by the following generation of Neo-Patristic thinkers, a topic to which I turn now.

#### CRITIQUES OF MODERNITY IN CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX THOUGHT

In an atmosphere of religious and theological renaissance in Russia today, different trends from the history of Orthodox thought are being revived, including pre-revolutionary Church-theology, patristics, Russian religious philosophy, and debates from émigré-theology. In this section, I cut across Orthodox thought in Russia today, both academic and clerical, philosophical and theological, focusing on key texts and figures, in order to discern the legacy of these different lines of continuity. I thereby want to show that the two positions that I have described for the émigré-theology of the 1930s can be found today as well. However, in contemporary debates we do not find a clear confrontation between the two critiques as was the case for the 1930s where it took place between two rival theologians at one and the same institute. A historical-institutional critique of modernism and attempts at reform of the Russian Orthodox Church are taking place today both inside and outside of the

Church. Yet at least the discourse inside the Church seems to have suffered a setback with regard to the debate of the 1930s, which it shuns in favor of continuity with pre-revolutionary theology. Neo-Patristic theology, on the other hand, has not only become a central element of Church-theology, it has also crossed over from theology to philosophy, where it is taken up for an interesting elaboration of a philosophical–ontological critique of modernism.

In 2000, the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church issued a document that was presented as a clear example for the theological rebirth of Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>42</sup> The document called *Foundations of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*<sup>43</sup> lays out the Russian Orthodox Church's position on a variety of socio-cultural phenomena, encompassing a whole range of issues from state and law to secularism, from culture to bioethics. Has the view that the Russian Orthodox Church should modernize itself and take a stand on contemporary problems, been gaining ground among Orthodox theologians? It seems that this is indeed the case for the Moscow Patriarchate, where the document was drafted under the auspices of Metropolitan Kyrill (Gjundaev) of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, head of the office for External Affairs.<sup>44</sup>

Aleksander Agadjanian has undertaken two very enlightening studies of the document, in one confronting it with the Catholic Catechism,<sup>45</sup> and in the other with popular Orthodox Church literature.<sup>46</sup> The latter in particular makes clear that the *Foundations of the Social Concept* is above all a carefully weighted document, which tries to steer clear between extreme conservatism and radical reformism. Agadjanian works out with great clarity the theological positions that determine the document. Even though it becomes apparent that the text falls short of providing a conclusive and coherent view comparable to the Catholic Catechism, and is instead torn between strategies of affirmation and rejection of contemporary worldly phenomena, Agadjanian finds that the very fact of formulating such an objective of theological quest as an official authoritative endeavor is unprecedented in Russian Orthodoxy.

Even though the entire project of writing a document that amounts to a social doctrine suggests a spirit of modernization that we find also in the works of Russian School theologians, these authors are missing from the document. This fact is not surprising, given that Bulgakov's sophiology was condemned as heretical by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1934. It is noteworthy, however, that Bulgakov has been appreciated greatly by Western theologians, for example Valliere and Williams, and is, as we will see shortly, appreciated by liberal clerics and intellectuals in Russia today, but that his legacy remains insignificant for the official line of the Moscow Patriarchate. However, not only is Bulgakov not mentioned in the document, the entire émigré-theology is conspicuously absent from the document.<sup>47</sup> Writing about community and ecclesiology, the authors of the document avoid any reference to the "Eucharistic ecclesiology" elaborated by Neo-Patristic theologians like Florovskij, Schmemmann, and Zizioulas. It is paradoxical, Agadjanian writes, that this profound liturgical (sacramental) ecclesiology developed by Russian émigré-theologians and their students had a direct impact on the Second Vatican Council, but remained non-appropriated or ignored by the Russian hierarchy. Agadjanian also notes another lacuna that testifies to the disregard of the intellectual tradition of Orthodox thought and émigré-theology. He notes that in their elaboration of the meaning of individuality and community, the authors of the document draw on nationalistic and ethnic views that are traditional for the Russian Orthodox Church, namely the Slavophile concept of *sobornost'*. They thereby ignore other, universalist elaborations of the topic which are available in late 19th and 20th century Orthodox thought: Solov'ëv's notion of Christian politics, a Christian philosophy of the person developed by Russian émigré-philosophers like Berdjaev, where it resonates with the Christian personalism of a G.W. Leibniz and Henri Bergson, and with the views of the French existentialists,<sup>48</sup> or, one may add here, a personal theology on the basis of Palamas' doctrine of energies as elaborated by Losskij.

These findings suggest that the official theology of the Russian Orthodox Church today is receptive to only a very



limited spectrum of ideas developed by Orthodox thinkers in the 20th century, despite the fact that standard works in 20th century Orthodox theology like John Meyendorff's *Byzantine Theology* or Joannis Zizioulas' *Being as Communion* are known. Perhaps this is not even surprising, taking into account the scattered state of Church theology: many Orthodox theologians nowadays are of the opinion that theology is in disarray after the communist period and is only beginning to pick up the pieces.<sup>49</sup> Taking into consideration the reconstruction of 20th century Orthodox thought which I have offered so far, it is, however, quite clear that the range of contemporary Orthodox thought is certainly not exhausted in the official discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church as expressed in the *Foundations of the Social Concept*, and that it is indeed imperative to look at other Orthodox discourses, too, in order to get a clear understanding of what Orthodoxy is or can be about in the 21st century.

The modernizing strand in Orthodox thought that is marked by the legacy of the Russian school can be found at the margins and outside of the hierarchies of the Moscow Patriarchate. Examples for such a civil engagement of the Church are the liberal priests Alexander Men' (1935–1990) and Georgij Kočetkov (born 1950) of the *Svjato-Filaretskij Institut*, who is looked upon very critically by the Moscow Patriarchate.<sup>50</sup> Sergej Averincev (1935–2004), specialist on early-Byzantine literature and patristics and promoter of Christianity and Russian religious philosophy since the 1960s, was also associated with this liberal trend in Orthodox theology, which has been met with considerable interest by some Catholic institutions.<sup>51</sup>

It is, in fact, Averincev, together with Aleksej Losev (1893–1988), who can be considered to have provided an intellectual bridge between the pre-revolutionary religious philosophy and the late-Soviet period when this philosophy was officially re-appropriated. They managed to introduce their students to the thought of the philosophers of the Silver Age and to teach them the fundamentals of Orthodox theology under the guise of lectures in Byzantine literature and classical

philosophy, inspiring those very people who are taking the stage of Orthodox thought in Russia today, for example Sergej Khoružij (born 1941). No complete study of the role of these two scholars is yet available,<sup>52</sup> but it is indicative of their shared importance for the permanence of religious philosophy during the Soviet period that they have recently been brought together in a publication by Losev's student and secretary, Vladimir Bibikhin (1938–2004).<sup>53</sup>

In the latest works of Bibikhin and Khoružij, however, we find critical accounts of the legacy of Russian religious philosophy, whose status has in their eyes been overrated. In Bibikhin's view, Russian pre-revolutionary religious philosophy, which gained widespread appreciation during *perestrojka* could not provide any answers for contemporary problems. It could not in the 1980s, just as it could not around 1900, and when Bibikhin writes that "the revolution has taught us little," he means to say that the 'official' religious philosophy of the 1980s was repeating old mistakes.<sup>54</sup> Khoružij, too, criticized the unrealistic expectations that were put into the philosophy of the past. In public consciousness, Khoružij writes, the forbidden religious philosophy had acquired the status of a place where all answers to current problems – Russia's future, its place in Europe – were to be found if only one could get there. Once the literature was made accessible, it became apparent that neither were there any ready-made answers, nor could these texts serve as an immediate inspiration for new creative solutions. They turned out to be too utopian, too optimistic, and too far-fetched, according to Khoružij. Only what was sufficiently 'easy' and graspable found an immediate echo in the political and social sphere: nationalism, fundamentalism, Eurasianism.<sup>55</sup>

Whereas Bibikhin subsequently dedicated himself to the study of Western philosophy, especially Heidegger and Wittgenstein,<sup>56</sup> Khoružij pursued the path of philosophy inspired by Orthodoxy, but he did not base himself on the pre-revolutionary religious philosophy, but on the Neo-Patristic theology of the 1930s, which he had become acquainted with already in the late 60s.<sup>57</sup> A long essay about the émigré-philosophy and theology of the 1920s and 30s in the book *Opyty iz russkoj*

*dukhovnoj tradicii* [Experiences from the Russian Spiritual Tradition] bears the programmatic title 'šag vperëd, sdelannyj v rassejanii' [A step ahead, taken in dispersal]. In this text, Khoružij makes it clear that, for him, the main intellectual achievements of the Russian Diaspora were made in the field of theology, especially the 'Neo-Patristic Synthesis' of Florovskij, the personal theology of Losskij, and the recovery of Palamas' teachings by Meyendorff. Khoružij sees his task in the transposition of these ideas, developed by theologians, into philosophy and thereby the preparation of the ground for a 'new beginning' in Russian philosophy, which would be nothing less than a redefinition of the relationship between philosophy and theology itself.<sup>58</sup> Khoružij himself describes his philosophical career as a moving away from the "methodological sloppiness" of the pre-revolutionary religious philosophers to the theological rigor of the Neo-Patristic theologians, which he now seeks to translate into his personal philosophical language of *sine-gijnaja antropologija* [synergetic anthropology].<sup>59</sup> His philosophical project is the elaboration of an anthropology that would overcome the limitations imposed by Western metaphysics, and Khoružij herein sees similarities of his work to Western post-modern philosophy.<sup>60</sup>

Khoružij is not alone in this attempt to transpose Orthodox theology into contemporary philosophy: the Greek theologian Christos Yannaras (born 1935) has taken a similar line of argument as early as the 1960s. As a student of theology, Yannaras became acquainted with the ideas of Berdjaev, Florovskij and Losskij. He soon went beyond theology, however, when he turned to the study of Heidegger and the French existentialist philosophers. The result was an Orthodox critique of Western metaphysics and Enlightenment that uses the language of Heideggerian fundamental ontology. The book *On the Absence and Unknowability of God* (1967) is the preliminary result of Yannaras' engagement with patristic literature and with Heidegger. In the book *Person und Eros* (1976) the argument that Heidegger marks an end-point in Western modern philosophy by identifying the ontology of the subject as the dead end of Western metaphysics is spelled out more clearly. In

Yannaras' view, Heidegger thereby opens up the possibility of a new ontology that could be derived from the theological tradition of Eastern Christianity, a path which Heidegger himself did not pursue. Heidegger's terminology of *Sein* and *Seiendes*, *Mit-sein*, and *ek-stasis* is used to express theological theorems like *ousia*, *hypostasis*, personhood and energy. In his book *The Freedom of Morality* (1970), Yannaras attempts to formulate an ethics on the basis of a personalist ontology. The main feature of these works is the attempt to conceptualize an ontology that would differ from Western metaphysics, and to point out how views of God, man, and the world differed in the Catholic and Protestant West and in the Orthodox East respectively.

In Russia, Yannaras is known for his work on Heidegger and Palamas, but while Church-theologians have criticized him for being 'too philosophical' and 'superficial', other philosophers, like Khoružij, have taken issue with his anti-Westernism.<sup>61</sup> Despite this controversy, Yannaras and Khoružij are the clearest examples of contemporary Orthodox thinkers in the tradition of Neo-Patristic theology who try to make this tradition fruitful for philosophy. In the works of Khoružij and Yannaras, we can see that the true contribution of contemporary Orthodox thought in the tradition of Neo-Patristic theology might, in fact, not lie in the field of theology as such, but rather in a radical theological-philosophical dialogue with post-modernity.

This last point already indicates the way in which Orthodox thought in the 1990s perpetuates not only the theological positions of the 1930s, but also the principled standpoints on Modernity that we have found there. The legacy of the Russian School in liberal Orthodox theology today and the spirit of modernization that is characteristic of the document *Foundations of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church* are indicators of an on-going historical-institutional critique of modernism within Orthodoxy. Neo-Patristic theology, on the other hand, has been made productive philosophically by thinkers who take its call for a retrieval of the origins of our understanding of God, man, and the world seriously, and think

through its consequences for philosophy. Their appeal to a new philosophical anthropology resonates with similar projects of 'first philosophies' in the West, most notably Heidegger and Jean-Luc Nancy.<sup>62</sup> Without taking this observation further at this point, it seems justified to identify their quest as a philosophical–ontological critique of modernism.

### CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, it is important to stress once more that in the Orthodox context 'modernism' continues to stand for several things at once: Western liberalism, individualism and capitalism, but also modern Russian society, and, maybe to a lesser extent now than was the case in the 1930s, a 'westernized' Orthodox theology.<sup>63</sup> A new element has moved to the foreground more forcefully, and quite clearly both the liberal as well as the Neo-Patristic trends are seeking to offer alternatives to it, namely Orthodox fundamentalism. I have not treated it as a separate issue in this essay, because I have been concerned with modern Orthodox critiques, and a categorically theocentric critique of Modernity does not qualify as such,<sup>64</sup> but this does not exclude that it is an important element for our understanding of the entire picture of 20th century Orthodox thought. To do justice to this aspect, however, will be the aim of another paper.

Another aspect that is not fully spelled out in this paper is the linkage between modern Orthodox theology, on the one hand, Catholic and Protestant theology on the other. This, too, requires a detailed study of its own, which could not be provided in this essay, the intention of which was to explore Orthodox standpoints on Modernity and to offer a differentiated approach which breaks with the common conceptualization of Orthodoxy and Modernity as mutually exclusive. Describing contemporary Orthodox thought in terms of Modernity and critique has allowed me to determine its place in modern philosophical discourses and to highlight connecting points between contemporary Orthodox and Western thought. None of the three strands that I have described for Modernity in

terms of a modernizing mainstream, a historical-institutional, and a philosophical–ontological critique, is exhaustive, and the three aspects are not reconcilable.<sup>65</sup> They spell out an ambiguity and tension that is inherent to the modern project, and I want to suggest that it is the acceptance of this ambiguity and the creative engagement with this tension which qualifies as modern, not its eradication.

The question which stood at the beginning of this paper, “Is Russian religious philosophy dead or alive?,” cannot be answered with a simple ‘Yes’ or a ‘No’, because it is as much ‘alive’ in the works of philosophers who pursue philosophy on the premises of Orthodox Christianity, and of theologians who seek reform of Orthodoxy in the light of challenges from modern society, as it is ‘dead’ in the sense that the works of Berdjaev, Bulgakov, Florenskij and their contemporaries have been thoroughly criticized and the impulse that they have given has been replaced by rejection. Yet both ways of answering the question bring to the fore the salience of the pre-revolutionary Russian religious philosophy for Orthodox thought in the 20th century, because it was this period that laid the ground for Orthodoxy’s engagement with Modernity.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Copleston (1988), p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> See Wagner (2001a).

<sup>3</sup> I have elaborated this point elsewhere; see Stöckl (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Habermas (1985).

<sup>5</sup> See Habermas (1985), ‘Drei Perspektiven: Linkshegelianer, Rechtshegelianer und Nietzsche,’ pp. 65–94.

<sup>6</sup> See Habermas (1985), 'Eintritt in die Postmoderne: Nietzsche als Drehscheibe,' pp. 104–129.

<sup>7</sup> Wagner (2001b), 3–6.

<sup>8</sup> Wagner, 2001b), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Castoriadis, Cornelius, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge 1987, cit. in Arnason (1989), p. 325; for conditions and limitations of the imaginary signification see Castoriadis (1994), pp. 136–154.

<sup>10</sup> For an elaboration of Castoriadis for a theory of Modernity, see Arnason (1989); and Wagner (2001a, b).

<sup>11</sup> In *Theorizing Modernity*, Wagner does not speak of a historical-institutional and philosophical–ontological, but of a first and second intellectual response to modernism.

<sup>12</sup> See Wagner (2001a), pp. 9951–9952.

<sup>13</sup> See Copleston (1988), pp. 1–16.

<sup>14</sup> For a general study of the Russian emigration after the revolution, see Schlögel (1994). In the remainder of this document 'Losskij' refers to the son, the theologian Vladimir Losskij.

<sup>15</sup> For a good overview over the personal, institutional and philosophical–theological developments before 1922 and during the first two decades of the emigration, see Khoružij (2005), pp. 329–446.

<sup>16</sup> It is not possible to include here also the philosophy in emigration, most notably the works of Berdjaev, whose impact requires a separate study.

<sup>17</sup> See Florovskij (1987).

<sup>18</sup> For an overview over anti-Western tendencies of Orthodoxy, see Makrides/Uffermann (2003), where we find Christos Yannaras cited as the "personification of the anti-Western critique in the contemporary Greek world *par excellence*" (p. 114), a view that I want to qualify with regard to Yannaras' theological works of the 1960s and 70s and recognize as justified with regard to his later works. For an elaboration of conservative and theocratic views existing with the Russian Orthodox Church, see Kostjuk (2005), pp. 122–128.

<sup>19</sup> Valliere (2000, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> In Valliere's view, the prevalence of Neo-Patristic theology incapacitated Orthodox theology to develop a guiding position on modern issues and he therefore sets himself the task to rehabilitate the Russian school, in which he finds a promising theological approach that could take Orthodoxy into the 21st century. The same view is expressed by Rowan Williams in the introduction to Bulgakov (1999).

<sup>21</sup> For the names of Russian theologians of the second generation the established transcription is used, thus Schmemmann instead of Šmeman, and Meyendorff instead of Mejendorf.

<sup>22</sup> Schmemmann (1972), p. 178.

<sup>23</sup> Valliere (2000), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Valliere (2000). In this essay, I focus on the latter of these.

<sup>25</sup> See Bulgakov (1995), pp. 5–26.

- <sup>26</sup> See Kostjuk (2005), pp. 183–189.
- <sup>27</sup> See Valliere (2000), pp. 279–289.
- <sup>28</sup> See especially chapters eight ‘On the Eve’ and nine ‘Breaks and Links’ in Florovskij (1987).
- <sup>29</sup> Meyendorff (1983), pp. 76–78, and (1998); Kapriev (1997).
- <sup>30</sup> See paper by Ilias Papagiannopoulos in this issue. See also: Lossky (1989), pp. 40–45.
- <sup>31</sup> See Bird (2003).
- <sup>32</sup> See Schmemmann (1972), p. 178.
- <sup>33</sup> See Valliere (2000), p. 376.
- <sup>34</sup> Florovskij (1987), p. 301.
- <sup>35</sup> Florovskij (1987), p. 301.
- <sup>36</sup> See footnote 18.
- <sup>37</sup> Florovskij (1987), p. 306.
- <sup>38</sup> See Bird (2003), p. 214.
- <sup>39</sup> See Schmemmann (1972), pp. 179–180; Bird (2003), p. 222.
- <sup>40</sup> See Valliere (2001), p. 231.
- <sup>41</sup> Bird (2003), p. 228.
- <sup>42</sup> Alfeev (2003).
- <sup>43</sup> *Osnovy social’noj koncepcii Russkoj Pravoslavnoj Cerkvi*, www.russian.orthodox.org.ru (last accessed 27 Aug 2005)
- <sup>44</sup> For a detailed analysis of the theological position of Metropolitan Kyrill, see Kostjuk (2005), pp. 128–138.
- <sup>45</sup> Agadjanian (2003a).
- <sup>46</sup> Agadjanian (2003b).
- <sup>47</sup> Agadjanian (2003b), pp. 172–173, esp. footnote 30.
- <sup>48</sup> Agadjanian (2003a), p. 338.
- <sup>49</sup> See Alfeev (2003).
- <sup>50</sup> About Alexander Men’, see Kostjuk (2005), pp. 118–122; about Georgij Kochetkov, see *ibid.*, pp. 108–109. It is noteworthy that it was the publishing house of the S. Filaret’skij Institut which first re-published the works of Fëdor Bukharev, see Valliere (2000), p. 383, footnote 11.
- <sup>51</sup> An example is the Jesuit-run *Institut filosofii, teologii i istorii S. Fomy*, whose publishing house has printed works by Averincev, Bibikhin and Khoružij.
- <sup>52</sup> On Losev, see special issue in *Studies of Eastern European Thought* 56 (2004), nos. 2–3, pp. 93–241.
- <sup>53</sup> Bibikhin (2004).
- <sup>54</sup> Bibikhin (2003), p. 179.
- <sup>55</sup> Khoružij (1991, 1994, 1999). See also the article by Paršin (2002), who considers the work of Khoružij a possible exit-strategy from the current stalemate in religious philosophy.
- <sup>56</sup> Bibikhin translated Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*, and his last publication is on Wittgenstein (Bibikhin, Vladimir V., *Witgenstejn: Smena aspekta*, Moskva, Institut filosofii, teologii i istorii sv. Fomy, 2004).



<sup>57</sup> This section is based on an interview with Sergej Khoružij conducted in June 2005 in Moscow.

<sup>58</sup> Khoružij (2005), pp. 29–31.

<sup>59</sup> Khoružij established an institute for the exploration of this thematic, its website being <http://www.synergia-isa.ru>.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Khoružij's latest text about Descartes and Kant (2004).

<sup>61</sup> Comments made by Orthodox theologians and Khoružij during interviews conducted by the author, see also footnote 18.

<sup>62</sup> See Nancy (1996).

<sup>63</sup> One reason for this may be that 'Western' theology is no longer what Florovskij depicted it to be. Catholic theology especially has undergone profound changes with the I. and II. Vatican Council.

<sup>64</sup> See footnote 18.

<sup>65</sup> Wagner (2001b), p. 9.

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