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**РЕЦЕНЗИЯ НА КНИГУ:  
ОБОЛЕВИЧ Т.  
ВОСТОЧНО-ХРИСТИАНСКАЯ ТРАДИЦИЯ  
В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ РУССКОЙ МЫСЛИ И НЕ ТОЛЬКО.  
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**Аннотация.** В книге профессора Краковского университета сестры Терезы Оболевич показано формирование и развитие двух основных линий в русской философии: «философии всеединства» Вл. Соловьева и его преемников и неопатристического синтеза протоиерея Г. Флоровского. Переплетение этих тенденций прослежено вплоть до работ С. С. Хоружего, вышедших уже в XXI в. Подобно известному на Западе отцу Томасу Мергону, Хоружий также интересовался исихазмом, дзеном и их духовными практиками. Т. Оболевич полагает, что критерии для неопатристического синтеза не были Флоровским четко сформулированы. Мы полагаем, что кроме Хоружего, видных сторонников этого направления в новейшей истории русской мысли не имеется.

**Ключевые слова:** русская философия, византийская философия, евразийская мысль, патристика, исихазм, всеединство, неопатристический синтез.

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**BOOK REVIEW:  
OBOLEVICH T.  
THE EASTERN CHRISTIAN TRADITION  
IN MODERN RUSSIAN THOUGHT AND NOT ONLY.  
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**Abstract.** In the book by sister Teresa Obolevitch, Professor of the Krakow University, the formation and development of the two basic lines within Russian philosophy is shown, i.e., of Soloviev's «all-unity» system and of Archpriest G. Florovsky's «Neopatristic synthesis». The author tracks down their intertwining up to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century works by S. S. Horuzhy. Like Fr. Thomas Merton, wide known in the West, Horuzhy also showed up a deep interest in Hesychasm, Zen and their spiritual practices and techniques. Prof. Obolevitch believes that Florovsky had not proposed clear-cut criteria for building up a Neo-patristic synthesis of the present-day Russian thought. Besides Horuzhy, no prominent adherents of this trend of thought are to be seen in the most recent history of Russian thought.

**Keywords:** Russian philosophy, Byzantine philosophy, Eurasian thought, patristics, hesychasm, all-unity, the Neopatristic synthesis.

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The book by sister Teresa Obolevitch is dedicated to the memory of recently departed Fr. Peter Scorer, Andrzej Valicki and Serguey Horuzhy. Its very dedication reveals the author's wish to situate Russian philosophy “between the East and the West” (cf. the title of Ch. 4), i.e., as a center of a fruitful meeting of different Orthodox, Catholic, and to a less degree Protestant traditions, as well as a locus of a seminal discussion between Christianity and Zen (cf. a sympathetic analysis of Fr. Merton's and S. Horuzhy's interest in Zen on pp. 160–168, esp. p. 162 on a «marriage of Zen and Sophia» in Merton, according to Ch. Pramuk). One of the pivotal questions here is that of *deification*, even though, in the author's words, «this concept does not belong to the canon of *depositum fidei* in the West» (p. 49). Whereas the representatives of the neo-Patristics (the main ones among them being Fr. Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky) understood this notion in the patristic sense, the adherents of the second main branch of Russian philosophy, i.e., of the all-unity and Sophiology (cf. p. 119, 140, 171), took it rather perversely. This bilateral division, as well as the author's approach to philosophy, which presupposes looking for centuries-long religious and spiritual traditions being reflected in its lore (see p. 130), looks contemporary and is easily justifiable. Vladimir Solovyov and his followers have added to this religious background a concrete metaphysics, which related in a greater detail the creation by God of an ideal trans-empirical world (p. 127). Fortunately, we see by now a well-developed trend of corresponding investigations thanks to the meticulous work by sister Teresa and her colleagues (one may be reminded of widely quoted here *Essays in Russian Spiritual Tradition* by Serguey Horuzhy).

The author was prompted by a longing to specify common stereotypes which reduce the specificity of Russian philosophical schools to a struggle between uniformly seen “Platonists” and “Aristotelians”: «Philosophy (and especially the history of philosophy) is also too often given to the temptation to yield to clichés and to superficial classifications of authors as “idealists” or “materialists”, “Platonists” or “Aristotelians”. A closer consideration of certain passages by individual thinkers often shows that their views are much more nuanced» (p. 24). This is certainly so.

Let us envisage the way the author analyses these nuances in her book. The book consists of the Introduction (p. XVIII–XXI), acknowledgments (p. XXII), the four chapters (pp. 1-170), the Conclusion (pp. 171-175), the Bibliographical list (pp. 177-210) and the index of names and notions (pp. 211-219); the main content is preceded with B. Gallacher's preface (pp. IX–XVII).

Let us adduce here the chapters' titles, so as to limit ourselves in what follows to a total appraisal of the author's contribution to her topic, because all the chapters are close-knit with a high degree of inner unity: «The Renaissance of Patristics in Russian Thought» (Ch. 1; pp. 1-54); «Apophaticism in Modern Russia» (Ch. 2; pp. 55-90); «God and the World in the Perspective of Apophaticism» (Ch. 3; pp. 91-130); «Russian Religious Philosophy: Between the East and the West» (Ch. 4; pp. 131-170).

The author takes her stand with Metropolitan Pavlos of Glyfada in his critique of Fr. Andrew Louth's somewhat exotic idea of a "post-Patristic" synthesis (p. 173, n. 10). No "post-Patristics" is thinkable within Orthodoxy, because "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (*Hb.* 13, 8), the holy Fathers being "the elect vessels" of the Tradition – the point which had been reminded of by Fr. Yves Congar in his famous article taken into consideration by T. Obolevitch. Otherwise, if we are to recognize Fr. Louth's correctness, we will have to admit as something much desirable and even necessary for the Orthodox thought both a «pre-Patristic synthesis» (thus being strongly liable to the temptation of declaring Neoplatonism as a synthesis of the kind), and an «extra-Patristic synthesis», say, a Hegelian one, or a «social Christianity» mocked at in Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* (Letter 16); etc. And what will be our final goal in such a wandering? Where are (the) limits of modernization? The corresponding anxiety sounds in sister Teresa's book very clearly. If "Georges Florovsky's Neopatristic synthesis is not a completed project" (p. 26), it means that its completion is a task in store for us or for future generations, in compliance with its general idea. Sister Teresa tries to prove that Fr. Sergius Bulgakov's Sophiology was not such a serious deviation from Orthodoxy (cf. p. 134), but we are not fully convinced, as Bulgakov's idea (or, to put it more correctly, mythologeme) of Sophia seems to be in too obvious a way at odds with 1 *Tim.* 2, 5–6 (cf. on Florovsky's and Lossky's similar approach to it on p. 133). Referring to D. S. Birjukov, sister Teresa asserts that Bulgakov was "a neo-Palamist in the sophiological vein" (p. 137), but it sounds almost like "a neo-Nicaean in the Arian vein": if the last specification were true for St. Basil, it would be so only with serious reservations concerning his *intellectual* (not *spiritual*) background. No doubt, Fr. Sergius was, «in a certain sense, a patrologist» (p. 136), but «in a sense» a huge herd of heretics, from the Cyrillian monophysites up to the subsequent compilers of dogmatic *florilegia*, like Patriarch Sergius and the monoenergists, the iconoclasts of 754 and 815, the anti-Palamites (as Acindynus) and so on, were patrologists, and sometimes rather prominent ones. It would thus seem to us that it is in this "anti-Palamite" row that Bulgakov, with all his creative genius, reminiscent of Gregoras, can be entered more naturally. Yes, it is also a Tradition branch (or, to put in in a proper way, an adjacent to the Tradition), but the one which seems to be "heterodox". Things will not stand differently, even if we acknowledge that Fr. Sergius had been «a peculiar forerunner or "godfather" of Neopatristic synthesis» (p. 137). T. Obolevitch seems to be rather sympathetic to Bulgakov's patrological relativism, which is evident in his statement that «the Fathers' writings cannot be accepted blindly as bearing dogmatic authority» (quoted from p. 137), but this Marcion-like trend will lead us to a negation of the Gospel and the Tradition as a whole (but cf. the author's remark on p. 141 about a digression of Russian religious philosophers from the exact dogmatic terminology).

This is one of the reasons which make us think that the quarrel with Sophiology cannot be explained with personal hostilities between its adherents and the representatives of the Neopatristic synthesis (as the author suggests on p. 135), because in the age of enormous spiritual crossroads and change such a hypothesis turns out to be irrelevant, for, e.g., whatever St. Cyril's

of Alexandria attitude towards St. John Chrysostom could be, both Fathers are venerated as the great pillars of the Church. Nobody will deny Bulgakov's philosophical magnitude. But dogmatic consciousness is something extremely conservative and rigorous. As sister Teresa notes with acumen, Sophia has got its right to exist in the history of thought as a theologoumenon «and, all the more so, as a philosopheme» (p. 139). The analysis contained in the book permits one to come to such a conclusion. Nevertheless, in the present writer's mind, Father Copleston was more correct in his critical evaluation of Sophiology than Valliere (p. 139, n. 41). Indeed, Bulgakov's "creaturely-mediating [*tvarno-posredstvujushchaja*] Sophia" (p. 141) rather reminds one of Nicephorus Gregoras' monsters like an uncreated-created or uncreated-uncreated (and so "twice uncreated", whatever this could mean) God (ἀκτιστόκτιστον ἢ ἀκτιστοάκτιστον) [*Nic. Greg. Byz. Hist. XXX, 17: PG. 149. 269A*], than of Orthodox "divine dictionary". Be this as it may, in this regard Russian philosophy, as many other avant-garde phenomena, stands out with its "interdiscursivity" [Соколова, 2019, с. 155-176, особ. 158, 162].

We agree with the author's remark, which we deem useful to be extrapolated at our approach to philosophy as well: «A careful study of the early Christian authors should be accompanied by wide-ranging philosophical and scientific research, which would be in keeping with the "spirit" of the Church Fathers themselves» (p. 174). One thinks that it is just the way taken by sister Teresa who asks: «Is there an opposition between the West and the East in the Russian religious thought? To what extent can Russian thought be topically relevant to Russian philosophy, and to what extent can Russian thought be topically relevant to the Western world?» (p. 131). Nowadays this opposition has lost much in its meaning, and not only from the Eurasians' standpoint, as it is clear that during the formative period of Russian philosophy the decisive role in its development was played by the Byzantine thought which was neither purely Western nor absolutely Greek, but Eastern European, or, if one wishes so, *central Eurasian* and in this quality valuable both for the Northern Russian lands (Novgorod) and for the Southern and South-Western ones (Kiev), and for Moscow and Tver later on. Today, when a changing in the geopolitical horizons is in progress, something analogous is taking place when Bakhtin, Jakobson and Lotman gain popularity in Brazil, New Zealand and SAR, and some Southern (especially Latin American) thinkers, and especially writers, become popular all over the globe<sup>1</sup>. One cogitates that it is a *median way* of Byzantine and Russian philosophy which can be elucidated now using such kind of examples which get over the old dichotomies. Sister Teresa writes, quoting Asproulis, that, in the final analysis, Russian Neopatristic synthesis and Sophiology supplement one another (p. 141, n. 50). If this judgment is philosophically correct, then, dogmatically it is open to criticism. And, of course, it is evident that the representatives of both trends "were the interpreters of the Russian culture in the West" (p. 142).

From the shortcomings of the book we would single out a lack of comparison between Bulgakov's Sophia and some analogous, or looking analogous, twentieth-century notions, the first among the latter being that mysterious "basic female beginning of the Creation", which was named in Oscar Ventzeslaus de Lubitch Miłosz (1877–1939), the uncle of Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004), *La Féminité de la Manifestation* [Милош, 2018, гл. 35].

Despite the elitarian character of this affinity, we see in this "moment of touch" between Russian and Polish cultures an appearance of that *median way* which was just mentioned [cf. above]; it is, properly speaking, what the author summons us to take (p. 146, 170). Let us add

<sup>1</sup> Certainly, the same is true for the French post-structuralists, Noam Chomsky *et al.*

here that it would be also good to adjust an interaction between Russian philosophy, on the one hand, and its Spanish and Portuguese counterparts, on the other, especially as in the latter one (say, in Pessoa) its own sophiological impulses were to be seen<sup>2</sup>. That «a peculiar “renaissance” of sophiological questions» (p. 146), which has been going already in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but had been foreseen by Berdiayev in his letter to Bulgakov from June 2, 1933 (p. 145-146), may also extract a new fueling for it from these relatively remote sources.

Surely, the author is a master of comparative analysis. Juxtaposing Whitehead's and his colleagues' philosophy of process with corresponding Russian ideas, sister Teresa underlines that: «Both process and Russian thought were looking for a *via media* (italics T.O. – D.M.) between monism and dualism in the shape of panentheism» (p. 117). To bear this out, she adduces a winning quotation from Hartshorne. But then in Russian philosophy a doctrine of Divine energies, i.e., of God Himself, according to Orthodox dogmatics, as a link between God in Himself and the world, was more clear-cut: «The discourse of energies has undeniable heuristic potential» (p. 171, cf. p. 141 on Florovsky's «the “ontology of energy”»). Apposite is also the author's analogy between Whitehead's *togetherness* and Russian *sobornost* (or conciliarity) (p. 118).

Following the irenic approach, sister Teresa polemicalizes with Fr. Florovsky in what the main idea of her book is concerned: «The relationship between them (i.e., the Neo-patristic synthesis and Sophiology. *D. M.*) is synthetic and dialectical. Nevertheless, these directions are not as radically different as in Florovsky's estimation» (p. 140). Estimations of such a kind used to depend on a sharpness of one's dogmatic self-consciousness, which is beyond philosophy. Anyway, on a purely philosophical level «Neopatristic synthesis is ... more of a correction of the philosophy of all-unity than its negation» (p. 141) – as we would adduce, inasmuch as the Neopatristics sees itself as a part of *philosophy* in general. But it is the gist of the matter that this more traditional trend does not fully correlate itself with philosophy alone, being a complex thought phenomenon. This syntheticity and ambiguity of both the main components of the Russian religious and philosophical renaissance of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is successfully open up in the book under analysis.

We should be grateful to sister Teresa Оболевич for a vividly, thoughtfully and fascinatingly written book dedicated to one of the most original flows of European – and Eurasian – thought and culture. Taken together with a long list of the scholar's previous publications, this work is able to serve as a navigator for the years to come for different-level readers, from novices to experts, in their sailing by the sea of Russian thought, which has become in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries general European and Eurasian property.

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<sup>2</sup> Portuguese scholars themselves regard the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a period of the “Portuguese renaissance” [Тейшейра, 2021, с. 32]. Cf., e.g., in Teixeira de Pascoaes (1877–1952) a lot of ideas concerning God's evolution in His creation, which look similar to those by Neoplatonists, Eriugena and Schelling: [Там же, 28–32]. In their turn, the Portuguese phenomena can be quite naturally understood as a part of a complicated history of the twentieth-century European gnosticism (Hesse, Th. Mann *et al.*) which still remains to be written. As for Spain, everyone remembers Unamuno's and Zubiri's traditionalist stance; but also Fransisco Torquemada, a character created by B. Perez Galdos, posits a question: “Is not really Spain *the most Catholic* (italics B. P. G. *D. M.*) country?” [Гальдос, 1958, с. 435–599, 583]. This theocentric perception of reality was evidently close to Russian literary characters as well as to the really lived philosophers.



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