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## Theology as Biography – Reconsidering Fr. Georges Florovsky’s Sofia period

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**Abstract.** *This article engages with texts, written in the not well known period of fr. Georges Florovsky’s life – the time spent in Sofia Bulgaria. It traces the development of one of his core ideas, the absence of ethnophyletism, to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of his home as well as the later time spent in Sofia. It also retrospectively looks at the key later themes in his writings in comparison with his earlier articles.*

**Keywords:** *Florovsky, Sofia, ethnophyletism, history, historical theology, Wisdom.*

„Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God;  
consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith“  
(Eph. 13:7)

“Man brings to history and life not a form, but meaning.”  
Florovsky, In the world of the quests and wanders<sup>1</sup>

Forty-two years have passed since the falling asleep in the Lord of two of the most valuable and fruitful theologians of the twentieth century, Archpriest Georges Florovsky and St. Justin Cheliyski (Popovich). Both were born in the 90’s of the 19th century, both are priests, and both are university professors in theology. Both were substantially related to Sofia and my Alma Mater Sofia University. The birthplace of Fr. Justin Vranje is 100 km away going West, in a straight line, from Sofia, and in the 60s and 70s, when the authorities allowed him, he visited Sofia and the Theological Faculty (then the Theological Academy), where his books, especially his volumes on Dogmatics, were very popular at that time, even more than in Belgrade.

In this text, for obvious reasons, more attention will be paid to Fr. Florovsky, whose influence in the formation of the theological views of many of the most influential theologians of our time is evident, though often carefully concealed.

### 1. Introduction

Any examination of Fr. Georges Florovsky’s complete works should necessarily consider his specific personal context and history. This is necessary because for him everything was *personal*<sup>2</sup> and everything was *historical* i.e. the reality of everything was shaped by his personal engagement in the specific historical events. In fact, these are two key elements of his Christian Theology:

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<sup>1</sup> Florovski, G., *Mudrost i Premudrost*, Sofia, Pravoslaven Kaleidoskov, 2009, p. 401. (in Bulgarian)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Lost Scriptural Mind* in Florovsky, Georges, *Bible, Church, Tradition*, Collected Works, vol. 1, Nordland Publishing, pp. 9-17, about the personalistic attitude of Fr. Florovsky, very meaningful and interesting are the personal impressions and observations of Metr. Antony of Surozh. See below.

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personalism and historicity. These two elements are the basis of Fr. Georges’ research approach. It is not about historical theology, but a theology of events and history – a theology, which is characterized by a remarkable confidence. Fr. Georges clearly knows who he is, what he wants, what he should and can do. He does not only believe, he knows. For him, there are no dilemmas.

The charisma of Father Georges is unquestionable, but there is something more than that, something which is based on his deeply inherent sense of the universal character of Orthodoxy, something which results in a total absence of ethnophyletism. This was precisely what distinguished him from the other “Parisian theologians” and that made him a real dissident among them.<sup>3</sup> The absence of ethnophyletism was probably the major reason for him to write *The Ways*? In his criticism of the book, N. Berdyaev wrote:

*His book is in essence a condemnation of the Russian soul. The author – is a Byzantinist, he does not love the Russian, and a “Russian Christianity” is repulsive to him, although it is unintelligible, why a “Byzantine Christianity” should be any better afront the judgement of Christian universalism.<sup>4</sup>*

In this short paper I will address the questions: Where was Florovsky born and how did he become a cosmopolitan, a truly catholic Christian? To answer this question, I will focus on the role of his family and birthplace – the town of Odessa, but mostly on the insufficiently studied early period of the life and work of Fr. G. Florovsky – the period of his stay in Sofia.

## 2. The Family

The history of the family of Fr. Georges, although very interesting, is quite ordinary. These are highly educated, but still ordinary people. Maybe it is this ordinariness which provided Florovsky with a sense of freedom, independent of any political or other bias, which helped him to develop the aforementioned absence of ethnophyletism.

The parents of the young Florovsky belonged to a circle of religious intellectuals which undoubtedly affected the direction of his intellectual path. His father, Fr. Basil, was an openminded person who did not force his children to attend Church services, but rather insisted that his sons should freely and consciously engage in Church worship.<sup>5</sup> Thus the upbringing in the living

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Shmeman, A. *In memory of Fr. Georges Florovsky*.

<sup>4</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, *Ortodoksia and Humanness*: (Prot. Georgii Florovskii. Puti russkogo bogosloviya) in *Puti*, 1937, No. 53, pp.53-65, Available at [http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd\\_lib/1937\\_424.html](http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1937_424.html)

<sup>5</sup> Georges had two brothers and two sisters. His older brother, Basil (1881-1924) was a doctor; his older sister Claudia (1883-1963) was a historian and philologist, a longtime professor at Sofia University; his other brother Antony (1884 – 1968) was professor of History of Russia in the beginning in Odessa University, where he was expelled in 1922 and then at the Prague University; his other sister, Mary, died several years before Georges was born.

tradition and the services of the Orthodox Church had a decisive influence on Florovsky's development as an Orthodox theologian.

### 3. Odessa

Undoubtedly, the city of Odessa, which is located on the borders between two empires plays a very important role in Florovsky's life. Odessa, this pearl of the Russian Empire, is an offspring of the newly emerging Russian imperial project in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is the third city in Russia after St. Petersburg and Moscow. There are over 30 printing houses, publishing more than 600 new books per year, in Russian, western languages, Jewish, etc. The city has 20 Orthodox churches, 3 of them belonging to the Old Believers, and 8 synagogues. The famous Iza Kremer sings in the opera.<sup>6</sup> Here are born, live and work Ilf and Petrov.<sup>7</sup> This is also the birthplace of Ostap Bender - Ilf and Petrov's unforgettable character. Bender represents himself as Ostap-Suleiman-Berta-Marta-Bender-Bey (in "The Twelve Chairs") and Bender-Zadunayskiy or Ostap Ibragimovich (in the "Golden Calf"). These names of the famous character refer to the multiplicity of cultures that coexisted in Odessa. Soon after the Bolshevik Revolution, however, Odessa turns into a small town bearing the spirit of provincialism.<sup>8</sup> However, the cosmopolitan atmosphere of this city leaves very solid traces in the young Florovsky.

### 4. The University

After entering the University, Georges Florovsky desires not just to study science, but to become a "Christian scientist". Since then, he perceives Christianity not as a system of semi-scientific truths, but as a Revelation of God, which is rooted in historical facts and events. An important role for his understanding in this period played the works of the theologian Michael Bogoslovskiy.<sup>9</sup> In 1911, aiming at obtaining the best possible humanitarian education, Florovsky joins the Faculty of History and Philology at Odessa University. The years spent in the University influenced significantly the young Florovsky. There he acquired his remarkable encyclopaedism, the detailed

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<sup>6</sup> Izabella Yakovlevna Kremer (21.10.1887-07.07.1956, Argentina) opera and operetta singer, actress. First started to sing in Yiddish on stage.

<sup>7</sup> Ilya Arnoldovich Faynzilberg (Ilya Ilyf, 1897, Odessa - 1937). Graduated the technical school in his hometown. Evgeny Petrovich Petrov (Kataev) (1903, Odessa - 1942). Graduated the classical school in his hometown. He died in suspicious circumstances on the plane from Sevastopol to Moscow.

<sup>8</sup> Бабель, И. *Сочинения*. Т. 1, *Рассказы (1913-1924 гг.)*, Москва, Публицистика, Письма, 1991, с. 238.

<sup>9</sup> Bogoslovskiy, Mikhail Ivanovich, writer (1844-1916), a graduate of the Kazan Theological Academy, where he teaches The Holy Scripture of the New Testament. Besides his doctoral thesis "*The Childhood of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Forerunner according the Gospels of St. Apostles Matthew and Luke*" (Kazan, 1893), he wrote also: "*The Idea of Kingdom of God in the Old and the New Testament* (Kazan, 1887), "*The Public ministry of Our Lord Jesus Christ, descript by St. Evangelists. Historical and exegetic study*" (Kazan, 1908) and many articles in "*Pravoslavniy Sobesednik*" and other editions. See "*40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the service of prof. M. I. Bogoslovskij*" (*Tserkovnie Vedomosti*), 1911, № 13).

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knowledge of history, the history of philosophy and the natural sciences. The study of the natural sciences proved to be particularly fruitful for the future theologian.<sup>10</sup> Developing later the principles of personalism, he brilliantly articulated the idea of the inadmissibility of using natural-science methodology in the humanities, i.e. for him it is impossible to interpret the historical and cultural *Universum* of man by analogy with the natural processes.<sup>11</sup> His knowledge of the natural sciences allowed him to understand adequately the organicist concepts in the European thought.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. Forced emigration

After his forcibly imposed emigration, Bulgaria became the first haven for the Florovsky family. Florovsky’s family heads to Sofia via Varna, where his father Fr. Basil has friends and students from Odessa, who held highly respected positions.<sup>13</sup> At first, Fr. Basil became inspector in the Sofia Seminary and later, until his death in 1928, he was the priest of the Russian parish. He died on March 3 and was buried on the Sunday of Orthodoxy. The funeral service in the Russian Church “St. Nicholas” was ministered by the Metropolitan of Sofia Stephen, Bishop of Lubensk, St. Seraphim (Sobolev) and many other Russian and Bulgarian priests.<sup>14</sup>

His sister Claudia, thanks to her knowledge of languages, quickly found a job in one of the high schools in Sofia, and later became a professor at the University. Georges could not find a permanent job in the city, thus having more time to work on his dissertation on Herzen, to write articles for Bulgarian and Russian publishers in Sofia, to give talks and lectures in the community centre “Slavyanska beseda” and to meet his future wife Ksenia Ivanovna. The family lived in a modest little house next to the Perlovska river which was far away from the downtown on the way to the village of Poduene.

Here began his real scientific and publication activity. Moving to Sofia Florovsky lost his students, his audience, and the rhythm of his research activities. The struggles did not make him give up, but rather motivated him to seek new fields and acquaintances. So as early as his first year in Sofia he joined the circle that emerged around Prof. N. Trubetskoy, who was then a lecturer at

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<sup>10</sup> His article “*On the Mechanism of Reflex Salivary Secretion*” is highly estimated by Acad. I. Pavlov, Florovsky, G. *On the Mechanism of Reflex Salivary Secretion*,” in *Bulletin de l’Academie Imperiale des Sciences*, 2 (1917).

<sup>11</sup> See the examples from: „*Biology in his study - The predicament of the christian historian*,” in *Hristianstvo i kultura*, Sofia, 2006, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Especially in his article “Evolution and epigenenezis”. Cf. Архимандрит Ианнуарий (Иванев), *Взгляды на теорию эволюции в Православной Церкви* in *Teoria dell’evoluzione: lo sguardo della scienza e della fede cristiana* (Теория эволюции: естественнонаучный и христианский взгляд). Seminario scientifico italo-russo. Российско-итальянский научный семинар. (San Pietroburgo 23 Aprile 2003-Санкт Петербург 23 апрель 2003), p. 98-121.

<sup>13</sup> The ministers at that time, of the Foreign Affairs and Religions Teodor Todorov (17.10.1918 - 6.10.1919) and Michael Madjarov (6.10.1919 - 16.04.1920) have their Odessa periods. First one studies law there in 80’s of XIX century and the second spends there few years after the coup in 1886. One of them is the Minister of Cults ...

<sup>14</sup> *Bulletin Narodn strazh*, 1928, № 4, p. 14; *Ecclesiastical newspaper*, 1928, № 15, p. 182.

Sofia University, in the newly established Department of Linguistics. This marks the beginning of the Eurasian circle, which offered a good opportunity for Florovsky to be part of live discussions as well as engage in research and publications.

In Sofia he wrote and published his first significant articles: “The eternal and the transient in the teaching of the Russian Slavophiles” (1921), “F. M. Dostoevsky” (1921), “Disruptions and connections” (1921), “The finesse of reason” (1921), “On unhistorical nations (the land of parents and the land of children)” (1921), “The meaning of history and the meaning of life” (1921), his first independent book “Dostoevsky and Europe” (1922), “A Letter to P. B. Struve concerning Eurasianism” (1922), “Human wisdom and Divine Wisdom” (1922), “On the righteous and sinful patriotism” (1922), “In the world of quests and wanders” (1922 - 23), “A Letter to the editor of Russian Thought” (1923), “Two Covenants” (1923), “The historical insights of Tyutchev” (1924), “In memory of Professor Pavel I. Novgorodtsev” (1924), “The Catholic Tradition and the Slavic Idea” (1925), “On the varieties of historical interpretation” (1925).<sup>15</sup> In Sofia Florovsky published also his brilliant article: “On the worship of Sophia, the Wisdom of God in Byzantium and Russia” (1930).<sup>16</sup> These articles are united by the search and shaping of a method that corresponds to the spirit of Orthodox Christianity and could become a basis for the spiritual rebirth of Russia.

The Bulgarian translations of most of these articles were collected in a single volume entitled “Mudrost i Premudrost. Texts from the Sofia period”, that was published in 2009 on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the repose of Fr. Georges Florovsky.<sup>17</sup>

## 6. Searching for a method

Unlike many Russian intellectuals of the previous generation and of his time (S. Bulgakov, N. Berdyaev and others), Florovsky has never

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<sup>15</sup> Г. Флоровский, „Вечное и переходящее в учении русских славянофилов,” in *Slavyanski glas*, 1921, p. 59-77; Ф.М.Достоевски, *Евск. Newspaper*, 33 (1921); *Разрывы и связи, Izhod ke Vostoku. Predchuvstviya I svershenia. Utverzdenie evrazjitsjev*, Sofia, 1921, p. 9-13; *Хитрость разума; Ibidem*, p. 28-39; *О народах неисторических; Ibidem*, p. 52-70; „Смысл истории и смысл жизни,” *Ruskaya misl*, 8-9 (1921), с. 175-194; *Достоевски и Европа*, Slavyanska biblioteka, 2/1922; „Письмо к П. Б. Струве об евразийстве,” *Ruskaya misl*, 1-2/1922, p. 267-274; „Человеческая премудрость и премудрость Божия,” *Dubovna kultura*, 11-12/1922, p. 85-96; „О патриотизме праведном и греховном,” *Na putjah. Utverzdenie evrazjitsjev*, Berlin, 1922, p. 230-292; „В мире исканий и блужданий,” *Ruskaya misl*, 4-7/1922, p. 129-146 и 3-5/1923, p. 210-231; *Письмо к редактору „Русской мысли” // Ruskaya misl*, Prague-Berlin, 1-2/1923, p. 300-306; „Два завета,” *Rosia I Latinstvo*, Berlin, 1923, p. 152-176; „Исторические прозрения Тютчева,” *Slavyanski calendar*, 14/1924, p. 29-42; „За спомен на проф. П.И.Новгородцев,” *Slavyanski glas* 3-4/1924, p. 21-34; „Вселенское предание и славянская идея,” *Yubileen sbornik na Slavyanskoto družestvo*, Sofia, 1925, p. 25-33; „О типах исторического истолкования,” *Sbornik v chest na V. Zlatarski*, Sofia, 1925, p. 521-541.

<sup>16</sup> Флоровский, Г. О почитании Софии, Премудрости Божией, в Византии и на Руси,” *Trudi Pjatego sjezda ruskib akademicheskib organizacij za granicey*, 1 (1930), p. 485-500.

<sup>17</sup> Currently in print is the next volume with early Florovsky’s texts with the title: “Church: Tradition and Utopia”, including articles from Sofia and Prague periods.

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renounced the Church, and therefore did not have to explain and justify his religious beliefs or to feel guilty of his former denial. Even his early works give the impression of unwavering firmness in the Orthodox faith.

For Florovsky the spiritual and religious reality was self-evident to the extent that he discussed primarily the problem of rationality.<sup>18</sup> The young scientist wanted to find a way for a philosophical justification of the Christian worldview and then use Christian theological reflection to focus on the understanding of Russian destiny. One could say that it was this idea became a leitmotif of Florovsky’s intellectual endeavors. But this proved to be not so simple.

Influenced by “the philosophy of life”<sup>19</sup> and of the German and Russian romanticism, Florovsky tried to build a synthesis between Christian personalism and naturalistic historicism. Instead, however, he achieved a syncretic union of disparate elements that were incompatible in both meaning and content. An example of such unifying attempt was his article “The meaning of history and the meaning of life.” The contradicting character of his research studies shows itself most clearly in his article “On unhistorical nations (the land of parents and the land of children)” (1921). In this article, dedicated to specific Russian problems, the young scholar applied on one hand (influenced by Bergson and Nietzsche) a modern European methodology and, on the other hand, continually strived to remain faithful to the Russian church theme referring to Dostoevsky, the Optina desert Fathers etc.<sup>20</sup> He proceeded in a similar way in his article “The eternal and the transient in the teaching of the Russian Slavophiles”. Even in the earliest period of Florovsky’s work, when there was still uncertainty and variation in his methodology, it was again Christianity, and not Western idealism that remained the starting point of his scientific endeavor. This was his way of seeing the past in the present and in building a program for the future – through Christianity and, I would say, through Christ. This Christocentrism features in the works of Georges Florovsky.

Touching on some of Dostoevsky’s themes, he tried to move ahead and show that the source of *utopism* is the desire to identify human history with the natural processes. Soloviev and Tyutchev, and Tolstoy, and Fedorov all became victims of the temptation to dissolve man into physical nature and to unify mankind and the *Universum*, i.e. something that could make man equal with God as long as He is everywhere and in everything. Such a temptation would deprive man from freedom, but for Florovsky human

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<sup>18</sup> Raev, M. *Soblazni i razriv: Georgii Florovskii kak istorik russkoi misli.* – In *Georgii Florovskii: svyashthenoslužbitel, bogoslov, filosof*, Moskva, 1995, p. 262.

<sup>19</sup> Philosophical school in German and partly in the French philosophy of the late XIX and the beginning of XX century, subdivided into several trends: biological (Nietzsche), cosmological (Bergson), cultural and historic (Dilthey, Spengler).

<sup>20</sup> Флоровский Г. В., „О народах неисторических,” *Izhd k Vostoku. Predchuvstviya i sversheniya. Utverzdenie evrazijssev*, Sofia, 1921, p. 68 -70.

freedom is the key for understanding the human person. He shows that all this is pre-determined by specific metaphysical assumptions.

In “The meaning of history and the meaning of life” he writes: “The romantic cult of personality, unique, autonomous and self-sufficient, which itself invents laws, Fichte’s pathos of the freedom of moral creativity, Schelling’s aestheticism, Schleiermacher’s religion of feelings and moods ... – all this is well known and ends up with Hegelianism, where the personal freedom, the freedom of creative self-determination becomes the main topic of cosmic development. And, in fact, in all these individualistic systems, the person ... simply disappears; there is no place for the creative person. We will not know the real reason for this unexpected accident, if we look for it in the “pantheism” of the worldview of these times: the issue was not in the dissolution of the person in the nature, but in the desire to find all of nature within ourselves, as in autonomous ‘microcosm’.

Florovsky believed that, by preserving the spiritual heritage of the past, history is the only opportunity to overcome any intellectual temptations. A person that cannot escape the bounds of history is obliged to look manly in the face of his or her own historical nature.

*“We will understand the past and will become worthy of the future only when it becomes for us an enjoyable hope and duty, when the hopes regenerate in a thirst for struggle, when the compressed, almost apocalyptic atmosphere of our days raises a stream of genuine religious pathos, of “fear of God” in our souls.”<sup>21</sup>*

Florovsky is perhaps the first among the Russian intellectuals of his time, who clearly realized the significance of historical knowledge, a problem which Dilthey raised together with Croce and Collingwood. Florovsky understood the autonomy of the historical disciplines, which lead him to a severe critique of the deterministic and materialistic assumptions taken from the natural science sphere into the realm of the spirit and the intellect.<sup>22</sup> This subject, which later will be addressed brilliantly in “The predicaments of the Christian historian”<sup>23</sup>, begins in his Sofia period with his article “On the varieties of historical interpretation”.<sup>24</sup>

Overcoming his initial biases in his early articles “The meaning of history and the meaning of life” (1921), “A Letter to P. B. Struve on eurasianism”(1922), “The human wisdom and the Wisdom of God” (1922), in “On the varieties of historical interpretation”, he showed the difference between personalistic understanding of the historical and cultural life of man, and the historiosophy and the cultural philosophy based on the principles of determinism, rationalism and pantheism. This is particularly evident in his less

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<sup>21</sup> G. Florovsky, *Razrivi i vrazhki*, in *Mudrost i Premudrost*, Pravoslaven Kaleidoskop, Sofia, 2009, p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> M. Raev, *Soblazni i razrivi: Georgii Florovskii kak istorik russkoy misli* in *Georgii Florovskii: syyashtennosluzhitel, bogoslov, filosof*, Moskva, 1995, p. 262.

<sup>23</sup> G. Florovsky, *Hristianstvo i kultura*, Sofia, 2006, p. 21

<sup>24</sup> G. Florovsky, *Mudrost i Premudrost*, Sofia, 2009, p. 256-283.

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popular text “In the world of quests and wandering”: “Any monism is inevitably accompanied by the pathos of necessity. ‘The absolute realism’, which reduces everything to ontological categories and puts on the first place the feature ‘I am’, kills the independently persisting consciousness, reduces it either to a dreamy contemplation, mitigating with lofty frauds the bitterness of the ‘low truths’, or to an optical instrument, which only increases the power of contemplation of elementary and impersonally emerging events. In both cases, however, there is no place for moral action and willing trust to the freely chosen values. Of course, in nature the new and the unprecedented, the unexpected and the unpredictable occur, but this is not creativity at all and there is no freedom.”<sup>25</sup>

*“Shall the humanity believe, shall it put the freedom and creativity higher than necessity and understanding? And when? – the light and the shadows of the future depend on that.” (The meaning of history and the meaning of life).*

## 7. Florovsky’s Sofia topics

One of the main topics that Florovsky deals with in his Sofia period is that of understanding the political outcomes of the revolution through the eyes of Slavophiles, on the one hand, and in the way they were seen by Herzen, on the other (“Eternal and transient in the teaching of the Russian Slavophiles”). For Florovsky, the great contribution of Eastern Europe is due to Orthodoxy, not to *slavism*: “Not on the Slavic, but on the Orthodox feature the center of gravity lies. Orthodoxy is not a feature, among others, but completeness, from which all other actual ‘features’ come from”. (“The Catholic tradition and the Slavic idea”). “Not on the tears of a single tormented child, but on the rivers of tears and blood ‘the structure of the human destiny’, the building of Russia's destiny is based and develops. It stands there away from the bloody hands in the empty spaces... Years and years we live with hatred, anger, thirst for revenge, thirst for victory and punishment. Someone kills. Others die. And everybody hates. And they even dare to call their hatred ‘holy’; they dare to speak as of old ‘to hate the sweetness of the fatherland’... All kill: one with word, another with a thought, a third one with a sword. There is no love in anyone. And there is no other way, because there is no thirst for redemption. We suffer. We even cry bitterly and inconsolably. But our tears are still tears of an offended child, and not tears of a man who saw the second death face to face. With the ‘ultimate’ goal we self-confidently justify the lower means; we still hope too much that our pride will melt completely. The death of the ‘geographical homeland’ hides from us the horror of the dying of the human souls... *It is not fearful that men die, but that they cease to be human.*”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> G. Florovski, *Mudrost i Premudrost*, p. 401.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

Another very important topic, which is even more relevant today, is the issue of relationship between Russia and Europe, the issue of their mutual conditioning. This is actually a topic referring to the relationship between Church and State or, if you like, between the Desert and the Empire, as the 'American' Florovsky will reformulate it later. All the texts from the Sofia period refer more or less to this topic, but maybe it dominates mainly the small book "Dostoevsky and Europe". The links between socialism and the idea of Old Rome, the forced unification of humanity and Roman-Catholicism, the 'earthly kingdom', the 'European civilization' here are seen very clear. "Socialism is a 'succession of Catholicism', its secular form – with this insight Dostoevsky reaches the depths – this is an inheritance not only of the tasks but also of the spirit of their solution." Socialism is the decline of the Christian beginning, some kind of de-humanization of man. "Only in Orthodoxy the person is freed to the end, just because it doesn't proclaim its internal destructive self-confirmation, but the *self-denial*, to an extent that could reach the sacrifice of life. And only the one who loses his soul will find it truly, and not he who keeps it."<sup>27</sup> The theme of 'the social utopia', which Florovsky will examine and refute in his classic and well known text "The metaphysical assumptions of utopism", continues in his text written in memory of Prof. Novgorodtsev.

In Florovsky this theme has a sub-theme: Russia and the Revolution as antinomies - Russia as the savior of Europe and Christianity, Russia that confronts revolutionary Europe. He develops these ideas in his text "The historical insights of Tyutchev".<sup>28</sup> For him the 'Revolution' is primarily a principle, 'idea' – the anti-Christian spirit is the soul of the Revolution; its distinctive character lies in it... The human 'Ego' does not want to depend on anything else but on itself, it does not recognize any law but its own will, it puts itself in the place of God, this 'self-authority', this 'apotheosis of the human ego' – that is what a revolution is. It is a kind of antichristian imitation of the Kingdom of Christ, "it is the last word of Judah, who decided after the betrayal of Christ, in perfectly reasonable manner, that the only thing left is to hang himself". It implements the 'traditions of the Roman Empire', manifested in the Christian Ages; it is Caesar who will be forever in war with Christ...<sup>29</sup> Here Florovsky unfolds his ideas for the Empire as an 'Orthodox kingdom', whose heart and soul is the Church.

The solution is: "Only in the Church the ancestors and the descendants reconcile and unite in a genuine communion with God; and only in the Church the dead are alive, and only in it the living and those who are still in the world are really united by the power of unity and of the grace that anointed them. Only the Church is true all-humanity, brought to God" (In the world of quest and wandering).<sup>30</sup> "The Church is real and active in *this*

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 403.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p 418-433.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 420.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 376.

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historical world, not destroying it, but re-creating it in itself. The Church is a *transfigured* world and in this graceful formatting of the creatures the true content of the history lies – not as an order of sensual birth, but as a building of the Kingdom of God. *History is real* - creation will not disappear, it will not be destroyed on ‘the great day of the judgment’, but will change – ‘in a moment, at the last trump’ (1 Cor. 15:52)...<sup>31</sup>

Another major theme of the Sofia period of Father Georges Florovsky is the question of patriotism. A theme that will be brightly developed in “On the righteous and the sinful patriotism” and other ‘Eurasian’ texts, begins with “In the world of quests and wandering”: “We must never forget that not every faith saves because ‘the demons also believe and tremble’ (Jacob 2:19). And even a faith which with the strength of courage can move mountains, *when it is devoid of love*, not only does not mean anything, but even turns into a lie, sacrilege, and grievous sin. Dostoevsky is not deceived by prophetic clairvoyance when he turns his mad ‘impostor’ Stavrogin into a father of his sacred idea of ‘the nation – God-bearer’ – ‘patriotism’ can be both righteous and sinful... And it is always sinful, when it is implied *only by flesh and blood*. But the holy could be born of the Spirit, of the gratuitous and selfless love towards what is higher than everything – than home, and than earth and than the world... It is born and can be born only of love towards the living values themselves. This love, however, breaks the snares of the fatal necessities and refuses to accept the impersonal creativity of the elements of the world. It focuses the creativity on the soul and the deeds of the free and responsible doer – a person who actually choose between paths and values. Here I do not criticize ‘those who accept the revolution’ - they are *immanently* invulnerable. However, the vicious circle of their spiritual ‘stereotypes’ should be torn...”<sup>32</sup> “The first step of righteous patriotism is the humility. We must admit our powerlessness, the powerlessness of every human individual to determine and to form the life through his own separate will and personal thought. We must recognize the *historical necessity* of what is done and of what is achieved. But we must remember: humility is not a slave submission...”<sup>33</sup>

Next is the theme of ‘the end of the history’, of eschatology as the coming kingdom of God. This topic is intertwined with a question, which is typical for ‘the early’ Florovsky: historical naturalism. In the third part of “In the world of quests and wandering”, he says: “No ‘age’ is able to fit in itself ‘the meaning of history’. The actual Apocalypse doesn’t ‘complete’ itself but rather ceases, interrupts the empirical history. And that’s because the real completion of history lies beyond the history itself – ‘when there will be no time’. The meaning of history completes itself *after its end*. This verbally controversial expression is actually quite clear. It tells us that there is *no part* (chronological) of the historic and the cosmic process that is not a *valuable goal*

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p 14.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 383.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101.

*of the whole process.* The *whole* world, as existence, will be judged *as a whole* 'on the last day', 'at the last trump'. The temporal - as such - will be replaced by the Eternal.

Here's how historical naturalism is overcome in its roots. History is not a continuation of nature. It is not only evolution of the type of some natural law-governed, causal process of disclosure of pre-existent potencies. There is a higher world - a world of eternal and actually true values, which opens up to man in the unconditional and endless decrees of the evaluating consciousness. Man as such, as some amphibian and as a person that is gifted with freedom, is able and should be able to overcome nature, to go beyond its borders – in 'the radiance of the eternal truth', he has to establish relations and connections with what 'is not of this world'."<sup>34</sup>

### **8. In conclusion**

It is noteworthy that since his early Sofia period, Florovsky has raised issues that will be further developed until the end of his life. If these texts have not received wide acceptance until now, it is mainly due to the difficulty in using the Bulgarian, and even the Russian language, as well as due to the lack of scholarly promotion of these texts. Not to mention that long ago the collections and the journals, where they are published, became a bibliographical rarity. However, it appears that many of the problems on which Florovsky worked long time after Sofia, have been articulated more directly and with greater clarity in the Sofia period. Obviously, this is one of the freest periods in Florovsky's creativeness. It is puzzling why during his entire lifetime he was forced to justify his participation in the Eurasian editions. He has nothing to be ashamed of, because in none of the texts is he untrue to himself. It is time for the 'Eurasian' articles to be published, so that there are no speculations over this issue anymore. Another issue is the political realization of the 'Eurasian project' itself, but Florovsky has nothing to do with this subject.

Fr. Georges' charisma is undeniable, but the success of his theological works, I believe, is due also to his personal history – his place of birth and growth, his family, the age, the emigration environment in Bulgaria and his later migration to the West. His characteristic cosmopolitanism, or Catholicity, to make it more accurate, is based on the Roman-Christian heritage of the Black Sea shore and the Balkans. Sofia has always been not only a centre of the Balkans, but also the actual centre of Greco-Roman Christianity; the boundary between the two classical languages - Greek and Latin is here. Later here will emerge the third sacred language of Christianity – Slavo-bulgarian. Odessos (modern Varna) is one of the places that St. Andrew the First-called visited during his evangelizing journey in Scythia. Ever since 57 AD there was a bishop here. Odessa was on the other shore of the Black Sea – a place which continues the Christian apostolic heritage and gave its worthy fruit in the person of Fr. Georges Florovsky.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 399-400.

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