

**ANTHROPOLOGICAL TURN IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY:
AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE¹**

I. Prehistory of the subject: the forgetting of Man

Martin Heidegger characterized the epoch of classical metaphysics in history of European philosophy as the time of the *forgetting of Being*. Development of Christian theology in the same epoch can be characterized by a similar formula, but in this case the forgetting took a different form. One can say that in Christian theology the age of Enlightenment and Modern Time was the time of the *forgetting of Man*. This trend was common to theology of all Christian confessions, and so we could say that the unity of Christians was achieved in this particular aspect, only it was unity of a somewhat negative kind. Naturally, in different confessions the forgetting of Man developed in different ways. I do not dare to embark on the discussion of Protestant theology in this place inscribed in history of Protestant thought. Instead of it, I only remind you of the great figure of Soren Kierkegaard, the Lutheran theologian, all the work of whom was a loud anthropological protest: the protest against the forgetting and neglecting of Man as a concrete human being, against ignoring Man as a single individual with his unique personality and feelings and strivings. He was deeply convinced that such “antianthropological” attitudes were fully dominant in both European philosophy and theology, and have penetrated throughout the life of his native Danish Lutheran Church. As for Roman Catholicism, its officially prescribed Thomist doctrine included quite detailed anthropology, but it was based on abstract categories not adequate to the real structure of a human person and subordinating strictly all human existence to abstract principles. As a result, a concrete single individual was represented here no better than in Protestant theology, which roused Kierkegaard’s indignation.

But, following my theme, I should concentrate mainly on my own confession, the Eastern Orthodoxy. In this case, let us enter more in detail and consider systematically, how was human person represented in the Orthodox worldview. We find that anthropological discourse in this worldview includes contents of three kinds:

- 1) the direct anthropological discourse describing empiric human being and existence;
- 2) anthropology contained (or concealed) in dogmatic theology;
- 3) anthropology having the specific form of ascetics.

Christian mind was much less of an inquiring naturalist turn than that of Ancient Greeks, and European science had its roots more in Ancient Greek than Christian mentality. Thus the direct anthropological discourse, which had to present, in the first place, naturalist and empiric view of Man, was strongly influenced by Ancient Greek anthropology. This influence is very clearly seen in all basic texts of early Christian anthropology, such as, e.g., the treatises on Man by St. Gregory of Nyssa and Nemesius of Emesa. But Ancient Greek anthropology was profoundly different from Christian one, including such fundamental difference as the dualistic character opposite to unitarian and holistic anthropology in the Biblical tradition. As a result, this first kind of discourse expressed only partially and imperfectly the authentic Christian view of Man. For the most part, the task of conveying this authentic view was fulfilled by the other two discourses: namely, Trinitarian theology presented Christian conception of being as hypostatic or personal being-communion; Christological theology determined the nature of the relation of a Christian to this being; while

¹ The lecture in the Divinity School, University of Chicago, 4 October, 2006.

ascetics, continuing Christology directly, discovered, by which concrete ways and means a human should actualize this relation. The specific feature of Orthodox spirituality is close connection between these discourses. Greek patristic theology considered itself as a discourse rooted firmly in spiritual Christocentric experience; and so it took care to be in permanent contact with the sphere, in which this experience was cultivated in its full and undistorted form. Experiential nature of Orthodox theology was constituted via its working contact with ascetics; and gradually both discourses formed a union or synthesis. This synthesis of patristics and ascetics is present already in the work of Maximus the Confessor (the 7th c.), and we have its striking manifestation in the concept of *Theosis* or deification: being a key theological concept, *Theosis* is at the same time the final goal or *telos* of the ascetical practice.

These discourses were not explicitly anthropological, however. They represented *sui generis* *crypto*-anthropology, and the extraction and apprehension of their anthropological message demanded some hermeneutical procedures. Such procedures were performed easily and almost automatically by Christian consciousness, when the rules of both *crypto*-anthropological discourses, their language and ways of coding the meanings, were known and comprehensible to this consciousness, and were in harmony with its own rules. And this was more or less the case during the epochs of Early Christianity and Middle Ages, when the both sides, the Church teaching and lay consciousness, that of an average Christian, were turned to each other in working connection and active communication.

But then the mutual understanding was destroyed. In the process of secularization, the development of human personality and society, on the one hand, and the evolution of the Church and its teaching, on the other hand, turned into the two separate and discordant processes. In the anthropological aspect, the separation implied that Christian theology became separated from actual anthropological experience of its time. Of course, *sub specie aeternitatis* it contained as before all the truths about Man and his destiny, but as a concrete cultural phenomenon, it became abstract and archaic and lost connection with the living reality of a human person. In its turn, the lay consciousness lost the ability to read the anthropological message out of both the theological and ascetical discourse. With some grounds, as we can see, it was getting convinced that theology as well as all the Church teaching are exclusively concentrated on God and “other world”, forgetting about Man and his life.

One should add that in philosophical discourse, besides the forgetting of Being, the forgetting of Man took place as well. The anthropological dimension of classical metaphysics consisted of classical European anthropological model, created chiefly in the works by Aristotle, Descartes and Kant and based on the three fundamental concepts, *Subject – Substance – Essence*. It was repeatedly noted (and demonstrated recently in detail in my texts) that this model, being extremely efficient in most variegated applied spheres, presents at the same time a very imperfect picture of a human being: it has important lacunae and does not take adequately into account integral or holistic predicates, characterizing Man as a whole (the main kinds of such predicates are religious, existential and intersubjective ones). In post-Kantian speculative metaphysics these defects – we call them *antianthropological* features – were added by new ones, the most significant of which was Hegelian objectivistic antianthropologism, reducing Man to an instrument of Absolute Idea. One easily agrees that such phenomena of philosophical antianthropologism are also a certain form of the forgetting of Man.

Summing up, we can say that the forgetting of Man stands out as one of basic characteristics of European culture of Modern Time.

II. From anthropological protest to anthropological turn

A natural reaction to the forgetting of Man was anthropological protest. It took again much different forms in the West and East of Christianity. In the West, the undisputed forerunner of the anthropological turn was Kierkegaard. At the peak of popularity and prestige of Hegelianism, which belittled anthropology to the extreme, turning Man into a slave of Absolute Mind, Kierkegaard puts defiantly into the centre of both theological and philosophical discourse a single individual who forms up his Self, actualizing fully his relation to God. But its thought remained strongly dependent on basic categories and principles of classical German idealism with its anti-anthropological foundations; and we can say that in his case anthropological protest, however ardent it was, did not yet develop into actual anthropological turn.

This example is typical of the ways of anthropology in the 19th c. For the most part, the opposition to the anti-anthropological mainstream voiced its protest, formulated some alternative goals and orientations and tried to find some concepts, on which to base an alternative, that is anthropologically oriented, theological or philosophical discourse. It was the anthropological aspect or correlate of the overcoming of metaphysics; and, like this process, for a long time it was only partially successful. The concepts chosen as possible alternatives to the metaphysical and anti-anthropological discourse still were, as a rule, largely dependent on this discourse or even belonging to it, and so they failed to produce a basis for a genuinely alternative discourse. Besides Kierkegaard, this was the case with such thinkers as Feuerbach, Schopenhauer or Vladimir Soloviev; in many other cases, like those of Carlyle, Emerson or, say, Lamennais, ringing anthropological rhetoric was not added with adequate conceptual foundations, remaining basically in the sphere of essayistic.

Strongly rhetorical as it was, Nietzsche's philosophy produced nevertheless many constructive anthropological ideas as well, and marked the transition to the actual overcoming of the forgetting of Man. Strongly antichristian as it was, it stimulated greatly nevertheless the progress of Christian theology and its anthropological turn, accelerating the crisis and rejection of the old anti-anthropological discourse. However, in the area of theology Nietzsche's influence was restricted to the West. In Orthodox theology the process of the renewal and anthropological turn started later, having different stimuli and following different patterns. What is more, it is not in theology as such that the anthropological turn in Orthodox thought had its origins: decisive role was played by the ascetical component of the anthropological discourse. In the Orthodoxy, the consciousness striving for living authentic Christian and Christocentric experience was turning usually to the ascetic tradition, *Hesychasm*, as a true core of Orthodox spirituality. This tradition knew also its periods of decline, when it was nearly forgotten and misinterpreted as a marginal phenomenon, dangerously close to ecstatic spirituality of some heretical sects, like the Messalians; but at the periods of its flourishing (the main of which was the so called Hesychast Renaissance in Byzantium in the 14th c.) its key role as the unique school of genuine authentic experience of ascending to and uniting with God stood out in full clarity. In such periods one remembered that the original meaning of the term *theology*, *θεολογία*, in the Orthodoxy was not scholarly reasoning about Divine things, but the communication of the actual first-hand experience of Divine reality given as a gift of grace at the higher stages of ascetical practice. At bad periods, however, the ascetic tradition kept its authority in the monastic and uneducated milieu only, and took forms typical of folk traditions. Hence in those periods anthropological protest expressed itself simply in the aversion to academic theology and institutionalized forms of religious life, and sympathetic turning to folk spirituality or so called "faith of simple people" (the trend well-known in the West as well).

Thus the specific mark of the Orthodox approach to the anthropological problem is its close connection with Hesychasm, a certain concrete school of anthropological and spiritual experience. Development of anthropological thought turned out here to be related directly to the destiny of hesychast tradition; and the advancement from anthropological protest to anthropological turn was triggered by another Hesychast Renaissance, which took place in Russia in the 19th c. It is often

called *Philocalic Renaissance*, since it started as a result of the publication of the *Philocalia*, a huge compendium of hesychast texts from the 4th to the 14th c. Published in the end of the 18th c. in Greek and Slavonic, *Philocalia* became enormously popular in Russia and influential in wide circles of Orthodox population as a real textbook of Christian life or rather Christian anthropology: a practical guide of how to transform one's inner reality according to the ladder of spiritual ascension, from the very start, the repentance or *metanoia*, to the final steps of approaching the *Theosis*.

Initially, *Philocalic Renaissance* involved mainly lower social strata, but, being directly connected with the book culture and tricky areas of philology, like paleography, codicology, textology and translation of ancient texts, etc., it developed gradually into a great cultural and even social phenomenon, bringing together hesychast ascetics and lay Christians. One of its main centres, the monastery *Optina pustyn'* in Central Russia, influenced and was visited by great many leaders of Russian culture, and *Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky, describing the figure and activity of the famous Elder Amvrosy of Optina, give a vivid picture of what was Hesychast Renaissance in Russia. It was a vigorous spiritual movement, which was broken by Bolshevik revolution of 1917, but managed nevertheless to fertilize theological thought, stimulating its anthropological turn.

III. Anthropological turn: The Western and Eastern scenarios

Thus we see that the anthropological turn was a pressing need in both Western and Eastern parts of European Christian culture; but both its concrete tasks and the starting situation differed in these parts significantly. In the West, it was necessary to find or create certain concepts and principles, which could provide sound and solid foundations to an anthropological discourse, alternative to classical anthropological model by Aristotle-Descartes-Kant. For Christian consciousness this anthropological task was inseparable from a religious task, that of creating a renewed vision and apprehension of Evangelical message or kerygma, which would be adequate to modern man and his world. In Roman Catholicism, the fulfillment of the religious task coincided with the development of the ideas of the Second Vatican Council and then with putting these ideas into effect. Particularly important was here the activity of Yves Congar (1904-1995), Henri de Lubac (1896-1983) and Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), who helped much to renew and enrich modern catholic theology, drawing into its orbit many elements of Patristic tradition and Eastern-Orthodox spirituality. However, the fulfillment of the anthropological task was less successful. Rigid essentialism of the Thomist doctrine was a great obstacle for anthropological renewal, while the complementing Augustinian line in catholic thought was imbued by neoplatonic influence, also of essentialist character; and, as a result, even now catholic anthropology remains attached strongly to the classical model.

In the Protestant theology and anthropology the changes were more radical. Here the religious and anthropological tasks were comprehended as essentially one task, for the fulfillment of which a certain general strategy was developed, known widely as the *anthropologization of theology*. Broadly speaking, this strategy follows the Feuerbachian line (by the famous Feuerbach maxim, "the mystery and genuine sense of theology is anthropology"), but not so far as Feuerbach himself, trying to keep the kerygma intact. It can be – and was – carried out by many ways, of which the most well-known ones are dialectical theology by Karl Barth and existential theology by Rudolf Bultmann. Barth propounds an interpretation of the New Testament discourse, which is wholly anthropological and ontological at the same time: according to him, this discourse reveals a new way of being for a Christian, constituted by the connection of this being with the being of Christ as the Son of Man; so that full anthropology can, in principle, be found in Christology. As for Bultmann, his program of demythologization is evidently a program of anthropologization as well: the core of the Scriptural discourse, made pure and clear due to the demythologization, establishes a personal existential link between man and God, and this anthropological link should become the

core of theological discourse. The other Bultmann's big contribution, the "existential interpretation" of Christian doctrine, is clearly no less anthropologically oriented.

Clearly, in both cases a real anthropological turn is achieved. But very symptomatically, rather soon it was found insufficient, and after two or three decades a new wave of anthropologization follows, which shows a strong bent to radical and high-sounding slogans, like "anthropological revolution", "transfiguration of hearts", "new messianism", etc. At closer look, however, this new trend initiated by Jurgen Moltmann, has no new properly anthropological message. It propagates mostly social ideas, while both anthropological and religious (spiritual) discourses are reduced to a supporting function. And this course of things makes one to ask questions about the limits of the anthropologization and its general sense: Isn't it drawn to simple Feuerbachianism after all? With all eschatological rhetoric of Moltmann's theology of hope, does this theology still retain fundamental ontological and anthropological meaning of Christ's victory over death?

With such general questions open, one might guess that the anthropological turn in Protestant thought still continues its evolution.

Coming back to Orthodoxy, we must say that for the most part of the 20th c. theological development on its soil does not look like the anthropological turn; but nevertheless this turn was taking place. The first decades of the 20th c. were the time of the so called Russian Religious-Philosophical Renaissance, when a large group of Christian thinkers, including such prominent figures like Nikolai Berdyaev and Pavel Florensky, developed big systems of religious philosophy, inspired mostly by the ideas of Dostoyevsky and Vladimir Soloviev. However, this bright period of Russian culture did not contribute much to the anthropological turn. Although its philosophy belonged to the general process of "Ueberwindung der Metaphysik", by Nietzsche's motto, but Russian systems were not among the most advanced in this process, remaining basically in the orbit of classical metaphysics with its forgetting of Man. For Eastern-Orthodox thought, the natural way to the anthropological turn was in the recovery of active connection with the ground of anthropological and spiritual experience. But Russian religious philosophy was not oriented to such recovery and, quite paradoxically, Religious-Philosophical Renaissance and Hesychast Renaissance remained separated phenomena.

Real advancement to the anthropological turn was achieved by theology of the Russian emigration in the mid-20th c.; and, as said above, its anthropological meaning was not directly evident. The first important step was a new interpretation of Patristic Tradition, its nature and modern role, presented by George Florovsky and known as *Neopatristic synthesis*. Articulating an intuitive vision, which was always inherent in Orthodox consciousness, Florovsky made clear and stressed that the Church Tradition and Patristic Tradition is conceived in Orthodoxy as the so called *Living Tradition*. This ancient formula means a kind of organic milieu that preserves and transmits or translates identically not some material, substantial or essentialist contents, or some formalized knowledge, but a certain experience or "*living knowledge*". Now, the experience of the Church Fathers was that of creative mastering and comprehension of their epoch, with all its religious and intellectual problems, achieved on the basis of generative Christocentric experience as the feeding source. Thus being in the tradition of the Fathers means having exactly this special kind of experience: the creative mastering experience, fed and led, in its turn, by Christocentric experience. Hence it follows one of the main theses of the theory of Neopetristic synthesis: being in the Patristic Tradition does not mean at all being tied to the letter of a set of old texts; it is not conservative, but creative and innovative principle. The most important prerequisite of the existence of such unique Tradition is its integration into the life of the Church as Body of Christ, so that the theory of Neopatristic synthesis can be properly understood only as a part of ecclesiology.

From the viewpoint of anthropology, the key point of the theory of Neopatristic synthesis was the displaying of experiential nature of Patristic tradition. The direct connection of patristic theology with Christocentric experience implied *eo ipso* the connection with the principal Orthodox school of this experience, the hesychast tradition. Naturally and unavoidably, the anthropological turn of Orthodox theology had to include the *turn to hesychasm*. As the first stage of such turn, profound theological reflection on the foundations of hesychast experience was carried out. Theological assessment of hesychast asceticism has been originally realized in the mid-14th c. mainly by St. Gregory Palamas in his theology of uncreated Divine energies, but also in all the vast body of literature produced during the so called Hesychast Controversy. Now all this palamitic and antipalamitic theology was reconsidered and analyzed in the context of the present-day theological thought.

It was really a big work. Initiated by Russian authors, such as hieromonk Basil (Krivoshein), Vladimir Lossky, John Meyendorff, it became widely known and discussed after the publication by Meyendorff in 1959 of a fundamental monograph on Palamas and also Palamas' chief text, the "Triads in the defense of holy hesychasts", both in the original and French translation. In the next decades, great many scholars from other Orthodox countries and even other Christian confessions joined the work. As a result, since the end of the Sixties it was definitely recognized that a new stage of Orthodox theology was formed up. With the regard for Florovsky's contribution, this new stage is now called usually *neopatristic and neopalamitic theology*.

It is dogmatic problems that were the centre of attention in this theology. Although the concept of uncreated Divine energy was already used in classical patristics of the 4th c. and Palamas himself took great care to provide it with the dogmatic and patristic basis, it was always alien to Western theology and for a long period after the fall of Byzantium it was forgotten even in Orthodoxy. In the detailed reconsideration of palamitic theology many new problems turned up, some arguments by Palamas' opponents were found serious enough and, as a result, all the theme of the Essence – Energy distinction and related subjects remains a field of active theological discussion. It is interesting that it is palamitic theology that became the subject of the first theological debates in postcommunist Russia: this theology is vividly discussed today by our young theologians and patrologists, and both palamitic and antipalamitic views are presented.

Integration of theology of Divine energies into the Orthodox dogmatic discourse touched upon all basic dogmatic problems and concepts. One line in this dogmatic development, which is important for anthropology, was the reassessment of the concept of the Divine Hypostasis. It was noted repeatedly that in Orthodoxy, the unfolding of the dogmatic discourse starts up with the Hypostasis, or Divine Personality, while in Western theology, it starts up with the Ousia, or Divine Essence. Stressing this starting point, putting into the centre the principle of Personality and relying much on the concept of Divine energy, Orthodox theologians, mainly, Vladimir Lossky and his modern follower, Metropolitan John Zezioulas, developed an interpretation of Orthodox Trinitarian theology known as *theology of Personality*. This theology describes Divine being as *personal being-communion*, accentuating its dialogical dynamics, conveyed by the Byzantine notion of *perichoresis* (lat. *Circumincessio*, going round, making a full circle). We mention it here because of its rich anthropological implications. In general, the fundamental Man-God relation serves as the source of the constitution of human personality and identity. Now we see that the structures of personality and identity in a human person can be characterized as being essentially some rudiments of personal being-communion, which are forming up when the fundamental relation is actualized. Such treatment of human identity and personality displays their dialogical character, and so is quite in tune with the modern vision of Man's nature. On the other hand, theology of Personality has close links with hesychast practice. In its terms, the *telos* of this practice, the *Theosis*, presents as complete participation in personal being-communion, and the practice, in its turn, is seen as a process, in which identity and personality of the adept are constituted.

We can conclude, summing up, that in this new stage of Orthodox theology, the original synthesis of the dogmatic and ascetic discourses was recovered in a new form, adequate to modern

theological context; and due to this, theology got an anthropological orientation. John Meyendorff, one of the key figures in the creation of this stage, agreed that its strategy can be characterized as the “anthropologization of theology”, although the meaning of this formula cannot be the same as in Protestant theology. Obviously, this strategy can be called equally the anthropological turn. But so far this turn remained implicit to a certain extent.

IV. Anthropological turn as a phenomenological turn

Accepting the strategy of the anthropologization of theology, Orthodox consciousness saw its key problem in the right balance between the anthropological and meta-anthropological tasks: between the need to turn to real, earthly human person and still to keep in all its force Christ’s eschatological message about victory over death. The solution of the problem was found in the union of dogmatics (or, equivalently, patristics) and ascetics; and, as a result, in the Orthodox context, the anthropological turn became the turn to hesychasm. Then, to reveal fully its anthropological essence, the turn to hesychasm had to become the direct turn to hesychast anthropology. Due to the abundance of modern studies and publications of hesychast literature, there was a good base for systematic reconstruction of this anthropology, and in the last two decades it was carried out, chiefly, in my works summed up in the monograph “The Phenomenology of Ascesis” (Moscow, 1998).

It was really a gratifying work, since it helped one to achieve a modern vision of all the field covered by the vague formula “spiritual experience”, correcting many old superstitions and mistaken views. First of all, it was necessary to define precisely the kind of this experience, which is cultivated in hesychasm. To this end, one has to draw a sharp division line between the two schools that correspond, loosely speaking, to the Western and Eastern types of mysticism:

1) Western type: individualistic and unsystematic, speculative and/or ecstatic mystical experience;

2) Eastern type: experience of holistic self-transformation, or practice of the Self (the term by Michel Foucault), following a strict method, which is created by a certain tradition and practiced strictly within this tradition.

With all definiteness, hesychasm belongs to the second type, and not to the first one. Till the recent time, this type was not clearly separated from the first one and often got mixed up with it. Hence the first task was to carry out its systematic description. A practice producing the experience of the second type is called *spiritual practice* and can be defined briefly as a holistic practice of the Self, oriented to a meta-anthropological *telos*. I mention now just two basic properties of spiritual practices:

1) Any spiritual practice has a well-defined *telos*, or higher spiritual state, and the key element in it is the *way*, by which one can reach this meta-empiric state. Thus it often calls itself just the *Way* (*Dao*, in Chinese). As for hesychasm, it calls itself the *Method*, which means that it takes especially into account that for such special Way there should be also some *way to know the Way*, and this nothing but method, according to its Greek etymology: indeed, the Greek *methodos* is *meta-hodos*, and *hodos* means way.

In any genuine spiritual practice, its method is its main treasure, gained by collective work of many centuries long. It has to be a full travel instruction for the Way, and so it includes a vast body of organizational, psychological, hermeneutical and other procedures, which form up a complete set of practical-theoretical rules or, in the Aristotelian terminology, *organon* of the kind of experience in question. Thus spiritual practice can be also defined as a practice of spiritual ascension provided with an organon. And only a few genuine organons were created in all the history of spirituality.

2) The second main property of spiritual practice is that it has necessarily *collective dimensions*. Of course, the practice as such is a process of strictly individual self-transformation.

But its organon is created in a coordinated work of many generations of adepts, and then it must be preserved and transmitted in time, which is also a collective work. Hence a certain community is needed for the existence of each spiritual practice: a community, which creates the organon of this particular spiritual practice, operates it, applying its procedures, and transmits it in time identically, reproducing itself in generations. This community is called *spiritual tradition*. Thus any spiritual practice is, in fact, a dual structure, the *dyad*, in which individual practice and collective tradition are united in such a way that the latter provides necessary conditions for the former, serving as a kind of organic milieu that surrounds it and ensures its functioning, its life. A structural parallel to such dyad is the unity of biological species and individual specimen that belongs to it and cannot exist without it.

So far we characterized hesychast experience at the global level, as a process of a definite type. We must then go down to the local level, in order to display the inner structure and mechanism of this process. One of the main facts that we discover here is close affinity of the organon of hesychast experience to the organon of intentional experience in Husserlian phenomenology. In other words, we find that hesychast consciousness works in many respects similarly to phenomenological consciousness. In order to see this, one has, however, to go into complicated details of both the hesychast organon and phenomenological method with their intricate technical apparatus. So in this lecture I restrict myself to just listing principal points in the correspondence between hesychasm and phenomenology. The complete reconstruction of this rich correspondence can be found in “The Phenomenology of Asceticism”, Section II-B.

1) *The Nitrian reduction*. The starting procedure of phenomenological method is the famous *phenomenological reduction*, which constitutes a specific cognitive perspective, restricting the horizon of consciousness to the world of the experience of a subject. Hesychast organon starts with a similar procedure, restricting the horizon of hesychast consciousness to the world of the ascetical experience and ascetical tradition and constituting a cognitive perspective, adapted to this world. Such rearrangement of consciousness has already been elaborated in the earliest period of hesychasm, that of monks-hermits in the Egyptian deserts Nitria and Scetis in the 4-6th cc.

Clearly, there is a semantic and structural parallel between the self-restricting act or operation of ascetical consciousness and the self-restricting act of an ascetic retiring to the desert for strictly solitary life. The drive to the desert continued, turning inwards, and the outer self-restriction, undergoing an interiorization, transformed into the inner one, a certain way of apprehending reality. And that’s how the ancient prototype of phenomenological reduction was born.

2) *The Sinaitic intentionality*. The key characteristic of phenomenological consciousness is its *intentionality*, which is the ability of putting an intellectual object into the focus of intellectual sight and then reaching gradually its more and more distinct vision, till perfect clarity: *clara et distincta visio*, by Husserl’s formula. As Husserl stresses, in this special ability the Aristotelian opposition of activity and passivity is overcome. As for hesychast practice, the core of its ascending process is the indissoluble union of the two elements, prayer and attention. Both of them must take a special form: for the prayer, it is the technique of “incessant prayer”, and for the attention, it is so called *soberness*. Soberness (*nepsis*, in Greek) is a purely hesychast concept, which rose to the principal role in the hesychast organon in the period of the so called *Sinaitic hesychasm*, in the 7-10th cc., when the main hesychast centres were the monasteries on the mount Sinai. When a hesychast succeeds in starting the process of the incessant prayer, this fragile process can very easily be broken or distorted, and it needs to be guarded permanently and carefully of any interference. Soberness or watchfulness of the consciousness is its constant and watchful readiness to protective reaction. Obviously, such readiness implies the ability to keep the protected prayer space in the focus of intellectual sight. It is equally obvious that such regime of functioning of the consciousness is beyond the Aristotelian opposition. Both soberness in hesychasm and intentionality in phenomenology are productive and uniting concepts: each of them is the centre of a conceptual complex, describing a definite state or modus of consciousness; and these moduses are basically similar.

Thus we can say, summing up, that in the period of the Sinaite hesychasm, the discovery of intentionality has been made.

3) *The Athonite noesis*. Husserl and his orthodox followers stated always that phenomenological method cannot and should not be applied to phenomena of religious and mystical experience. In general, our analysis agrees with this position, but it makes also some corrections and reservations to it and, what is more important, goes further. We identify concrete elements of the phenomenological method, which make it not valid in the sphere of mystical experience, and present the generalizations, making it possible to extend the method to this sphere.

Clearly, the said above represents already some corrections to the Husserlian position. The experience of spiritual practice is a vast sphere, and surely not all contents of this sphere are of specifically mystical nature, that is marked by the presence of other horizon of Being. The practice has the ladder structure, and we demonstrate that, at least, at the lower parts of this “Ladder of Paradise” the hesychast consciousness works in the accordance with the paradigm of phenomenological reduction and intentionality. But at the higher steps, when the ascending process gets close to its meta-anthropological *telos*, and its meta-anthropological aspects are manifested more and more clearly, the accordance breaks down.

The anthropological transformation at these steps takes distinctly holistic character, involving all the levels of human organization, intellectual, psychic and somatic. First of all, such character manifests itself in the sphere of perceptive modalities: they start changing radically and formation of new holistic perceptions takes place – or rather of a single modality uniting all the old ones (*synesthesia*) and belonging not to a separate bodily organ, but to a human being as a whole (*panesthesia*). Together with all functions of consciousness, its grasping ability, or intellectual sight, is changing too, and the object of grasping changes as well, becoming meta-empiric. Thus the work of hesychast consciousness near by the *telos* of its practice loses any direct resemblance to the intentional act. Or, putting it the other way round, phenomenological method cannot describe mystical experience.

However, our reconstruction of hesychast practice makes it possible to find some generalizations of basic phenomenological concepts that are specially fit for the higher stages of this practice. Indeed, the Husserlian intentionality is associated in a well-defined way with the modality of sight. Now, accepting that the key characteristics of hesychast experience near by its *telos* is the new modality of holistic sight, we can associate with this modality in the same way a new concept of *holistic intentionality*. Like its classical prototype, this concept should also be productive, which means that it generates a certain conceptual complex; and this complex can be considered as a holistic analogue or extension of the modus of intentionality of phenomenological consciousness. Like the holistic sight, this new modus of holistic intentionality belongs not to the consciousness anymore, but to a new holistically transformed anthropological reality, which forms up in the approaching to the meta-anthropological *telos* of spiritual practice.

The Orthodox and hesychast view of reality is teleological, which means that the meaning of phenomena and processes is supposed to be concentrated in their final; and *telos* is a specific concept of Orthodox thought, meaning not an end simply, but the end imbued with all the meaning of what is ending. Hence it follows that in our parallel between hesychast experience and intentional act, the concluding phases of the latter, at which all the constituents of the meaning of an intentional object are joined together, that is the phases of the *noesis* and *noemas*, correspond to the higher stages of hesychast practice with their holistic nature. In the history of hesychasm, these stages were elaborated most carefully and much discussed during the Hesychast Renaissance in Byzantium in the 14th c., when the main centre of hesychast tradition was in the Athos. Thus it is mainly this Athonite hesychasm that tells us, which structures of hesychast experience might correspond to phenomenological *noesis* and *noemas*. And we conclude, summing up, that the Husserlian intentional act can be adapted to describing hesychast mystical experience, if the noetic and noematic phases of this act are modified in a specific way, basing on the new concept of holistic intentionality.

V. Conclusion

Reviewing all the development of the anthropological turn in Orthodox theology, we see that the last stage of this turn brings forth some new moments. Anthropological discourse becomes here completely direct and explicit, contrary to what it was in old theology. At the same time, it is oriented to *Theosis* and includes meta-anthropological aspects, thus avoiding the danger of the empiricist reduction and elimination of the ontological core of Christianity (which takes place in postmodernist theology). The other moment is a close connection and intertwining of theological and philosophical discourses. Such connection was characteristic of Russian religious philosophy, which was flourishing in the beginning of the 20th c., with big names like Soloviev, Berdyaev or Pavel Florensky. However, this philosophy was still basically in the tradition of classical metaphysics, and the connection of the theology and philosophy took often the form of their loose mixing. Now, the philosophical discourse is phenomenology, and it makes big difference. Phenomenological treatment of hesychast practice produces anthropological discourse, which sticks to the ground of experience, following the strategy of the overcoming of metaphysics and Husserl's motto *Zur Sachen selbst!* At the same time, it brings together Orthodox spirituality and Western philosophy; and I hope that it could contribute to the East-West dialogue in Christian thought, which is so important for finding the constructive answer of this thought to the challenge of modernity.