

## PHILOSOPHY VERSUS THEOLOGY: NEW AND OLD PATTERNS OF AN ANCIENT LOVE-HATE

The problem of the relation of philosophy and theology could give us a good illustration of the Hegelian thesis on the coincidence of the logical and historical principles of structuring. It would be quite possible to construct for this relation a kind of the tree of Porphyry, i.e. the scheme including all logically possible variants of it, and then to ascertain that all these variants have been realized in the history of European thought. In this text I do not plan to pursue such an ambitious project, however. I shall try only to reconstruct the genesis of the relation in question (which determines its further development to the great extent) and describe its principal types and paradigms. Of course, for the most part they are well-known and well-studied, but we shall also point out some types developed within Eastern-Christian discourse and usually not taken into account in Western discussions of the philosophy vs. theology problem. These types will be seen to add significant new elements to the centuries-old context.

I. The idea that philosophy and theology are two different and divided spheres – and hence the problem of relationship between these spheres – originate with the Christian era. Such division means the existence of two different (not in the degree of perfection, but in the essence and nature) types of the relation of Reason to Divine reality and the idea of this dual relation has always been deeply alien to the Greek consciousness. Even in the neoplatonic finale, when this consciousness was dying, it was dying as an *integral* consciousness and its relation to Divine reality was conceived also as integral one and belonging entirely to the sphere of philosophy. Of course, there was also the sphere of religion and cult, that of not intellectual, but practical relations with gods. But even with respect to this sphere there existed a strong trend to unity and synthesis and the latter has really and repeatedly been achieved: in orphism, pythagoreanism, neoplatonism. In Jamblichus and Proclus philosophizing is conceived as liturgy and theurgy. The term “theology” (θεολογία, θεολογική) has sometimes been used for some higher forms of knowledge (e.g. for the theory of the Unmoved Mover in Aristotle), but everything that can be called so surely finds its place within philosophy as the kingdom of Reason actualizing itself in cognitive and auto-cognitive activity. Where else can Reason actualize itself better than in the love for wisdom?

It is difficult to deny that the division between philosophy and theology is rooted in the primordial dividedness and confliction of European consciousness. As well as these features, the sources of this phenomenon go back to the genesis of Christianity, its dual Judaeo-Hellenic roots. In the precise sense and terms the opposition philosophy vs. theology has been formed up only in the late Middle Ages, but the actual history of their relationship starts up with the beginning of Christianity. Of course, at that time Christian theology has not yet been reflected upon and conceived as a special discipline, but it did exist and was conscious of itself as a special kind of thought radically distinct from Hellenic philosophy. Philosophy was considered then as an endemic form of pagan thought which does not and cannot know Christ. But in Christ, as said in Scriptures, “dwelleth the fullness of godhead” (Col. 2,9) whence it follows that when philosophy claims to speak about Divine things, its speech is either empty words or pure deceit. Thus Christian discourse of Divine things should be a different kind of discourse. This logical deduction of the opposition of philosophy and Christian discourse on God has been already performed in the New Testament by Paul who has formulated it clearly in the Epistle to Colosseans: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit” (Col. 2,8). Here philosophy and “vain deceit” (κενήσ ἀπάτης) are basically synonymous. In the time of the apologists this argument is reproduced regularly and with Tertullian it finds the famous aphoristic

expression: “What do Athens and Jerusalem have in common? or Academy and Church?” Tertullian’s aphorisms are often exaggerated and biased, but in this case his position is well-founded and, in particular, in this place of his treatise “De Praescriptione Haereticorum” the aforesaid Paul’s words are quoted.

Thus before even the full maturing of Christian theology, clear opposition of this theology and philosophy already took shape. In its essence, the opposition included two principal moments. Firstly, in the Christian relation to God tasks and attitudes of thought were radically different: the attitude of cognition was replaced by the attitude of communion and striving to God as Living and Personal, i.e. the specific attitude of the sphere of personal being. Hence, secondly, the attitude to human thought as such was also changing. The Greek culture and cultivation of thought as such, as the element of pure Reason and art of cognition and self-cognition, -- all this ceased to be a special goal and value and was left aside in favor of some other principles and values which stood behind rather obscure formulas “striving to Christ” and “union with Christ” and could not be presented very clearly so far. As a result, philosophy and theology were confronting each other as Athens vs. Jerusalem, cognition vs. communion and pure thought vs. holistic striving to Christ.

Such was the starting phase of the relationship. Then comes the stage of patristics when this relationship changes noticeably. The character of the changes is subtle and the important thing is that it is presented and assessed very differently in the Western and Eastern Christianity. It is here that the watershed of the Eastern and Western theological traditions originates and deep typological distinction of spirituality of the Christian East and West springs up. In the West, in the last two centuries the famous successively changing schools of protestant theology (with the special role belonging to the school of Karl Barth) developed the conception which characterized patristics as the “acute hellenization” and “hellenistic grafting” to the Christian stock. According to this conception, as a result of the patristic stage Christian thought has adopted structures of the Greek and Hellenistic thought and became actually a branch of this thought, joining the tradition of platonism and neoplatonism. Hence there followed numerous conclusions, two of which are essential for our theme. First, the Christian discourse on God has lost its initial opposition to philosophy: it has turned into theology in the Greek sense, and this theology, in accordance with nature of the Greek thought, was belonging to the sphere of philosophy as the universal discourse of Reason. Secondly, the well-known position has been formed which contrasted the early Christianity as the only genuine one with patristics and all the post-Constantinian Christianity.

The Orthodoxy always held strongly different views, however. Here one never considered patristics as purely theoretical and hellenized discourse, since one never lost sight of the fact that at the same epoch of Late Antiquity and in the same Christian milieu, parallel to the creation of the theoretical text of patristics, the practical genre of asceticism, i.e. the Christian school of spiritual practice, was being created. All this sphere of spiritual and mystical practice was evidently and intensely inspired by the direct striving to Christ and it was impossible to believe that here there is any loss or weakening of the genuine Christocentric pathos which animated early Christians. Moreover, asceticism was working out its own discourse which gradually developed from purely practical and applied one to an elaborated discourse of mystical experience, sometimes called *mystical theology*. That is why the Orthodoxy finds in the fruits of the patristic stage not only theology as a theoretical discourse (whose degree of the hellenization is disputable, by the way), but also the mystico-ascetical discourse which is an experiential discourse of the God – Man relationship realized as a personal and direct relationship. Usually it is also called “theology”, but here the term is given another and specific meaning: it means the direct experiential knowledge of Divine reality achieved in higher stages of spiritual ascent to God so that it is synonymous to mystical union with God. Thus there are two very different notions, the Western theoretical one and Eastern mystical and experiential one, denoted by the same term. For a long time this fact was producing confusion in all discussions of the relationship of the Eastern and Western

Christian discourses. Russian authors sometimes tried to remove the confusion, keeping the Latin term *theologia* for the Western notion and using its Russian loan translation, *bogosloviye*, for the Eastern one. For our subject it is essential not to confuse the two notions, and to this end we shall use the notation Theology, with the capital T, for the Eastern notion.

The existence of two different kinds of the cognition of God and discourse on God was clearly realized in Byzantine thought. In his polemics with Barlaam of Calabria who described the cognition of God ignoring the way of Theology, st. Gregory Palamas (in the First of his “Triads in the defense of saint hesychasts”, composed in 1438) presented an elaborated exposition of this way as a full-fledged cognitive mode distinct from the way of theology and capable to reach the knowledge of Divine reality inaccessible in this way. It is important that the spheres of theology and Theology were characterized as not isolated from each other, but closely connected. In this connection Theology played the leading role of a completely reliable, certified in the experience spiritual pivot. (Though it must be said that real work of Orthodox theologians often lost its living connection with and subordination to Theology, and such loss was traditionally one of the main points in the self-criticism of the Orthodox thought). Thus for the Orthodox consciousness patristics was neither a deviation from early Christianity nor hellenized theology, but a certain synthesis of theology and Theology as two different modes of the discourse on God. In other words, in this consciousness there existed no patristics in the Western sense, as an isolated sphere of theoretical knowlegde; instead of it, there was a united Eastern Christian discourse representing a synthesis of patristics and asceticism.

Seen in the historical and comparative perspective, this different structure of the discourse brought forward both advantages and risks. The key advantage was the working mechanism (secured by the ascetical component of the discourse) of the identical reproduction and translation of the authentic living experience of communion with Christ. According to the Orthodox view, there is the continuous historical succession of forms, in which this experience is identically preserved: the experience of apostles – then martyrs – then ascetics. On the other side, the primacy of the christocentric experience implied the perpetuation of the incompatibility between the Christian discourse and Greek philosophy. One could even think easily that the incompatibility extended to philosophy as such, to very principles of the philosophical discourse: indeed, the christocentric experience belonged entirely to the sphere of personal and dialogical being-communion, while all philosophical categories, structures, methods corresponded to impersonal being and reality. Thus the status and situation of philosophy within the Eastern Christian discourse became ambiguous and problematic. As for the problem of the relation of philosophy and theology, it became more complicated: this relation turned out to involve three instead of two different discourses, and in this triple relationship, theology tended to get closer to philosophy, while Theology was rather hostile to and suspicious of the latter. Due to this complicated and muddled situation, including conflicting trends, the relation of philosophy and theology in Orthodoxy could never be presented, as it was in the West, as a set of well-defined paradigms. Instead of it, it took usually confused and contradictory or even schizophrenic forms.

2. This early and formative stage of the Christian thought determined to the great extent the further development of the problem considered. Let us outline sketchily the principal phases of this development in the West. The sphere of theology did not possess that intimate and complicated connection with spiritual practice. Theory and practice of the God – Man relationship were much more distanced here. Having no dependence upon ascetic experience and “mystical theology”, theology developed simply as one of theoretical disciplines within the general cultural context, where it had philosophy as its nearest neighbor. Its constitutive norms were very close to those of philosophy, as they were founded not on the primacy of experience, but on logical rules and theoretical criteria. The only exception was the presence of the Church dogmas in the theological discourse. In the East (see below) the dogmas were conceived as experiential facts, referring to the charismatic experience of the Councils inspired by Holy Spirit,

but in the West they were rather understood as “dogmatic formulas”, speculative statements of a special kind<sup>1</sup>. These formulas had to be accepted as absolute truths, but at the same time they were enigmatic, aporetic and impossible to prove; and without the support in the experience their privileged status seemed strange and unjustified. Quite naturally, the reason questioned this status, often revolted against it – and all this implied that the relation of philosophy and theology became the subject of close and intense reflection in the medieval consciousness.

All kinds of scenarios and paradigms for this relation were permanently put forward, analyzed and discussed. As soon as both disciplines have definitely got their constitution in the scholasticism (after Abelard, basically), in a short period all the principal paradigms of their relationship have been discovered. Sygère de Brabant introduces the paradigm of the *mutually exclusive relation*: positions of philosophy and theology are necessarily in contradiction with each other. John of Salisbury and the school of Chartres put forward the paradigm of the *mutually independent relation*: in contrast to Sygère, philosophy and theology cannot contradict each other, because they do not have common ground and object. The sphere of philosophy is experiential knowledge, discursive logic and rational methodology, while that of theology is the economy of salvation which is governed by supernatural laws. But it is the third variant that became predominant and was recognized as the orthodox one. It was the paradigm of the *inclusive relation*, stated by the thomism and resumed in the famous motto: *Philosophia est ancilla theologiae*.

For the further history of European mind there remained not many important elements which could be added to the medieval achievements. In the epochs to come, the ways of philosophy and theology part more and more. The problem of their relationship loses its edge and there are no more reasons to rank it among central problems of European thought. There remained just one unexploited position in our hypothetical tree or table of possible paradigms, and this position was not exactly new one. In fact, it was the most ancient hellenic paradigm discussed above: the paradigm integrating theology into philosophy and considering philosophy as the universal discourse on the meta-empirical and transcendent. Unavoidably, in the medieval consciousness this paradigm has been pushed aside and not less unavoidably, in the Modern Age with progressive secularization of thought it had to come back. As we know, in the most systematic and profound way this paradigm of the *inverse inclusive relation* has been realized by Hegel. After complicated evolution in the early stages of his thought, in his mature system he revives the classical position of Greek metaphysics: “Philosophy itself is liturgy and religion” and “religion consists precisely in the cognition of God”<sup>2</sup>. According to Hegel, the task of religion in its highest stage is to become “scientific religion”, which completely displays its contents in speculative forms; and this task can be fulfilled solely by philosophy. As for theology, it always tends to treat speculative forms in an arbitrary and imperfect way and if it succeeds to overcome this tendency, it only achieves the level of philosophy. “In point of fact, it is philosophy that is orthodox nowadays... it is philosophy that states and preserves the basic truths of Christianity which were always valid”<sup>3</sup>. Since such position is directly opposite to that of the thomism, the

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<sup>1</sup> We should warn, however, that here as well as in other points of divergence the differences between the Christian East and West must not be presented as binary oppositions. Surely, the Western Christian consciousness recognized the presence of the charismatic-experiential dimensions in the dogmas of faith, and the Eastern and Western interpretation of the dogma diverged not in the essence, but in accents, in the role and importance of various aspects. Still, these delicate distinctions proved fairly capable to generate quite different course of the spiritual evolution in both parts of the Christian world. It may be added also that in the last decades, after the II<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, catholic consciousness clearly moved eastwards in its assessment of the dogma. Commenting, e.g., on the new (1983) Codex of the Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church, the dean of the faculty of the Canon Law of the Papal Gregorian University in Rome Fr. Gianfranco Ghirlanda, S.J., says: “Council becomes the hermeneutical criterion... the interpretation of the canons must include a new element, the spiritual one”. // *Puncta. Catholic Quarterly* (Moscow). Vol.1-2, 2001, p.147.

<sup>2</sup> G.W.F. Hegel. *Philosophy of Religion*. Vol.1. Moscow, 1975, p.220 (In Russian).

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.*, vol.2. Moscow, 1977, p.213 (In Russian).

polemic of the thomism and later neothomism with Hegel and hegelianism became a permanent element of the state of the philosophy vs. theology problem.

Of course, in the Modern Age all the paradigms described have repeatedly reappeared and were formulated and analyzed anew and in new terms. In this process, after long predominance of the paradigms of mutual exclusion (which are of conflict nature) and paradigms of inclusion (which are asymmetric and unequal in rights), in 20 c. the distinct turn to the predominance of the paradigm of mutual independence of philosophy and theology began to show. It is precisely to this paradigm that Heidegger's solution belongs which he presented in the talk "Phenomenology and theology" (1927) devoted to Rudolf Bultmann, his frequent interlocutor at that time. As in John of Salisbury formerly, philosophy and theology do not have here common ground and space, where they could meet and conflict with each other. Heidegger places theology in the same sphere of the *ontical*, where scientific knowledge is located, since he defines theology as the "science of faith" (providing this formula with great many senses: it is the science studying both the contents and manifestations of faith, it is also the "conceptual interpretation of Christian existence", etc. ). But philosophy is placed in the sphere of the *ontological*, which is characterized by different constitution and type of discourse. Philosophical discourse displays different dimensions of reality. It may function as the "ontological corrective amendment to ontical contents of basic theological notions", but such function is not necessary for philosophy and it does not create any inner ties between philosophy and theology. On the contrary, "there is no such thing as "Christian philosophy", it would be simply wooden iron"<sup>4</sup>. In protestant theology this Heidegger's position is supported and developed by Paul Tillich. As Tillich states, "Philosophy deals with the structure of being in itself; theology deals with the meaning of being for us"<sup>5</sup>, and we easily recognize in this thesis a variation of Heidegger's theme "Philosophy vs. theology as the ontological vs. ontical". The final conclusion of Tillich is a straightforward statement of the mutual independence paradigm: "Thus there is no conflict between theology and philosophy, and there is no synthesis either – for ... [a] common basis is lacking"<sup>6</sup>. It should be added, however, that Heidegger's – and, following him, also Tillich's position includes a noticeable element of the Greek tendency to place theology under or within philosophy since the ontological or "being in itself" has the indisputable essence and value primacy over the ontical or "being for us", and the latter can be interpreted as a *sui generis* "applied" and secondary side of the former. Another important remark is that the concept of theology in both Heidegger and Tillich corresponds to the Western and especially protestant tradition. It does not take into account specific features of the Eastern Christian discourse on God. In our terms, all the development described leaves the problem "philosophy vs. Theology" untouched.

Finally, there is a special case which should be discussed too. Besides all the paradigms considered, European thought was always using one more paradigm which cannot be found on the tree of logical relations since it evades of working out well-defined concepts of philosophy, theology and their relationship. In other words, this paradigm corresponds to the *diffuse relation*; and it was always characteristic of the gnostic type of thought. Gnosticism claimed to represent the synthetic way of knowledge which is not restricted by the bounds of either philosophy or theology, being a synthesis of them or the "third kind" of the discourse on God. This gnostic ideal has the obvious connection with the Greek ideal of integral knowledge and consciousness which we discussed. There is an important distinction, however: the Greeks were creating their type of integral knowledge organically and *ab ovo*, while the gnosticism deals with the already divided state of things. It strives to get back lost integrity as lost paradise, and to achieve its end, it takes ready products of various traditions and epochs, of different types of thought and starts joining them. By definition, this is called "syncretism", the principal generic feature of the gnostic thought. (Of course, in the decline of the tradition, neoplatonism becomes syncretic too, so that

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<sup>4</sup> M.Heidegger. *Phänomenologie und Theologie*. Frankfurt a.M., 1970, S.32.

<sup>5</sup> P.Tillich. *Systematic theology*. London 1968, p.25.

<sup>6</sup> *Ib.*, p.31.

the border between the two currents is delicate and sometimes disappearing). Naturally, both philosophy and theology consider the claim of gnosis on the role of higher synthesis as unjustified. In its real forms gnosis is not a higher but rather intermediate type of knowledge: it is intermediate, because its principles and notions are not well-defined and due to this belong to neither philosophy nor theology. By its typology, gnostic thought is a para-scientific and para-philosophical form of thought, which rejects the elaboration of methodology and concepts and lacks the criteria, which could tell the authentic and verifiable from effects of illusion, imagination and arbitrariness. All scholars agree in such qualification of gnosticism, starting with Hegel, whose “Lectures in the History of Philosophy” define gnostic thought as “vague and fantastic constructions” and state that “the gnosticism ... clothes its representation in forms suggested by imagination”<sup>7</sup>. Because of merging all borders, the problem of the relation of philosophy and theology is not even stated properly in gnosis. One can only say that here the two spheres draw closer to each other, overlap or merge in a certain vague sense.

Nevertheless the thought of such kind arises regularly in the intellectual history, becoming more popular and widespread in periods of crises and big changes. In the wake of classical gnosticism of Late Antiquity, there appear numerous currents and isolated phenomena of the gnostic type; taken as a whole, they form a certain marginal line of European philosophizing. One can point out here a good number of medieval mystical doctrines, mystical theosophy and philosophy of nature of Renaissance, religious philosophy of German romantics, with the theories by Novalis and Baader, in the first place, the “free theosophy” and philosophy of revelation of late Schelling, and also a big part of Russian religious philosophy of the Silver Age. Finally, this line was always closely surrounded by a large aura of openly marginal and eccentric movements or groups, including mystical sectarians, adepts of occult teachings and like. Nowadays this aura is booming again.

**3.** In the Eastern-Christian discourse the relation of philosophy and theology did not have so rich history. Of course, the principal reason of this is that both spheres were here much less developed – always, with the important exception of two periods, the epoch of patristics and time of hesychast disputes and palamitic theology. This reason is not unique one, however. As explained above, in Orthodoxy, besides theology as a scholarly discipline, there existed traditionally the discourse denoted by us as Theology and expressing not theoretical knowledge, but direct communion with God, achieved in higher stages of spiritual and especially prayer experience. The triple relation philosophy – theology – Theology, which emerges here, was never analyzed systematically so far, and we shall try to outline its principal features.

Specific characteristics of the Eastern Christian discourse begin to form up in the period of patristics, and to see them correctly, one needs first of all to understand the Orthodox conception of this phenomenon, which the Orthodoxy considers as its unshakeable doctrinal basis. In its structure, patristics is a synthetic discourse, combining the usual theoretical discourse of syllogistic constructions, very specific and based on aporias dogmatic discourse, and experiential discourse of the communion with God (as mystico-ascetical practice). In spite of this heterogeneity, the patristical discourse holds inner unity. Mystico-ascetical discourse of the communion with God is exactly what we called Theology, and its essence is defined by a contemporary hesychast teacher as follows: “Theology renders neither inventions of human reason nor results of critical studies; it is the narration of the being into which a man was introduced by Holy Spirit”<sup>8</sup>. As for the dogmatic discourse, it is rooted in the discourse of the Oecumenical Councils and it is important that the latter discourse can also be considered as Theology. Church dogmas are basic doctrinal statements and formulas worked out by the Councils and the specific nature of the dogmatic discourse can be understood via the

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<sup>7</sup> G.W.F. Hegel. Lectures in the History of Philosophy. Coll. Works, vol.XI. Moscow, 1936, p.92 (In Russian).

<sup>8</sup> Hieromonk Sophrony. Silouan the Elder. Moscow, 1991, p. 153 (in Russian).

phenomenon of Council. Ontology corresponding to the patristico-ascetical discourse is characterized by the fundamental predicate of *openness*: in this ontology man's mode of being (being-as-presence or being-as-consciousness) has no autonomous and self-sufficing definition, but is constituted by a certain open, directed outwards relation, namely, the God – Man relation. From this viewpoint, Theology is the discourse of the experience of being as the experience of the constitutive God – Man relation; and in the phenomenon of Council this experience acquires a new dimension: *it is brought out into the horizon of intersubjectivity*. With this dimension, it also acquires new nature, becoming a new kind of experience, namely, the conciliary-ecclesiastic or intersubjective experience of the constitutive God – Man relation. This is basically the essence of the famous concept of “conciliarity” (*sobornost*) introduced by Khomiakov and developed by Russian theologians. In sacramental terms, the main predicate of this “conciliary” kind of experience is defined as the presence of the element of inspiration by Holy Spirit, and the dogmatic discourse emerges as the expression of the conciliary experience. As a result, we conclude that the patristico-ascetical discourse possesses a united experiential ground which includes the conciliary experience (generating the dogmatic discourse) and mystico-ascetical experience (generating the discourse of spiritual practice or direct personal communion with God). The two kinds of experience are connected in such a way that the first kind is an intersubjective extension of the second one.

For the Orthodox consciousness the main element in the triple structure philosophy – theology – Theology is the last one, Theology. It is basically this element, the discourse of the Orthodox mystico-ascetical practice<sup>9</sup>, that represents the specific nature of the Eastern Christian discourse as distinct from the Western Christian one and expresses the primordial incompatibility between the Christian christocentric experience and Greek philosophy. In Sect.1 we described the initial state of the problem “philosophy vs. theology” in the Eastern Christian discourse and raised the question whether the incompatibility mentioned extends from the early stage of the Christian thought to all the history of the Eastern Christian discourse, meaning the complete incompatibility of Theology and philosophy as such. Let us analyze this question, which can be considered as the central one for the destiny of the “philosophy vs. theology” relation in the Christian East.

It is not difficult to identify concrete features of both discourses which cause their incompatibility. Theology is the discourse or narration of mystical experience of direct personal communion with God. It corresponds to the ontology of personal being-communion and formulates itself in terms of dialogical communication and both Divine and human energetic characteristics. Greek philosophy corresponded to the ontology of impersonal being and formulated itself in platonic idealist and/or aristotelian essentialist categories. The two discourses had their source (*ἀρχή*) in different kinds of primary generating experience; in other words, they had different archaeology and it is mainly this archaeological difference that made them

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth making a terminological remark. What we call “practice” here is the process of spiritual and holistic ascent to God, which the ascetical (hesychast) tradition itself divides into two successive phases called *πρᾶξις* and *θεωρία*, respectively. These ascetical terms should not be identified with “practice” and “theory” in the usual sense: in this sense they both are practical and theoretical at the same time, since they mean holistic activities involving intellectual levels of a human being (hence “theoretical”) as well as somatic levels (hence “practical”). On the other side, *θεωρία* is often identified, in both Western and Orthodox authors, with the ecstatic state of contemplation of Divine reality in the traditions of ecstatic and/or speculative mysticism. This identification is also wrong: hesychast mysticism is neither ecstatic nor speculative, and the goal of its practice, which is deification (*θέωσις*), is neither cognition nor contemplation of God, nor even “contemplation-union” (the term used by some authors, trying to be more accurate). Instead of the cognitive-contemplative paradigm, deification should be conceived in the dialogical one: it is the actual participation-integration of man into ontological dynamics of Divine being, i.e. the dialogical (perichoretic) dynamics of personal (hypostatic) being. Hence *θεωρία* is also a dialogical activity, in which the dialogism of the incessant prayer (*πρᾶξις νοερά*) ascends by means of synergy (*συνεργία*) and turns into the perichoretic dialogism of *θέωσις*. One can say that identifying *θεωρία* with “theory of Divine things” is a reduction, completely equivalent to identifying Theology with theology and meaning the substitution of a very special experiential discourse with that of syllogistic constructions.

incompatible with each other. Classical European metaphysics which was developing after Descartes inherited the foundations and basic principles of Greek philosophy and *eo ipso* it also inherited its incompatibility with Theology. This fact became a *sui generis* birth trauma for Russian philosophy which tried to integrate itself into the discourse of Western metaphysics, preserving at the same time fidelity to the Orthodox spirituality.

Chances for changing this state of things appeared with the crisis processes in European thought of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. The essence of these processes can be conveyed best of all by means of one of famous Nietzsche slogans: *Überwindung der Metaphysik*. The crisis was in fact a fruitful renewal which took form of a complex and variegated movement including such different figures as Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Bergson, Husserl, Vladimir Soloviev... Common ground for all pieces in this mosaic was the trend to overcome basic stereotypes of classical metaphysics, its discourse of speculative constructions and monistic systems based on idealist principles and essentialist categories. Some of new currents and theories had noticeable elements of affinity to Eastern Christian discourse – and hence Theology. Usually existential philosophy is mentioned in this connection, and it is indisputable indeed that the existential discourse restoring holistic image of man, describing phenomena of inner life and openly hostile to abstract philosophizing comes nearer to the Orthodox holistic and energetic vision of man and reality. Prominent Orthodox theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. such as Florovsky, Meyendorff, Yannaras e.a. displayed and discussed various points of affinity between this vision and existential thought: the thinking of the Eastern Church Fathers was characterized as existential one, parallels between theology of Divine energies and heideggerian conception of ecstatic participation in being were drawn, etc. As a result, today the presence of common elements in the existential and Orthodox discourse is widely recognized and rather exaggerated than underrated<sup>10</sup>.

The process of the “overcoming of metaphysics” created, however, one more field, contiguous to Eastern Christian discourse: the field of Husserlian phenomenology. Its affinity to this discourse was practically unnoticed till recent years, but nevertheless it is more essential and profound than that of existential philosophy. The core of this affinity is the far-going parallel between the whole economy of the consciousness (its tasks, attitudes and mechanisms) in the phenomenological (intentional) act and mystico-ascetical practice. According to old views (voiced by many philosophers, starting with Husserl himself), phenomenology, one of the most rigorous tools of modern thought, represents not a parallel, but the opposition to the discourse of mystical experience, reputedly the most subjective and arbitrary one. In many aspects, this opposition is obvious and indisputable, so that the relation of phenomenology and hesychasm (or Theology) is a good example of *coincidentia oppositorum*. The phenomenological discourse is intricate, however, the mystical one very specific, and this makes the demonstration and analysis of *coincidentia* a ponderous task, to which most of my monograph “The Phenomenology of Ascesis” (Moscow, 1998) is devoted. Here I shall restrict myself to only a few principal points.

A) The fact of crucial importance is that spiritual or mystico-ascetic practice is very far from being arbitrary and subjective: it is a methodical discipline scrupulously elaborated by centuries traditions. Both phenomenology and hesychast practice represent a school of lived experience (*das Erlebnis*) which develops rigorous procedures of organization, testing and interpretation of the experience. In both schools these procedures form a full-scale *organon*, i.e. practical-theoretical canon of a definite kind of complete experience (“complete” means completely displaying a certain *φύσις*). The hesychast organon is based on the opposition of the true and false experience and the necessity (implied by the opposition) to test the experience in order to establish its truthfulness. The testing represents an intricate structure of criteria and procedures, but now I want to point out just one capital fact: all the arsenal of the means and

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<sup>10</sup> Critical analysis of the relation of the existential and Eastern Christian discourse can be found in my book “The Diptych of Silence. Ascetical anthropology in theological and philosophical presentation”. Moscow, 1991 (in Russian).

principles of the testing is founded on the Tradition and refers to it, to the whole corpus of the experience collected in all its history (including Sacred History given in Scripture). The Tradition appears here as a special fundamental concept: the complete corpus of the (tested and certified as) true experience of all its members in all times since its birth. It stands out as a complete and self-sufficing world, the full Universe of the hesychast experience and organon. Each (piece of) experience is to be tested by means of placing into this world and should be considered in its perspective. As a result, all the arbitrary, accidental, psychologically subjective elements of the experience will be recognized as such and removed.

What we described is nothing but a certain variation of the phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological act places experiential (belonging to *lived* experience, i.e. perceived) contents into the world of subject's experience, constructs the world-as-experience, bracketing everything not belonging to the experiential horizon, and purifies the experience in the perspective of this world, removing all elements that do not correspond to structures of transcendental subjectivity. Thus phenomenological *world-as-experience* and ascetical *Universe of the Tradition* perform the same (highly nontrivial) function: they constitute a special space of the experience, in the perspective of which certain specific vision of reality and mode of consciousness get formed. The two spaces correspond to radically different kinds of experience, but at the same time the two approaches have discovered basically the same way to realize the principle of the primacy of experience.

B) In the elaborated economy of the hesychast ascending anthropological process the crucial role belongs to two factors, whose interplay forms a *sui generis* dynamical frame of the process: soberness, or attention (*νηψις, προσοχή*) and incessant prayer. As st. Philotheos of Sinai (9<sup>th</sup> c.) said, "Attention and prayer ... when they are acting together, perform something similar to Elijah's chariot of fire: they bring whoever who possesses them to heavenly heights"<sup>11</sup>. This fact provides further clarification of the relation of phenomenology and hesychasm (and Theology). In the "hesychast dyad" Soberness – Prayer the second element is the leading one: it is the heart or "engine" of the whole process, securing its ascent to *συνεργία* and *θέωσις*. It has nothing to do with phenomenology. As for soberness and attention, they are the principal conditions that support the right course of the process: they perform the "guarding of the mind and heart", i.e. the preservation of specific configurations of energies of the consciousness and all man's being, which correspond to the stages of the ascent (in particular, they fight the distraction, drive out incidental thoughts, etc.). They characterize a special state or mode of the consciousness that overcomes the opposition of activity and passivity and realizes the watchful and concentrated grasping of definite energetical contents of the consciousness itself. It is obvious that this "mode of soberness" has a direct correlate in the intentional attitude and intentional act of the phenomenological consciousness. The core of the intentional act is the noesis or intellectual grasping which brings experiential contents into the focus of the inner sight and then the vision of these contents is made more and more precise, advancing to clarity (*die Evidenz*). Husserl stresses specially that in this intellectual grasping the opposition of the passivity and activity is overcome. Both the soberness in asceticism and intentionality in phenomenology are highly productive notions, centers of large conceptual nests, and they clearly share a common core: the ability of keeping something firmly in the focus of the inner sight and disciplined intense concentration of this sight achieving intellectual clarity. Hence the work of the soberness can be interpreted as an intentional act, and the intentional object grasped in this act is the configuration of man's energies.

C) Thus the hesychast and phenomenological consciousness, though they deal with deeply different kinds of experience, share a number of general principles: primacy of experience over syllogistic constructions, elaborated processing of the experience, strict technique of the control and fixation of mental contents. Due to this they develop a number of common transcendental

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<sup>11</sup> St. Philotheos of Sinai. Forty Chapters on Soberness. // Philokalia. Vol.3. Moscow, 1992, p.414 (in Russian).

structures. We see that mystical experience cultivated in the ascetical tradition is far from being a marginal and eccentric phenomenon, completely separated from all the domain of verifiable and analyzable experience. To complete the picture of the relationship between this experience and phenomenological (intentional) act, we need to expand the scope of our observation and confront the phenomena as a whole. We found that the core of the hesychast practice can be characterized as a combination of dialogical and phenomenological activity of the consciousness, resp., the ontological dialogue of the prayer and intentional act of the soberness. It is obvious, however, that specific features of mystical experience are manifested most fully and visibly in higher stages of the ascending process, when the process approaches its meta-anthropological goal of *θέωσις*. In these stages the actual transformation of human being starts which has holistic character. The essence of the transformation is the formation of new types of man's configuration of energies which can be realized only in the process of the practice and correspond to fully developed synergy, when all man's energies are oriented and conformed to Divine energy. (According to ascetics' testimonies, the beginning of the transformation manifests mainly in radical changes of perceptual modalities: a new system of these modalities called "intellectual senses" (*νοερά αἰσθησις*) begins to form up). This means that both components of the energetic configuration described above, i.e. the "dialogical" energies of the prayer and "phenomenological" energies of the soberness, merge together, turning into a certain unified activity which represents a new holistic form of both prayer and soberness (attention). Obviously, the consciousness in this activity is not the intentional consciousness in the usual sense. As our analysis shows, however, the holistic soberness achieved in the synergy preserves a certain analogy to the intentional act: it can be considered as a specific generalized form of the latter, its holistic extension. In this "holistic intentional act", specific to mystical experience, the grasping of an intentional object is realized not by intellectual energies alone, but by all energies of human being, and the object in question does not belong to the horizon of being-as-presence: it is Divine energy, standing out in this context as a *sui generis* transcendent and energetic intentional object.

The conclusion is that the synergetic experience of higher stages of the spiritual practice which is expressed by Theology as a form of direct narration, could also be expressed philosophically by means of a definite generalization of phenomenology: namely, the discourse of holistic intentionality and holistic transcendental structures. There is no such discourse so far, and its construction would be a highly nontrivial task, but still the fact remains that Theology and the hesychast organon show us the way to the extension of phenomenology to the domain of mystical experience. Calling to mind the relation of phenomenology and theology as it was presented by Heidegger, we discover that phenomenology has more intimate and fruitful connection with the Eastern-Orthodox Theology than with the Western theology. By right we can see in this surprising fact a good touch of *gaia scienza* which Nietzsche would love.

A more general conclusion concerns the dynamical unity of human mind. We find that it is hopeless to try to isolate the philosophical mind and religious mind from each other or fix them in some definitive static position to each other. It is equally hopeless to expect that one of them will ever absorb entirely the other. Their relation is dynamic and ever changing. As soon as they both are in a sound and creative state, they enter into an interactive regime – to use the modern slang – and start producing new forms of their ancient and ever stimulating love-hate relationship. Such was the case in the patristic age, and there remains some hope that it can be still the case today.