

RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘Synergy’, ‘energy’ and ‘symbol’ in Pavel Florensky and Palamism

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*Corresponding author. Email: dbiryukov@hse.ru**Abstract**

This article is a study of Pavel Florensky’s philosophy of symbol in the context of his discovery of Palamism in the 1910s, when Florensky started to speak of symbol using Palamite language. It proposes a fundamental difference between Florensky’s and Palamas’ teachings on symbol: Palamas views a natural symbol as the energy of an essence, while for Florensky symbol is the essence itself, the energy of which synergises with the energies of other essence. In this context the prehistory of the concept of synergy in Florensky is studied, leading to the identification of a further difference in the ontologies of Florensky and Palamas: while Florensky’s ‘essence-energy’ has the property of necessary correlation with the ‘other’, following the tendencies of the philosophy of that epoch, in Palamas ‘energy’ does not presuppose any necessary correlation with the ‘other’. The author connects this difference in ontologies between the two thinkers with their respective teachings on symbol.

Keywords: correlativity; energy; Pavel Florensky; Gregory Palamas; symbol; synergy

In this article I will consider Pavel Florensky’s philosophy of symbol in the Palamite context and draw conclusions about the specifics of the ontological ideas of Florensky against the Palamite background. I propose that one can distinguish two stages in Pavel Florensky’s teaching on symbol: they may be termed pre-Palamite and Palamite. This distinction is connected with the fact that at a certain moment of his creative activity, Florensky started to formulate the notion of symbol in the language of Gregory Palamas.

At the heart of Palamism as a theological system, formulated in fourteenth-century Byzantium, is the distinction in the divinity between an unknowable and imparticipable *essence* on the one hand, and the knowable and participable *energies* of this essence on the other. According to Gregory Palamas, the Tabor Light that was revealed to the Apostles during the Transfiguration of Christ (Matt 17:2) is such an uncreated energy.

The first, pre-Palamite stage in Florensky’s teaching on symbol is reflected in his correspondence with Andrei Bely (Bugaev) from 1904 and in the work *The Empyrean and the Empirical* from the same year.¹ There Florensky speaks of symbol in order to point

¹Letter from Pavel Florensky to Boris Bugaev, 1904.VII.18; in P. V. Florensky (ed.), *Obretaja put’: Pavel Florenskij v universitetskie gody* [Getting the Way: Pavel Florensky in his University Years], 2 vols (Moscow: Progress-Tradicija, 2015), vol. 2, p. 651.

out the moment of unity of the empirical world and 'another world' (with all their differences): a human mind can grasp the empirical world as a *symbol* of the other world, which shines through it. The empirical world

becomes the bearer of another world, its body, it embodies in itself this other world or is spiritualized and transformed into a symbol, that is, into an organically living unity of that which represents and that which is represented, of that which symbolizes and that which is symbolized.²

The thinker here is far from understanding the nature of symbol simply as a sign; instead, for Florensky, symbol acquires here connotations referring to the living, animated reality of that which it symbolises.

The second stage belongs to the time after Russian religious thinkers discovered for themselves Palamism during the Name-glorifying dispute of 1910s.³ In the wake of these debates, Florensky began to formulate 'symbol' in terms of the essence-energy distinction – that is, in the language of Gregory Palamas and Palamite doctrine. The terms 'essence' and 'energy' go back at least to the theology of the Cappadocian fathers of the fourth century. There they referred to the conceptual pair *unknowable-knowable*, such that the (divine) *essence* is unknowable, while *energies* of this essence are knowable. In Palamite theology, which was influenced by Maximus the Confessor (seventh century), *essence-energy* came to be connected with another conceptual pair, *imparticipable-participable*: again, the (divine) essence is imparticipable, while (divine) energies are participable.⁴ In Florensky's texts the pairing essence-energy correlates with the pair unknowable-knowable. Yet when we take into account the historical context of Florensky's philosophical activity and deliberations in the 1910s, we can confidently speak about Palamite connotations in his use of the terms essence and energy.

Symbol in Florensky and the Palamite language of essence and energies

Although Florensky and his companions borrowed the language of essence and energies from the Palamite doctrine, where the terms referred first of all to the (imparticipable and unknowable) *divine* essence and the (participable and knowable) *divine* energy, Florensky infused this language with universal meaning. He uses these terms for describing the ontological structure of *any* being and *any* act of cognition. A good illustration of this is a passage from Florensky's *Auto-Abstract* (1925–6), where, in setting out his own intellectual biography and worldview, he says about himself:

He sets realism as a conviction in the transsubjective reality of being against illusionism, subjectivism and psychologism: being opens to knowledge directly. Perceptions are not subjective, but belong to the subject, although they lie outside of him. In other words, in knowledge the genuine expansion of the subject is

²Pavel Florensky, *Early Religious Writings, 1903–1909*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), p. 55.

³See Tatiana Senina, 'The Status of Divine Revelation in the Works of Hieromonk Anthony Bulatovich', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64/4 (2011), pp. 381–2.

⁴See Dmitry Biryukov, 'Hierarchies of Beings in the Patristic Thought: Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus and the Palamite literature', *Scrinium: Journal of Patrology and Critical Hagiography* 10 (2014), p. 300.

manifested, as well as the genuine uniting of his energy (in the sense of the terminology of the 14th century) with the energy of the knowable reality.⁵

Further on Florensky continues his self-description:

F[lorensky] ... considers any system to be coherent not logically, but only teleologically, and in this logical fragmentation and inconsistency he sees an inevitable consequence of the very process of cognition, as creating on the lower planes patterns and schemes, and on the higher symbols.⁶

Here, following the natural course of the account of his own worldview, Florensky passes from the exposition of his understanding of cognition in terms of Palamite 'energy' to the idea of antinomy (namely, presence of 'logical fragmentation and inconsistency' in 'the very process of cognition') as the basic constituent of his philosophical method. Then he concludes his thought by approaching the subject of symbol. As we will see, in Florensky these problematics of symbol are closely connected with the Palamite language of essence-energies.

Thus, in his works of the Name-glorifying cycle (*Onomatodoxy as a Philosophical Premise* and *On the Name of God*, 1919–21) Florensky, in the vein of his 'symbolic world-understanding',⁷ defines symbol in the following ways:

such an οὐσία [essence], the energy of which, merging with the energy of some other, more valuable in a given aspect, ουσία [essence], carries in this way that later οὐσία;⁸

such an essence, the energy of which, intertwined, or rather, merged with the energy of some other essence, more valuable in this respect, carries in this way this latter in itself;⁹

essence, carrying, intertwined with its own energy, the energy of some other essence, by which energy that very second essence is given.¹⁰

He also discusses the topic in the work *Symbolism of Dreams* (1917), where, according to Florensky, something is recognised as a symbol 'by indwelling in some reality of the

⁵Pavel Florensky, *Avtoreferat* [Auto-Abstract], in *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah* [Works in Four Volumes] (Moscow: Mysl', 1994), vol. 1, pp. 39–40. Cf. Florensky, *Imeslavie kak filosofskaja predposylka* [Onomatodoxy as a Philosophical Premise], in *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah* (Moscow, 2000), vol. 3/1, pp. 254–5; Florensky, *On the Cultural-Historical Place and Premises of the Christian World-Understanding. Lecture Eighteen: The Relation between Philosophy and Science [11.XI.1921]*, in Pavel Florensky, *At the Crossroads of Science and Mysticism: On the Cultural-Historical Place and Premises of the Christian World-Understanding*, ed. and trans. Boris Jakim (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2014), p. 134.

⁶Florensky, *Avtoreferat*, p. 40.

⁷This worldview is generally based on the thesis that 'a thing can bear the energy of another thing'. See Florensky, *At the Crossroads of Science and Mysticism*, p. 126.

⁸Pavel Florensky, *Imeslavie kak filosofskaja predposylka*, vol. 3/1, p. 359.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 263.

energy of some other reality, and therefore, by the synergism of the two – at least two – realities'.¹¹

In short, Florensky describes the structure of symbol in the Palamite terms of essence and energies: symbol is an essence, the energy of which is intertwined with the energy of some other, higher essence, thus manifesting through itself the energy of this higher essence, and through it – that very essence itself. As we see, the teaching on symbol, understood in this way, presupposes the concept of 'synergy' (or 'synergism'). I will address this issue further below, but first I will consider the question of the relation between the philosophy of symbol in Pavel Florensky and Gregory Palamas.

'Symbol' in Gregory Palamas and Pavel Florensky

Palamas himself had a quite developed teaching on symbol. This allows us to ask whether Gregory Palamas and Pavel Florensky understood symbol in the same way. For, as we have seen, Florensky's teaching on symbol is based on general foundations and terminology of the Palamite doctrine.

Gregory Palamas' teaching on symbol (τό σύμβολον) is expressed first of all in his *Triads*, especially in the first part of the third *Triad*. Here Palamas polemicises against the thesis that the Tabor Light is merely a symbol of the divinity and therefore is not uncreated; obviously, this thesis presupposes the understanding of symbol as a conventional sign. In his response, Palamas maintained that symbol is that which, in a natural way, manifests the symbolised, which is manifested itself in this symbol.

Specifically, in *Triads*, III.1.14, 19–20, 36, Palamas distinguishes between natural and non-natural symbols. A *natural symbol* is of the same nature as the symbolised. Such a symbol always accompanies the symbolised: it naturally proceeds from the symbolised and manifests it. By contrast, a *non-natural symbol* is of another nature than the symbolised; it appears and disappears in time, not accompanying the nature of the symbolised. As examples of natural symbols Palamas cites the light of the sun, the warmth of a fire, and the Tabor Light, understood as one of countless uncreated energies, always accompanying the essence of the divinity, each of which is a natural symbol of the divine essence. A non-natural symbol is, for instance, fire which is kindled in the case of the invasion of an enemy to notify one's own army; signs that appeared to the Old Testament prophets. We can say that the examples of non-natural symbols, cited by Palamas, correspond to the communicative type of symbol.¹²

¹¹Pavel Florensky, *Simvolika snovidenij* [Symbolism of Dreams], in *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, vol. 3/1, p. 424.

¹²'Every symbol either derives from the nature of the object of which it is a symbol, or belongs to an entirely different nature. Thus, when the sun is about to rise, the dawn is a natural symbol of its light, and similarly heat is a natural symbol of the burning power of fire. As to signs which are not connatural in this way, and which have their own independent existence, they are sometimes considered symbols. Thus, a burning torch might be taken as a symbol of attacking enemies. If they do not possess their own natural existence, they can serve as a kind of phantom to foretell the future, and then the symbol consists only in that. ... So a natural symbol always accompanies the nature which gives them being, for the symbol is natural to that nature; as for the symbol which derives from another nature, having its own existence, it is quite impossible for it constantly to be associated with the object it symbolises, for nothing prevents it from existing before and after this object, like any reality having its own existence. Finally, the symbol lacking an independent existence exists neither before nor after its object, for that is impossible; as soon as it has appeared, it at once is dissolved into nonbeing and disappears completely.' Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, III.1.14, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle, (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 74; see also *Triads*, III.1.19–20, 36. On the natural symbol in Palamas see Dmitry Biryukov,

My analysis of Pavel Florensky's works has shown that, when he referred to patristic authors in his philosophical and theological works, he commonly relied on the existing Russian translations and did not turn to the untranslated patristic texts. I have, moreover, found out which texts of Palamas and the Palamites were available to Florensky in Russian, what his possible circle of reading in the Palamite literature was and whether he was acquainted with Gregory Palamas' teaching on symbol. One can maintain that the texts containing Palamas' teaching on symbol (as well as his theological-philosophical texts in general) had not been translated into Russian in Florensky's time. Small fragments of Palamas' *Triads* had been translated by Theophanes the Recluse as a part of the Russian *Philokalia*, but the passages where Palamas develops his teaching on symbol (as well as all the theological-philosophical content of the Palamite doctrine as such) were not included there. Of all Palamite literature containing the teaching about symbol, only the Russian translation of the exegesis for Parables 9:1 ('Wisdom hath builded her house') by the Palamite Philotheus Kokkinos existed then.¹³ Florensky was familiar with this edition.¹⁴ But it contains only the teaching on symbol that corresponds to Palamas' concept of non-natural symbol. So, in my mind, Florensky was not acquainted with theological-philosophical works of Gregory Palamas – and with his teaching on natural symbol in particular – at all.¹⁵ One cannot trace any connection between Florensky's teaching on symbol and Palamas' doctrine of natural symbol on either the textual or the conceptual level.

Indeed, Florensky's philosophy of symbol, expressed in essence-energy terms, is completely different from that of Palamas, and in some sense opposed to it. Namely, Palamas understands *energy* as natural symbol of essence, while Florensky does not consider energy as symbol, but rather considers symbol as an *essence*, the energy of which synergises with the energy of another essence. Although dressed in Palamite terminological clothing, Florensky's symbolology conceptually follows the idea of symbol developed by him in his pre-Palamite period, where, as we have seen, 'symbol' had connotations referring to the animated reality. The same philosophy of symbol is met in those texts of Florensky's where he speaks about symbol in Palamite terms: symbol, understood as essence having its own energy and capable of synergy, carries connotations of animated being. Indeed, in his lectures on the analysis of spatiality and time in his works on fine arts (1921), Florensky, reflecting on symbol in the Palamite terms of

'Neilos Kabasilas's Rule of Theology and the Distinction between the Light and Warmth of Fire in Neilos Kabasilas and Gregory Palamas', *Scrinium: Journal of Patrology and Critical Hagiography* 14 (2018), p. 390.

¹³Bishop Arsenius, *Filofeja, patriarha Konstantinopol'skogo XIV veka tri rechi k episkopu Ignatiju, s ob'jasneniem izrechenija pritchej: Premudrost' sozda sebe dom i proch* [Three Discourses of Philotheus, Patriarch of Constantinople, Addressed to Bishop Ignatius with an Explanation of the Expression of the Proverb: 'Wisdom hath builded her house', etc.], Greek text and Russian translation (Novgorod, 1898). Cf. Roman Svetlov, Igor' Tantlevskij, "'Odiseja" ponjatija mudrosti v antichnoj mysli i nekotorye osobennosti biblejskih koncepcij premudrosti' [The "Odyssey" of the Notion of Wisdom in Ancient Thought and Some Peculiarities of the Concepts of Wisdom in the Bible], *Voprosy Filosofii* 1 (2020), pp. 114–27.

¹⁴Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters* [1914], trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 557, n. 693.

¹⁵My research has shown that the only sources about the philosophical content of the Palamite doctrine available in Florensky's circle were the anathemas against Barlaam and Akindinos in the conciliar decision of 1351, quoted in the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, which had been published by that time by Fyodor Uspensky as *Sinodik v nedelju pravoslavija. Svodnyj tekst s prilozhenijami* [The Synodikon of the Sunday of Orthodoxy: Summary with Appendices] (Odessa, 1893).

essence and energy, says that this essence-symbol is an artist himself, whose energy unites with the energy of ‘another reality’.¹⁶

I will touch upon the basic philosophical premises of this divergence between Florensky and Palamas later. First, I will consider the terms ‘synergy’ and ‘synergism’, which, as we have seen, play an important role in Florensky’s philosophy of symbol.

From ‘synergism’ to ‘synergy’

When Florensky uses the term *synergy* or *synergism*, he sometimes uses the Greek form *συνεργεία*,¹⁷ which obviously refers to the Byzantine-patristic background of its theological use. This concept appears in Florensky’s works after he discovered Palamism for himself.¹⁸

The notion ‘synergy’ is morphologically closely connected to the notion ‘energy’ (ἐνέργεια), one of the key terms in Palamite doctrine. It can seem that the notion of synergism in Florensky is conditioned by his reception of the Palamite doctrine.¹⁹ However, I would contend that it is not so. On the one hand, the term ‘synergy’ is not more characteristic of the theological lexicon of Gregory Palamas than of other Byzantine authors; indeed, one can even say that Palamas utilises this term and its derivatives quite rarely. On the other hand, as I have said, there is no evidence that Florensky had read Palamas’ theological-philosophical texts. At the same time, as I will show, the notion of ‘synergy’ appeared in Russian religious and theological literature at the end of the nineteenth century and gradually manifested itself at the very beginning of the twentieth century, until it gained stability in Florensky’s lexicon.

I suggest the following reconstruction of the emergence of the term in Florensky. The term ‘synergism’ appeared in Russian scholarly literature as a calque from the German *Synergismus*, which, in its turn, is derived from Greek *συνεργία/συνέργεια* (‘cooperation, ‘co-participation’). The original form in which this term was used in Russian theological literature (i.e. the form ‘synergism’) is explained by its borrowing from German *Synergismus*, which corresponds less well than ‘synergy’ to the original Greek word *συνεργία*, but which, in the end, has remained in Russian language. The notion of *Synergismus* was utilised in German church history scholarship to denote the position of Erasmus of Rotterdam, Philipp Melanchthon and others regarding a correlation between the human will and the divine grace. This position upheld the necessity of the human cooperation with divine grace for human salvation.²⁰ It was defined in opposition to the Lutheran and Calvinist ‘monoenergism’, derived from Augustine and presupposing that the salvation is effected by divine grace alone.

¹⁶Pavel Florensky, *Analiz prostranstvennosti i vremeni v hudozhestvenno-izobrazitel'nyh proizvedenijah* [Spatial and Time Analysis in the Art and Graphic Works] (Moscow: Progress, 1993), p. 302.

¹⁷Pavel Florensky, *Ob Imeni Bozhnem* [On the Name of God], in *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, vol. 3/1, p. 358.

¹⁸Pavel Florensky, *Simvolika snovidenij*, p. 423; *Magichnost' slova* [Magic of the Word] [1920], in *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, vol. 3/1, p. 240; *Imeslavie kak filozofskaja predposylka*, pp. 257, 259, 261; *Ob imeni Bozhiem*, p. 358.

¹⁹See Clemena Antonova, *Visual Thought in Russian Religious Philosophy: Pavel Florensky's Theory of the Icon* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 30–1.

²⁰See e.g. G. Frank, ‘Synergismus’, in *Realencyclopadie D. A. Hauck* (Leipzig, 1884), Heft 141–50, S. 103–13. An example of corresponding Russian usage in this context can be found in Alexander Katansky, *Uchenie o Blagodati Bozhiej v tvorenijah drevnih sv. otcov i uchitelej Cerkvi do bl. Avgustina. Istoriko-dogmaticheskoe issledovanie* [Teaching on the Grace of God in Church Fathers up to Augustine of Hippo. A Historical and Dogmatic Research] (St Petersburg, 1902), p. 19.

The 'synergistic' positions of Erasmus and Melanchthon are ideologically close to the so-called semi-Pelagian teachings of the fifth century about the relation between human freedom and divine grace, which took a polemical stance against Augustinism but were held by many Byzantine authors. This was the reason why Russian church historian Vassily Bolotov brought the term back from the Reformation context to the Byzantine one. This term appeared in his lectures on early church history, where he, in discussing the position of the Western bishops in the Byzantine East, touched upon the Pelagian controversy. In this context, Bolotov speaks of 'synergism' as a characteristic position of Byzantine theologians in the Pelagian controversy.²¹ In a similar context, this notion occurs in the materials of the *Proceedings of St Petersburg's Religio-Philosophical Meetings*. There it is mentioned that in the 17th meeting (1903) a person called S. Zorin discussed Bolotov's understanding of the development of the dogmatic consciousness of the Byzantine church and spoke about 'synergism' of the divine and the human in this process.²²

Further on, the notion of synergism appears in the study by S. Zarin (perhaps the same person as S. Zorin mentioned above), devoted to the patristic foundations of asceticism. This study was published in 1907 under the title *Asceticism according to the Orthodox Christian Teaching*. Zarin insists that the Orthodox view on man's salvation presupposes both divine and human constituents. In this connection, he states: 'The Orthodox teaching affirms the synergism of divine grace and the human freedom' and he gives in a note a short reference about the notion of synergism.²³ He mentions there the passages from the Gospel and early church thinkers (Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Gregory of Nyssa) and refers to the position of Erasmus and Melanchthon in the Reformation controversy on freedom and grace.²⁴

At the same time, the concept of synergy – almost framed as a term – also appears in the work *A System of Philosophy: An Attempt at a Scientific Synthesis* (1903–4) by a thinker who had a great influence upon Pavel Florensky: Archimandrite Serapion Mashkin.²⁵ Mashkin and Florensky knew each other through correspondence and never met personally. In 1905, after Mashkin's death, Florensky acquired his archive. After Florensky had delved deeply into the ideas of the *A System of Philosophy*, he felt great closeness between his own worldview and Mashkin's philosophy. Therefore, during the writing of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* Florensky made use of 'very many ideas' of Serapion, and said about himself: 'I do not even know where his [Serapion's] ideas end and where mine begin'.²⁶

Archimandrite Serapion systematically uses the term 'synergy'. In Mashkin's *A System of Philosophy*, this term occurs most often when he speaks about humanity's

²¹Vassily Bolotov, *Lekcii po istorii Drevnej Cerkvi. III. Istorija Cerkvi v period Vselenskikh soborov. I. Cerkov' i gosudarstvo. II. Cerkovnyj stroj* [Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church. III] (St Petersburg, 1913), p. 316.

²²Sergei Polovinkin (ed.), *Zapiski peterburgskikh Religiozno-filosofskikh sobranij* [Proceedings of St Petersburg's Religio-Philosophical Meetings] (Moscow: Respublika, 2005), p. 368.

²³Sergei Zarin, *Asketizm po pravoslavno-hristianskomu ucheniju. Tom pervyj: Osnovopolozhitel'nyj. Kniga vtoraja: opyt sistematicheskogo raskrytija voprosa* (Asceticism according to the Orthodox Christian Teaching, vol. 1, Fundamental. Book 2: The Experience of Systematic Disclosure) (St Petersburg, 1907), p. 75, cf. p. 692.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 75–6, n. 42.

²⁵Pavel Florensky, 'Otoshedshie. Arhimandrit Serapion (Mashkin) (Zhizn' myslitelja)' [Those Who Have Gone. Archimandrite Serapion (Mashkin) (Life of the Thinker)], *Symbol* 68–9 (2016), p. 259.

²⁶Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, p. 438.

agreement with God.²⁷ Mashkin also speaks about the synergy of Christ with God the Father,²⁸ as well as about the synergy of ‘many’ when they reach unity and harmonious coordination in the truth.²⁹ As we have seen, before Mashkin the notion of ‘synergism’ had a narrow, technical meaning conditioned by the way through which it came into Russian language: the co-direction of human aspiration and the divine will. ‘Synergy’ in Mashkin includes this meaning, but he has a strong tendency to use the notion of ‘synergy’ in a universal sense. One can say that in Mashkin ‘synergy’ is a term referring to the idea of dynamic unity as such. I should also note that Mashkin uses the form ‘synergy’, and not ‘synergism’, which had been used in Russian before. Mashkin’s ‘synergy’ thus appears as if from nowhere, without any connection with the previous Russian tradition. I conclude that this notion appears in his work independently, and is not derived from the conception of ‘synergism’ that had up to that point been employed in Russian theological literature (as I have outlined above).

To my mind, the notion of synergism/synergy appeared in Florensky’s lexicon under influence of the two above-mentioned sources: the essay of Mashkin on the one hand, and the book of Zarin on the other. The influence of Mashkin on Florensky is obvious. As for Zarin’s *Asceticism*, we know that Florensky read it from his mention of this book in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*.³⁰ One of the aspects why Zarin’s book that was appealing for Florensky was that Zarin was one of the first (if not the first) Russian theologian to devote a few pages to the philosophically loaded account of the Palamite teaching about the distinction of essence and energies in the divinity, drawing on Palamas’ own works.³¹ The influence of both these sources (namely, the works of Mashkin and Zarin) is evident from the fact that Florensky uses the term in both forms, ‘synergism’ and ‘synergy’, without making any distinction between them (though ‘synergy’ is used more often): we can see him following Mashkin’s usage in ‘synergy’, and Zarin’s in ‘synergism’.

²⁷Archimandrite Serapion (Mashkin), ‘Sistema filosofii: Opyt nauchnogo sinteza. V dvuh chastjah. Chast’ I’ [A System of Philosophy: An Attempt at a Scientific Synthesis. In two parts. Part I], *Simvol* 67 (2016), pp. 267, 421, 463. This publication, from only a few years ago, is the first edition of *A System of Philosophy*. It represents only the first part of the last revision of *A System of Philosophy* by Serapion. The second part, according to Florensky, ‘remains in the form of separate fragments and even in the form of jottings that are barely legible owing to the indecipherability of the handwriting’ (Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, p. 439).

²⁸Archimandrite Serapion (Mashkin), *Sistema filosofii*, pp. 422–3.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 541.

³⁰Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, pp. 533, 570.

³¹Zarin, *Asketizm*, pp. 405–7, see also pp. 93–4, n. 118. It is interesting, that, expounding the Palamite teaching about the distinction of the unparticipable essence and participable energies in God, Zarin refers to the dialogue *Theophanes* and the treatise *150 Chapters* by Palamas and quotes them (*Asketizm*, pp. 403, 406). At the same time, as we can see from the texts, the first Russian religious philosopher who, when he got interested in Palamism, turned directly to the dogmatic texts of Gregory Palamas, was Sergei Bulgakov, the closest friend of Florensky. See Sergei Bulgakov, *Svet Nevechernij. Sozercanija i umozrenija* [Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations] (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), pp. 111–13; cf. Hegumen Andronik (Trubachev) (ed.), *Perepiska svjashennika Pavla Aleksandroviča Florenskogo so svjashennikom Sergiem Nikolaevičem Bulgakovym* [Correspondence between Priest Pavel Florensky and Priest Sergij Bulgakov] (Tomsk: Vodolej, 2001), p. 78 (Bulgakov’s letter to Florensky from 15 Feb. 1914). I think it is very probable that Bulgakov, when he turned to the philosophical-dogmatic content of the Palamite doctrine, relied on Zarin’s book.

Following Serapion Mashkin, Florensky employs the notion of synergism/synergy in the universal sense, not limiting it only to the synergy of man with God.³² And whereas in Mashkin there was merely a tendency towards the universalisation of this notion, in Florensky it acquires a genuinely universal meaning. Thus, in his *Onomatodoxy* Florensky speaks of synergy as a connection and relationship of beings. Such synergy is both characteristic of each of these beings and something new, for the energies of these beings, when uniting, create a reality that is new in respect to each of them.³³ This new synergetic reality, which was created through union of the energies of the two beings, is more than itself if one of the beings is the cause of the other.³⁴ In this way, Florensky leads the reader to the subject of symbol, which, according to him, presupposes the presence of two – more valuable and less valuable – essences: such that the energy of symbol, as the less valuable essence, carries the energy of the more valuable essence.³⁵

So, Florensky's attitude was to make 'synergy' as universal as possible, taking it in this way beyond the limits of theology into the field of philosophy. This was reflected also in how he 'plays' with the corresponding term, as evidenced by the fact that a few times in *Onomatodoxy* Florensky uses the form 'synergy', a neologism which appears to be intended to point to a new approach to the old concepts implemented by the thinker.³⁶ The form 'synergy' is made up by Florensky as a calque of the Greek *συνενέργεια*, although such a form never existed in patristic Greek (unlike *ἡ συνέργεια*, which 'synergy' corresponds to).

'Correlative' and 'non-correlative' ontologies: Consequences for the theory of symbol

Now I will again turn to the problematics of symbol in Florensky. As I have shown, although Florensky, conceptualising the notion of symbol, actively used the Palamite essence-energy language, his philosophy of symbol is essentially different from Palamas'. Gregory Palamas understood energy as natural symbol of essence, while for Florensky energy as such is not considered as symbol; symbol for him is an essence synergising with other essences. One can put a question: what are the foundations upon which Florensky's philosophy of symbol is built, which make it different from Palamas' philosophy of symbol?

I see two lines in this respect. One, more particular line, is connected to the 'Goetheanism' of Florensky and the corresponding concept of the 'sun sight', understood as a paradigm for the process of cognition. I will treat this topic in another article.

³²On synergy in this sense in Florensky see e.g. Pavel Florensky, *Filosofija kul'ta (Opyt pravoslavnoj antropodicei)* [Philosophy of Cult (Experience of Orthodox Anthropodicea)] (Moscow: Akademicheskij proekt, 2014), pp. 384–5, 396.

³³Florensky, *Imeslavie kak filosofskaja predposylka*, p. 256.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 257.

³⁵*Ibid.* I want to point out that, after the concept of synergy was entered in Florensky's lexicon, it appeared in the works of Sergei Bulgakov as well: this concept was actively used at least in the late work of Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (written in 1939, the first edition in 1945, in Russian). Bulgakov uses it in the technical sense (i.e. in the context of speaking of the correlation between God and the created world; see, first of all, section I, chapter 4, 'God and Created Freedom'; section II, chapter 7, 'God and Afterlife Existence'; and section III, 'Eschatology'). For this reason, this notion was used in *The Bride of the Lamb* in the form 'synergism', which in Russian theological literature, as we have seen, traditionally referred to the aforementioned technical sense.

³⁶Florensky, *Imeslavie kak filosofskaja predposylka*, pp. 256, 259.

Here I will trace the second, fundamental line, connected with the divergence of the basic ontological intuitions of Florensky and Palamas.

Palamas' doctrine presupposes two interconnected modes of being: the mode of being concealed in itself and unmanifested (in Palamism this links up with the notion of 'essence') and the mode of manifestation, which discloses what is unmanifested (this is tied to the notion of 'energy'). In the Palamite language, this entails a distinction in unity between the unknowable and imparticipable essence and knowable and participable energy of this essence. The aspect of distinction of essence and energy consists in the fact that energy is not essence; the aspect of their unity is that energy manifests essence, being the energy of *this* essence. A paradoxical philosophical move of Palamism is that this distinction between unmanifested and its manifestation becomes substantive, such that it is held to exist independently from the fact of whether anybody actually perceives the manifestation (energy). Accordingly, the participable and knowable divine energies, in distinction from the imparticipable and unknowable divine essence that they manifest, are considered in the Palamite doctrine as always inherent in the divine essence and therefore existing without connection with and independently from the created world.³⁷ I suggest that this fundamental Palamite insight, carrying certain paradoxicality in itself, was *not* shared by Florensky. Indeed, he was just not aware of the specifics of the Palamite teaching in this respect (since, as I have shown, he was not acquainted with philosophically loaded works of Palamas).

Thus, in his lectures on the premises of the Christian worldview, Florensky, expounding the position of Palamas in the context of the Palamite controversy, says:

The Orthodox understanding is that one can indeed see God, but what one sees is not His essence but His energy. The energy seems not to express the essence, but it is God insofar as He is revealed to people, and the essence is God as He is in Himself. ... For every entity, the essence is the side turned toward itself, whereas the energy is the side turned outward; in other words, only non-being does not have energies.³⁸

As we see, unlike Palamas, Florensky understands the divine energies as something directed by God 'outward', to people as created beings, and in this respect he distinguishes energies from the divine essence, which is 'God as He is in Himself'. However, within the framework of the Palamite doctrine there is, paradoxically, no

³⁷Gregory Palamas' teaching presumes that the energies in the divinity (and, accordingly, the difference between the divine essence and energies) exists regardless of the created world. In this sense we can say that relativity is not inherent to the category of energy in historical Palamism. But at the same time Palamas' doctrine includes the teaching about the kind of divine energies which exist only in their relation to the created world. These are the 'creating' energies, by which various kinds of created beings are produced and in which they participate (see Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.27; III.2.5–7; *150 Chapters*, 72–3, 113, 140; on the structure and hierarchy of these 'relational' energies in Palamas see Biriukov, 'Hierarchies of Beings in the Patristic Thought', pp. 294–303). This means that Palamas' doctrine includes the kind of energies which are 'relational', although this property of 'correlativity' within the frames of Palamism does not apply to the category of divine energy as such.

³⁸Using the formula 'only non-being does not have energy', Florensky refers to the anathemas against Barlaam and Akindinos from the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*: Uspensky, *Sinodik v nedelju pravoslavija* [The Synodikon of the Sunday of Orthodoxy], p. 31 (for the modern edition, see Jean Gouillard, 'Le Synodikon de l'orthodoxie: Édition et commentaire', *Travaux et mémoires* 2 (1967), p. 83.589–90). Pavel Florensky, 'On the Cultural-Historical Place and Premises, Lecture Seventeen', in *At the Crossroads of Science and Mysticism*, p. 126.

'outward' for God, where His energies necessarily would be directed to; rather, the divine energies are God in Himself in the same way as the divine essence.

In *Onomatodoxy* Florensky gives a more universal picture and speaks not of the *divine* essence and energies, but of essence and energy as such:

Being has an inner side, by which it is turned to itself in its unconfusedness with all that is not it, and the external side, directed to the other being. These are the two sides; but they are not attachments to each other and are in the original unity; they are one and the same being, although in different directions. One side serves self-assertion of being, the other – its disclosing, manifesting, uncovering or whatever name you can call this life, connecting one being with the other being. According to the ancient terminology, these two sides of being are called essence, ουσία, and action, or energy, ενέργεια.³⁹

One can discern in this fragment essential features of Florensky's ontological ideas, expressed here in terms of essence and energy. Specifically, Florensky's ontology presupposes internal and external sides in any unit of being, and these two sides are in unity. One is connected with self-assertion of the being in its own existential core, the other with its disclosing outwards. This disclosing, being directed outwards, interacts and connects this unit of being with the other. Florensky links the first side with the notion of essence, the second with the notion of energy. This ontology would seem to be close to the Palamite one. However, it is not: the Palamite doctrine, as I have said, does not presuppose that energy (namely, manifestation of essence) is necessarily turned outside, to some other being; energy in Palamite ontology does not require the presence of another being, with which it would have to interact. One can affirm here that the correction of the ontological frame of Palamism made by Florensky (namely, his ascribing to the concept of energy the property of necessary correlation with the other) is connected with the personalist and existentialist tendencies relevant for the philosophical field of the beginning of the twentieth century. By contrast, Palamite ontology proper is not personalist or loaded existentially.

In this way, Florensky's philosophy of symbol is linked to the specifics of his ontology: this is a personalistically loaded ontology, in which energy of essence is understood as correlational, and which necessarily presupposes synergetic interactions of essences by means of their energies. Appropriately, this ontology makes the conception of symbol also loaded personalistically, whereas the Palamite natural symbol proceeds from a non-personalist and non-correlative ontology, where essence and its energy are not held to be necessarily correlating with other essences and energies. Such teaching of natural symbol would be impossible within the frames of the 'correlational' or personalist ontology of Florensky, where energy of essence has to be synergetically correlated with energies of other essences. As a result of exactly this ontology, inside Florensky's philosophy a conception of symbol was matured, which harked back to Florensky's early insights, and which was based on the principle of correlation.⁴⁰

³⁹Florensky, *Imeslavie kak filozofskaja predposylka*, p. 255.

⁴⁰This publication was made possible through the support of a grant 'Philosophy in Neoplatonism: New Figures and New Interpretations' from The National Science Centre of Poland (2018/31/B/HS1/01861).