

The ‘Sophiological’ Origins of Vladimir Lossky’s Apophaticism¹

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Abstract

Vladimir Lossky (1903–58) and Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944) are normally taken as polar opposites in modern Orthodox theology. Lossky’s theology is portrayed as being based on a close exegesis of the Greek Fathers with an emphasis on theosis, the Trinity and the apophatic way of mystical union with God. Bulgakov’s ‘sophiology’, in contrast, if it is remembered at all, is said to be a theology which wished to ‘go beyond the Fathers’, was based on German Idealism and the quasi-panteist and gnostic idea of ‘sophia’ which is a form of the ‘Eternal Feminine’ of Romanticism. In short, Lossky’s theological approach is what people normally think of when they speak of Orthodox theology: a form of ‘neo-patristic synthesis’ (Georges Florovsky). Bulgakov’s theological approach is said to be typical of the exotic dead end of the inter-war émigré ‘Paris School’ (Alexander Schmemmann) or ‘Russian Religious Renaissance’ (Nicolas Zernov). Lossky, we are reminded, was instrumental in the 1935 condemnation, by Metropolitan Sergii Stragorodskii of the Moscow Patriarchate, of Bulgakov’s theology as ‘alien’ to the Orthodox Christian faith. Counter to this widely held ‘standard narrative’ of contemporary Orthodox theology, the article argues that the origins of Vladimir Lossky’s apophaticism, which he characterised as ‘antinomic theology’, are found within the theological methodology of the sophiology of Sergii Bulgakov: ‘antinomism’. By antinomism is understood that with any theological truth one has two equally necessary affirmations (thesis and antithesis) which are nevertheless logically contradictory. In the face of their conflict, we are forced to hold both thesis and antithesis together through faith. A detailed discussion of Lossky’s apophaticism is followed by its comparison to Bulgakov’s ‘sophiological antinomism’. Lossky at first appears to be masking the influence of Bulgakov and even goes so far as to read his own form of theological antinomism into the Fathers. Nevertheless, he may well have been consciously appropriating the ‘positive intuitions’ of

¹ A version of this study was first given at the AAR at a session of the Eastern Orthodox Studies Group in Nov. 2012. I am indebted to the critical comments and suggestions of the participants. In particular I want to thank Matthew Baker, Seraphim Danckaert, Paul Gavriilyuk, Jane Heath, Julia Konstantinovskiy, Paul Ladouceur, Andrew Louth, Aristotle Papanikolaou and Met. Kallistos Ware for their help with aspects of this study.

Bulgakov's thought in order to 'Orthodoxise' a thinker he believed was in error but still regarded as the greatest Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century. Despite major differences between the two thinkers (e.g. differing understandings of reason, the use of philosophy and the uncreated/created distinction), it is suggested that Lossky and Bulgakov have more in common than normally is believed to be the case. A critical knowledge of Bulgakov's sophiology is said to be the 'skeleton key' for modern Orthodox theology which can help unlock its past, present and future.

Keywords: antinomy, apophaticism, Bulgakov, Lossky, Orthodoxy, sophiology.

For perhaps 65 years there has reigned, more or less serenely, in Orthodox theological circles, in different permutations, a vision of theology sometimes called 'neo-patristic synthesis'. Neo-patristic synthesis is, of course, a notoriously vague phrase, a sort of slogan, used by Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) for his own work. It can roughly be understood as the perpetual theological return to and renewal in the patristic corpus (especially the Greek fathers) and Byzantine liturgical tradition. In this theological return, one imbibes the patristic spirit and vision (so it is 'patristic') which aids one in responding to the current problems and queries of our age (so it is 'neo-patristic') in a creative and synthetic form, avoiding mere repetition of formulae, concepts and words, putting forward an integral vision of Orthodoxy (so it is a 'synthesis'). Of course, such vagueness has allowed one to apply willy-nilly neo-patristic synthesis to almost any sort of Orthodox theology as long as it reverences the fathers and the liturgy so that it takes in such radically different and brilliant religious thinkers as Vladimir Lossky (1903–58) and Dumitru Stănilaoe (1903–93), John Zizioulas (b. 1931) and Christos Yannaras (b. 1935) or, for that matter, Alexander Schmemmann (1921–83), John Meyendorff (1926–92), Kallistos Ware (b. 1934), Sergey Horujy (b. 1945) and Andrew Louth. In practice, however, outside of such brilliant practitioners, neo-patristic synthesis has often degenerated into a sterile dogmatism which simply repeats the words of the fathers just as a fundamentalist parrots the words of the Bible: call it 'patristicism', an anti-Western polemic combined with a chest-beating Hellenism and a reduction of all theology to patrology and a slavish exegesis of Father 'X' or 'Y' on set subjects like 'the two wills of Christ' and 'creation'. Such a theology holds very little interest in culture and politics other than being a fallen realm outside the liturgy.

It is not surprising, therefore, that so many Orthodox thinkers have become dissatisfied with such a 'theology of repetition' whether it is rightly

called ‘neo-patristic’ or not, seeing it as a blind alley from which there is no escape. In some quarters, as witness to this theological malaise, there are the first signs of a rethinking or re-envisioning of neo-patristic synthesis, with an accompanying strong critique of its seminal figures like Florovsky and Lossky. Recent controversial conferences in 2010 at the Volos Academy, Greece, and at Fordham University, New York, have put this nascent movement into the spotlight.² A provocative article by Paul Gavrilyuk has even gone so far as to argue that we are at the cusp of a new ‘Orthodox Renaissance’ in theology³ with riches and creativity not seen since the ‘Russian Religious Renaissance’ detailed in Nicolas Zernov’s famous book.⁴ This possible ‘renaissance’ can partially be traced to a querying of the standard neo-patristic paradigm and an interest in a host of other modern Orthodox theologians (often vilified by neo-patristic writers) who apparently offer contrasting paradigms, such as the neglected ‘sophiologists’, Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) and, especially, Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944). Yet it is precisely here that things become somewhat muddy. How different is the theology of these two great thinkers from their neo-patristic opponents?

In order to answer this question let us turn to one of the theological ‘weeds’ that, arguably, needs uprooting in Orthodox theology, which is that neo-patristic synthesis involves the restoration of the integral vision of the fathers shorn of its Western (and especially Romantic) pseudomorphosis. This latter thesis is often combined with a strong anti-Western polemic. Thus, in going back to the fathers it is often said by neo-patristic writers that one must certainly avoid anachronistic Western interpretations of that vision. But, arguably, this is certainly not the case even with Florovsky himself who read the fathers through Western spectacles.⁵ This is important because it is

² ‘Neo-Patristic Synthesis or Post-Patristic Theology: Can Orthodox Theology be Contextual?’ Volos Academy for Theological Studies (Volos, Greece), 3–6 June 2010, <http://orthodoxie.typepad.com/ficher/synthese_volos.pdf> (accessed March 2013) and George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (eds), *Orthodox Constructions of the West* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) (based on a 2010 conference at Fordham).

³ See Paul L. Gavrilyuk, ‘The Orthodox Renaissance’, *First Things* (Dec. 2012), pp. 33–7.

⁴ Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963).

⁵ See Brandon Gallaher, ‘“Waiting for the Barbarians”: Identity and Polemicism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky’, *Modern Theology* 27/4 (Oct. 2011), pp. 659–91, and (substantially revised and expanded) ‘A Re-envisioning of Neo-Patristic Synthesis? Orthodox Identity and Polemicism in Fr Georges Florovsky and the Future of Orthodox Theology’ (trans. and ed. Nikolaos Asproulis and trans. Lambros Psomas and Evaggelos Bartzis), *Theologia*, 84/1 (January–March 2013), forthcoming June 2013 (in Greek).

simply impossible to read a text outside of one's own horizon and so if one is to develop a neo-patristic theology for today – and with it the renewal of contemporary Orthodox theology of which Gavriilyuk speaks – there needs to be a conscious and creative rereading of the fathers in light of a selection of Western philosophical and theological sources. Such a reading, from an Orthodox perspective, where doxology and orthodoxy are inseparable, must be tested by the Church through prayer and communion: does it measure up to the tradition of worship and spiritual life in the liturgy, the parish, the monastery and the community more broadly? But do we find the weed of which we spoke in Lossky's work as well?

Lossky has long had more attention paid to him than his older contemporary Florovsky and their work is sadly often conflated in the scholarly imagination. Rowan Williams, in his pioneering and painstaking 1975 doctorate,⁶ not only showed the great difference between the two thinkers but contended that 'Lossky can only be fully understood against the background of Russian intellectual history . . . he continues to read the Fathers with Russian eyes'.⁷ Building on this insight, Aristotle Papanikolaou⁸ has even gone so far as to argue that Lossky is a tacit Bulgakovian who co-opts the 'central categories' of Bulgakov (e.g. antinomy, person-freedom vs nature/necessity, kenosis and individual vs person) and 'apophaticises' them in a 'self-consciously anti-sophiological theology'.⁹ This is important, as Lossky attacked Bulgakov for being beholden to Western philosophical sources in his theology and, rather self-consciously, in his 1955 'La notion théologique de personne humaine', he says he wishes to avoid, in finding a doctrine of the human person in the fathers, 'unconscious confusion' by attributing to them a way of conceiving the human person dependent on a complex philosophical tradition which follows paths very different from a 'line of thought . . . which could claim to be part of a properly theological tradition'. He is especially wary of 'conscious anachronisms', such as inserting Bergson in Nyssa (he is probably thinking of Daniélou) or Hegel into the work of Maximus (read: Balthasar whom he later

⁶ Rowan Williams, 'The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1975. Found at <<http://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:15b86a5d-21f4-44a3-95bb-b8543d326658>> (last accessed: 20 May 2013).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁸ See Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2006).

⁹ Papanikolaou, 'Eastern Orthodox Theology', in Chad Meister and James Beilby (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 538–48 at p. 544.

discusses) or Heidegger (as he proposes somewhat tongue-in-cheek) in reading Chalcedon.¹⁰

In terms of Lossky's own dependence on Western sources, Michel René Barnes argued, in an otherwise closely argued and now widely cited study from 1995,¹¹ that Lossky was dependent on a slightly skewed reading of a faulty thesis of the French Jesuit, Théodore de Régnon (1831–93), in his posthumously published *Études de théologie positive sur la sainte Trinité* (1892–8). Simply put, this thesis – Barnes calls it 'de Régnon's paradigm'¹² because of its widespread influence in English-language patristic scholarship, possibly via 'neo-Palamite' (read: Orthodox) theology¹³ – argues that there is a uniquely Eastern approach to trinitarian theology, exemplified by the Cappadocians, which begins with the persons and moves to the common *ousia*, in contrast to a Western post-Augustinian scholastic perspective, which starts from a common essence and then diversifies it through the hypostases.¹⁴ Barnes alleged that this dependence on the thesis of a Roman Catholic (indeed, Jesuit) was purposely hidden in Lossky's citations by the embarrassed neo-Palamites who were responsible for the 1957 English translation of his famous *Essai sur la théologie mystique de L'Église d'Orient* (1944).¹⁵ They excised all but two direct quotations from de Régnon and the other indirect references (where Lossky is quoting the Cappadocians from him) they made direct patristic quotations. In addition, his name is absent from the index.¹⁶

¹⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *A l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu* [= IRD], ed. Saulius Rumšas (Paris: Cerf, 2006), pp. 109, 118; *In the Image and Likeness of God* [= ILG], trans. and ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 111, 120.

¹¹ Michel René Barnes, 'De Régnon Reconsidered', *Augustinian Studies* 26/2 (1995), pp. 51–79 at p. 58, and 'Augustine in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology', *Theological Studies* 56/2 (June 1995), pp. 237–50 at p. 246, n. 39. Earlier see André de Halleux, 'Personnalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères cappadociens? Une mauvaise controverse', *Revue théologique de Louvain*, 17/2 (1986), pp. 129–55, and 17/3 (1986), pp. 265–92 (notes).

¹² Barnes, 'De Régnon', p. 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 73, n. 73, where Bp Vasili Krivocheine is suggested as the one responsible for spreading the paradigm in Britain (with the alternative of Prestige).

¹⁴ E.g. Théodore de Régnon, *Études de théologie positive sur la sainte Trinité*, 4 vols bound as 3 (Paris: Victor Retaux, 1892–8), vol. 1, p. 433, cited at Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de L'Église d'Orient* [= TM], ed. Saulius Rumšas (Paris: Cerf, 2009), p. 57; *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, trans. by Members of the Fellowship of Sts Alban and Sergius [= MT] (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1991; reprint of 1957 edn), pp. 57–8.

¹⁵ *Essai sur la théologie mystique de L'Église d'Orient* (Paris: Aubier, 1945) and *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke, 1957).

¹⁶ Barnes, 'De Régnon', p. 58.

The trouble with this now popular allegation is simple: it is false. It ignores the contradictions of Lossky's relationship to the 'West', to which he was both deeply attached (e.g. his extensive ecumenism and doctorate on Meister Eckhart¹⁷) and deeply critical (e.g. his attack on 'filioquism'¹⁸), and flies in the face of the history of the English translation of this his best known book. In fact, Lossky's involvement in the English translation was general at best¹⁹ and did not amount to checking the text. The two main translators (Peter Hammond with the aid of A. M. Allchin who was a close friend of the Lossky family²⁰) were Anglo-Catholic priests friendly towards Eastern Orthodoxy and were far from being the anti-Western Yannarasian neo-Palamites that Barnes assumes. Due to the negligence of the original publisher (James Clarke), which produced the book 'on the cheap', the extensive corrections to the proofs by the translators (not Lossky) were not even added to the text which went to press and an errata-ridden edition has been successively reprinted ever since. The translators did not even draw these errata to Lossky's attention, at the request of his wife Madeleine given his then fragile health (he died of a heart defect, shortly after the book's publication). It appears that the translators' corrections did not include adding all the references to de Régnon. These were omitted most probably given the strict restrictions on space placed on them by the publishers who wished to save money at every turn (e.g. the index was limited to just three pages), as well as the feeling that English readers would not be interested in the source of Lossky's citations in an obscure French scholarly work. What is absolutely clear, however, is that these references were not left out due to any anti-Western prejudice.²¹

¹⁷ Here see Lossky, *Sept jours sur les routes de France, Juin 1940*, ed. Nicolas Lossky (Paris: Cerf, 1998); *Seven Days on the Road of France, June 1940*, ed. Nicholas Lossky and trans. Michael Donley (Yonkers, NY: SVS Press, 2012); and the nuanced Olivier Clément, *Orient-Occident: Deux passeurs, Vladimir Lossky et Paul Evdokimov* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1985), pp. 17–104.

¹⁸ See Lossky, TM, p. 55 (MT, p. 56) and IRD, pp. 67–93 (ILG, pp. 71–96).

¹⁹ Lossky did however take an interest in the text's visual presentation. He violently protested to Donald Allchin concerning the publisher putting Russian 'onion dome' churches on the dust-jacket which he felt made the book appear to be in the same vein as 'des romans sur Raspoutine ou autres "sujets russes"' when, in fact, Orthodoxy, 'malgré ses implications historiques, n'est pas du folk-lore russe' ('Letter to A. M. Allchin from Vladimir Lossky, 19 September 1957', Allchin Papers, Gladstone's Library, Hawarden, Wales).

²⁰ Evgeny Lampert, a Russian disciple of Bulgakov who advocated Anglican-Orthodox intercommunion (so no neo-Palamite), was also possibly a translator and certainly corrected the proofs.

²¹ This is based on private conversations with Met. Kallistos Ware who prepared the index from the proofs but was not a translator.

More importantly, what Barnes misses is the central point of Lossky's appropriation of de Régnon. For Lossky, in Cappadocian theology (sc. Orthodox theology for Lossky) we see that God is, as Trinity, three irreducibly particular hypostases with one common *ousia* and what is common (sameness) in the Godhead must be held together simultaneously with what is particular (particularity) since 'It was a question [in the Athanasian and Cappadocian purifying of the Hellenistic concepts of *ousia* and *hypostasis*] of finding a distinction of terms which could express the unity of, and the differentiation within, the Godhead, without giving the pre-eminence either to one or to the other; that thought might not fall into the errors of Sabellian unitarianism or a pagan tritheism'.²² And here, with this typically Losskian antinomy, we have reached the main focus of our discussion. As will emerge, Barnes was right to raise the issue in Lossky's work of an obscured theological (perhaps half-denied) dependence, though this dependence was not on de Régnon at all. Lossky was openly appropriating an aspect de Régnon's trinitarian thought in the service of what is the core of his theology – 'apophaticism' and the peculiar version Lossky ascribed to a host of fathers from Dionysius to Palamas – 'antinomic theology'. It is arguable that the provenance of this latter theology (which we shall return to shortly) will illumine some of the controversies in Lossky's interpretation, including the Barnes-de Régnon episode.

Lossky argues that two types of theology or theological attitudes exist. The first, and it is clear that by this he is referring to Western theology (especially Aquinas), is concerned with God as an object that is characterised above all by its unity and simplicity, such that the attributes of God (wisdom, justice, mercy, being, one, true, good, etc.) can only be known analogically as the essence of God surpasses human understanding on earth which is multiple and complex. Thus, one is forced to create 'analogical concepts'²³ about God obtained through speculation, as a direct vision of God on earth is impossible and any image of God or theophany is created by definition. He traces this sort of philosophical and conceptual thinking about the divine in another place to Plotinus²⁴ and more revealingly to Origen and Origenism which he argues strike at the 'divine incomprehensibility' by replacing the 'experience of the unfathomable God by philosophical concepts'.²⁵ We say 'more revealingly' because the person who is repeatedly identified in

²² TM, p. 49 (MT, p. 50) and see TM, p. 56 (MT, p. 57)]; See Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame, IN: NDUP, 2012), pp. 102–3, and responding to Barnes see *Being with God*, p. 181, n. 101.

²³ IRD, p. 45 (ILG, p. 51).

²⁴ TM, pp. 27ff. (MT, pp. 29ff.).

²⁵ TM, p. 31 (MT, p. 33).

modern Russian theology with Origen is none other than 'Father Bulgakov' whose teaching on Triadology, Lossky tells us, is heretical like the religious philosophy of Origen.²⁶ In *Spor o Sofii* (1936) (*The Controversy Concerning Sophia*), Lossky somewhat shrilly attacks Bulgakov and his sophiology and defends the September 1935 ukaz ('decree') of Met. (Patriarch from 1943) Sergii Stragorodskii of Moscow (1867–1944) condemning Bulgakov's teaching on sophiology in his volume of christology, *Agnets Bozhii* (*The Lamb of God*) (1933), as 'alien' to the faith.²⁷ In *Agnets Bozhii*, Bulgakov, Lossky writes, is 'held captive by his own philosophy and perverted Orthodox teaching for the sake of it and revolted against the Fathers'.²⁸ At worst, he says, Bulgakov refutes apophaticism, presumably because Bulgakov develops a positive philosophy based on the idea/reality of 'Sophia' (it is not clear). At

²⁶ TM, pp. 61 and see 40 (MT, pp. 62 and see 42). Compare Florovsky's argument against Origen with his polemical reference to a 'fourth hypostasis' (which Bulgakov was accused of upholding): Florovsky, 'Appendix: The Idea of Creation in Christian Philosophy', *Eastern Churches Quarterly* 8/2 (1949), pp. 53–77 at p. 65, and John Meyendorff, 'Creation in the History of Orthodox Theology', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (= SVTQ) 27/1 (1983), pp. 27–37.

²⁷ Lossky was part of the Moscow Patriarchate, which was the rival jurisdiction to Bulgakov's Parisian based Patriarchal Exarchate of Russian Parishes under Constantinople (under Met. Evlogii Georgievskii (1868–1946)). Lossky's epistolary reports (as the vice-president of the Moscow loyalist Paris-based Brotherhood of St Photios) concerning Bulgakov's theology (set out formally in *Spor o Sofii*: 'Dokladnaia Zapiska' prot. S. Bulgakova i smysl ukaza Moskovskoj Patriarkhii (Paris: Brotherhood of St Photius, 1936)) served as the background to Met. Sergii's ukaz. A third rival jurisdiction, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (or 'in Exile'), a month later in Oct. 1935 would accuse Bulgakov (explicitly) of 'heresy'. Bulgakov was officially investigated by a commission of his own jurisdiction which split, producing majority and minority reports (with the more critical minority report signed by Florovsky). He was finally cleared of the more serious charge of heresy by an episcopal conference of his own church in Nov. 1937 but, in its report, he was heavily criticised for serious doctrinal flaws in his sophiology. For the Moscow ukaz see N. T. Eneeva, *Spor o sofologii v russkom zarubezh'e 1920–1930 godov* (Moscow: Institut vseobshchei istorii RAN, 2001), pp. 112–25, and *O Sofii Premudrosti Bozhiei: Ukaz Moskovskoi Patriarkhii i dokladnye Zapiski prot. Sergiia Bulgakova Mitropolitu Evlogiiu* (Paris: YMCA, 1935), pp. 5–19 (with Bulgakov's response: pp. 20–53). For a summary see A. F. Dobbie-Bateman, 'Concerning Sophia, The Divine Wisdom', *The Christian East* 16/1–2 (Jan.–July 1936), pp. 48–59. For discussion see Bryn Geffert, 'The Charges of Heresy Against Sergii Bulgakov: The Majority and Minority Reports of Evlogii's Commission and the Final Report of the Bishops' Conference', SVTQ 49/1–2 (2005), pp. 47–66; Antoine Arjakovsky, *La génération des penseurs religieux de l'émigration Russe: La Revue 'La Voie' (Put')*, 1925–1940 (Kiev and Paris: L'Esprit et la Lettre, 2002), pp. 433ff.; Alexei Klimoff, 'Georges Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy', SVTQ 49/1–2 (2005), pp. 67–100, and Gallaher, 'A Re-envisioning of Neo-Patristic Synthesis?'

²⁸ Lossky, *Spor o Sofii*, p. 14.

best, Bulgakov, Lossky claims, pays lip service to apophaticism by including it as a mere chapter in his *Svet Nevechernii (Unfading Light)* (1917) (his knowledge of this text will later prove important). In this fashion, he shows a complete deficit of apophaticism because he alternates apophasis with cataphasis²⁹ as a sort of corrective. Bulgakov does not realise, Lossky argues, that apophatic theology is not a special category of theology but the *only way* of doing Christian theology, perceiving the truth of revelation, which does not fall into gnosis and philosophy.³⁰ In other words, the sort of theologising in the first type of theology Lossky delineates – seen in Plotinus, Origen, Aquinas and Bulgakov – attempts to conceptualise the divine by ‘falling into a “theology of concepts”’ for whenever theology becomes transformed into a religious philosophy like that of Origen it is the result of forsaking what he calls the ‘apophatic attitude’ or ‘apophaticism’ which is ‘truly characteristic of the whole tradition of the Eastern Church’.³¹

Unsurprisingly, the second type of theology is apophaticism. This attitude begins with the radical unknowability of God, but immediately affirms with no less force the possibility of knowing God. Apophaticism, Lossky continues, presupposes what he calls ‘antinomic theology’.³² Indeed, throughout his work, Lossky simply assumes that ‘antinomic’ and ‘apophatic’ are synonymous. He speaks, for example, of the ‘apophatic and antinomic spirit of eastern theology’³³ and of how the theology of light’s ‘negative, “apophatic” character is expressed by antinomic oppositions expressive of patristic methodology.’³⁴ Antinomic theology or apophaticism ‘proceeds by oppositions of contrary but equally true propositions’ or every ‘antinomic opposition of two true propositions’.³⁵ Thus, one might state the positive proposition that God is one in essence, a Unity, but, simultaneously one must affirm its contrary or opposite proposition which is that God is a ‘not-One’ as He is three hypostases, a Trinity.³⁶ We have then a dialectic of negative and affirmative which tries to evoke the unimaginably transcendent by an ‘intellectual discipline of the non-opposition of opposites (*la non-opposition des contraires*)’.³⁷ When it is said that it tries to evoke the absolutely transcendent it points to its dogmatic role, for every antinomic opposition, Lossky argues,

²⁹ See TM, pp. 23–4 (MT, p. 26) where this is the method of Aquinas.

³⁰ See *Spor o Sofii*, pp. 21–3.

³¹ TM, p. 40 (MT, p. 42).

³² IRD, p. 45 (ILG, p. 51).

³³ TM, p. 74 (MT, p. 77).

³⁴ IRD, p. 64 (ILG, p. 68).

³⁵ IRD, pp. 45–6 (ILG, pp. 51–2).

³⁶ IRD, p. 46 (ILG, p. 52).

³⁷ IRD, p. 20 (ILG, p. 26).

ultimately 'gives way to a dogma' or a real distinction of a religious order which is 'ineffable and unintelligible' and cannot be replaced by concepts which usurp the place of spiritual realities or, worse, think that God can be deduced by reasoning.³⁸ Thus, the antinomy we just related is the dogma of the Trinity, a synopsis of the One and the Three, although to count God is to immediately miss the point which is to evoke the reality of what Dionysius calls using, Lossky tells us, a 'contradictory term', 'Unitrinity'.³⁹ Or, to take another, in Lossky words, 'antinomic' or 'self-contradictory' expression from hymnography, God is, as the Canon of St Andrew of Crete puts it, 'simple Trinity', which 'points out a simplicity which the absolute diversity of the three persons can in no way relativize'.⁴⁰ Antinomy, Lossky argues, is the heart of dogma. Indeed, every doctrinal statement about God can only be expressed in antinomies.⁴¹ Lossky repeatedly focuses on the antinomy of the incommunicability of God and his simultaneous intimate sharing with us in communion, which expresses the real dogmatic distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies. He also says that Chalcedon, with its affirmation of a duality-unity in the christological dogma, is an antinomy.⁴²

Our thought then must be, Lossky says, exegeting Gregory Nazianzen in 'continuous motion', swinging ceaselessly between the two poles of the antinomy – 'pursuing now the one, now the three, and returning again to the unity' – so that we can attain the contemplation of the 'sovereign repose of this threefold monad'.⁴³ This intellectual swinging back and forth, almost a speculative way of gaining momentum for a leap into the abyss of contemplation, 'deconceptualises the concepts' which are habitually ascribed to the mystery of the personal God in his transcendence.⁴⁴ These concepts are 'idols of God' which shackle the spirit and which need consequently to be cast off as speculation falls away and gives place to contemplation.⁴⁵ One must, therefore, never resolve the tension in an antinomy, which Lossky repeatedly refers to as involving 'contradiction' and even seeming 'absurd' to our minds which are 'rationalistic',⁴⁶ precisely because it safeguards⁴⁷ the

³⁸ IRD, p. 46 (ILG, p. 52), and TM, p. 40 (MT, p. 42).

³⁹ IRD, p. 22 (ILG, p. 28).

⁴⁰ IRD, pp. 82, 85 (ILG, pp. 85, 89).

⁴¹ TM, p. 75 (MT, p. 78).

⁴² IRD, p. 64 (ILG, p. 68).

⁴³ TM, p. 45 (MT, p. 46).

⁴⁴ IRD, p. 18 and see p. 112 (ILG, pp. 24 and see p. 114).

⁴⁵ TM, pp. 31, 38 (MT, pp. 33, 40).

⁴⁶ IRM, pp. 25, 57 (ILG, pp. 31, 62).

⁴⁷ E.g. TM, pp. 84, 239 (MT, pp. 87, 240) and (with the antinomy safeguarded) see TM, p. 46 (MT, p. 52).

mystery we encounter as a living experience of God in contemplation. There is, in Lossky, unlike Florovsky and Bulgakov, a general suspicion of the role of reason in theology as leading to conceptual idolatry about the divine. This is accompanied, again unlike Bulgakov and Florovsky, by an almost Barthian dismissal of the role of philosophy in theology: 'there is no philosophy more or less Christian. Plato is not more Christian than Aristotle. The question of the relations between theology and philosophy has never arisen in the East.'⁴⁸ How far we are from Florovsky's claim that dogmatic theology is a 'Christian' or 'sacred philosophy' or, yet again, a 'philosophy of the Holy Spirit'!⁴⁹ In contrast, Lossky emphasises, and here he is reminiscent of Florovsky's ideas of patristic vision as a form of intellectual intuition,⁵⁰ contemplation and an immediate all-embracing vision of God through our participation in the divine energies.

Lossky contends that, once we break up the antinomy, resolve it conceptually, we fall from contemplation into the 'platitude of rationalism' and replace vision/contemplation with the speculation on concepts⁵¹ – falling for example in the trinitarian antinomy either into 'sabellian unitarianism' or 'tritheism'⁵² – because 'The antinomy, on the contrary, raises the spirit from the realm of concepts to the concrete data of Revelation'.⁵³ And in revelation we come to know that God is inconceivable, neither one nor many but as simple Unitrinity transcending the antinomy as he is unknowable in what he is⁵⁴ and what he is is not us. For Lossky, and here he differs certainly from Bulgakov,⁵⁵ there is an absolute distinction between created

⁴⁸ TM, p. 40 (MT, p. 42) and compare Sergii Bulgakov, 'Dogmat i dogmatica', in *Zhivoe Predanie: Pravoslavie v sovremennosti* (Paris: YMCA, 1937), pp. 9–24 (*Pravoslavnaia mysl'*, vol. 3). 'Dogma and Dogmatic Theology', trans. Peter Bouteneff, *Tradition Alive*, ed. Michael Plekon (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2003), pp. 67–80.

⁴⁹ See Florovsky, 'Offenbarung, Philosophie, und Theologie', *Zwischen den Zeiten* 9/6 (Dec. 1931), pp. 463–80 at p. 475 (given at Barth's seminar in Bonn); 'Revelation, Philosophy and Theology', *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 3, *Creation and Redemption*, gen. ed. Richard Haugh (Belmont, MA: Nordlands Pub. Co., 1976), pp. 21–40 at p. 35. (A new translation of this piece will appear in *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Writings*, ed. Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur (forthcoming 2014 from T&T Clark)). For commentary see Matthew Baker, "'Theology Reasons' – in History: Neo-Patristic Synthesis and the Renewal of Theological Rationality', *Theologia* 81/4 (Oct.–Dec. 2010), pp. 81–118.

⁵⁰ See Gallaher, 'Waiting for the Barbarians', pp. 670ff.

⁵¹ IRD, p. 46 (ILG, p. 52).

⁵² TM, p. 56 (MT, p. 57).

⁵³ IRD, p. 46 (ILG, p. 52).

⁵⁴ TM, p. 29 (MT, p. 31).

⁵⁵ See Gallaher, 'Graced Creatureliness: Ontological Tension in the Uncreated/Created Distinction in the Sophiologies of Solov'ev, Bulgakov and Milbank', *Logos: A Journal*

and uncreated.⁵⁶ All antinomic thinking is in the service of protecting that distinction and attempting to perceive the Trinity as a 'primordial fact (*fait initial*)' or 'primordial reality (*réalité primordiale*)' or, once again, 'primordial truth (*vérité première*)' which cannot be arrived at by a process of reasoning (one cannot 'climb up behind it') as it is the infinitely anterior basis of all being and knowledge in being absolutely beyond both orders.⁵⁷ The apophatic surpasses (*l'emporter sur*) the cataphatic for Lossky.⁵⁸ It certainly has a positive or cataphatic end in the broadest sense of the word, which is to open us up to, purify us in preparation for the reception, the splendour and glory of God in prayer and through this union and communion with the Holy Trinity so that in putting on God we become gods by grace through participation in the divine energies: 'The apophatic way of Eastern theology is the repentance of the human person before the face of the living God. It is the constant transformation of the creature tending towards its completeness: towards that union with God which is brought about through divine grace and human freedom.'⁵⁹ One can only know God once we refuse to form concepts about him but instead draw near to him, becoming a new man, a man united with God, for the 'way of the knowledge of God is necessarily the way of deification'.⁶⁰

Now it seems fairly clear that Lossky believed 'antinomic theology' cum apophaticism was the position of the fathers as the methodology I have related is elaborated through the exegesis of different fathers including Dionysius, the Cappadocians and especially Palamas.⁶¹ The most persuasive passage in this regard is from Palamas, if it were not for his rejection of 'contradiction' in theology which, as we have seen, is said by Lossky to be a part of antinomic theology: 'It is an attribute [Palamas writes] of all theology which wishes to respect piety to affirm now one thing, now another, when both affirmations are true; to contradict oneself in one's affirmations is appropriate only for

of *Eastern Christian Studies* 47/1–2 (2006), pp. 163–90 at pp. 172ff. and pp. 181–2, and Gallaher, 'Antinomism, Trinity and the Challenge of Solov'evan Pantheism in the Theology of Sergij Bulgakov', *Studies in East European Thought* 64/3–4 (2012), pp. 205–25 at pp. 215ff.

⁵⁶ TM, p. 85 (MT, p. 88).

⁵⁷ TM, p. 62 (MT, p. 64) and IRD, pp. 76, 82–3 (ILG, pp. 80, 86). Here one is reminded (besides the usual patristic sources) of Schelling's idea (taken from Spinoza) of the free God's *Unvordenklichkeit des Seins* (unprethinkability of Being), for which see Joseph P. Lawrence, 'Spinoza through Schelling: Appropriation through Critique', *Idealistic Studies* 33/2–3 (2003), pp. 175–93.

⁵⁸ TM, p. 24 (MT, p. 26).

⁵⁹ TM, p. 237 (MT, p. 238), and see IRD, pp. 95ff. (ILG, pp. 97ff.).

⁶⁰ TM, p. 37 (MT, p. 39).

⁶¹ E.g. IRD, p. 64 (ILG, p. 68).

people completely deprived of reason'.⁶² That Palamas denies the necessity of contradiction in theology should make us a little suspicious. Just how patristic is antinomic theology?

A favourite passage of Palamas (cited at least twice) found in the posthumously published 1945–6 course of lectures at the Sorbonne on the 'Vision of God' gives the provenance of 'antinomic theology' away: 'the divine nature', says Gregory Palamas in his dialogue *Theophanes*, 'must be called at the same time incommunicable and, in a sense, communicable; we attain participation in the nature of God and yet he remains totally inaccessible. We must affirm both things at once and must preserve the antinomy as the criterion of piety (*Il faut que nous affirmions les deux choses à la fois, et que nous gardions leur antinomie, comme critère de la piété* [*Dei un amphotera hemas terein kai tithesthai hos eusebeias gnomona*])'.⁶³ The small problem is that there is only one conceivable object here in the Greek (both things: *amphotera*) and both verbs (to affirm and to guard/preserve: *terein kai tithesthai/tereo* and *tithemi*) refer to it. There does not appear to be anything in this passage that can be interpreted as the Greek *antinomia* without considerable eisegesis. Lossky has interpolated it in his translation to make his point about apophaticism being an antinomic theology. Of course, one does not even have to look at the original to sense something is not quite right as *antinomia* in classical and patristic Greek has an ethical meaning (i.e. a conflict of laws or ethical norms or opposition to laws or ethical norms) and the use of antinomy in this epistemological sense of two equally valid truths/affirmations/arguments dates to the late eighteenth century from Kant's first Critique (1781¹) with his rational antinomies. In fact, as far as I can discern from the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (which includes his *Triads*) Palamas never even used the word *antinomia*. Now antinomy and antinomic theology may be helpful heuristically to understand patristic apophaticism, but this is a separate matter and not what is being claimed by Lossky; what he is presenting is patristic theology on this subject. Quite simply, as Florovsky noted in a 1958 letter to the monk theologian Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov (1896–1993), Lossky's form of theological apophaticism (*antinomism* to use the technical term) comes not

⁶² Gregory Palamas, *Capita physica, theologica, moralia, et practica*, 150, 121, PG 150.1205A–B, cited at IRD, p. 45 (ILG, p. 51).

⁶³ *Vision de Dieu* (Neuchatel: Éditions Delachaux & Niestlé, 1962), p. 130; *The Vision of God*, trans. Asheleigh Moorhouse (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), p. 156, citing Palamas, *Theophanes*, PG 150.932D; Panayiotis K. Chrestou, *Gregoriou tou Palama syngrammata*, 5 vols (Thessaloniki: Ekdotikos Oikos Kyromanos, 1994), vol. 2, ll. 11–12, p. 238. And see TM, p. 67 (MT, p. 69).

from the fathers but from Florensky's philosophy of antinomies,⁶⁴ itself a development of Kant, and Lossky is indebted, by extension, to Bulgakov himself whose whole dogmatic theology is structured around antinomies. Indeed, in *Svet Nevechernii (Unfading Light)* (1917), which Lossky attacks in 1936, Bulgakov describes the essence/energies distinction as a 'pure antinomy' in a section devoted to exegeting the very same text (*Theophanes*) Lossky will mistranslate using the same notion nearly 30 years later.⁶⁵ Thus, the dependence of Lossky's apophaticism on Bulgakov's antinomism seems more than likely. We do not have the space here to elaborate antinomism at length but a brief sketch should establish our claim.⁶⁶

Kant held that, without holding to his epistemological dualism, reason is led 'unavoidably' to certain necessary 'rational' (or 'sophistical', as he prefers) illusions,⁶⁷ the most famous of which are his four rational antinomies.⁶⁸ Creatively developing Kant, Florensky, in his *Stolp i utverzhenie istiny (The Pillar and Ground of the Truth)* (1914) (a text Lossky cites),⁶⁹ and later Bulgakov, in a whole series of publications (e.g. *Svet Nevechernii (Unfading Light)* (1917), *Die Tragödie der Philosophie (The Tragedy of Philosophy)* (1927) and *Ikona i Ikonopochitanie (Icons and Icon-veneration)* (1931)), held that truth itself must take the formal logical form of an antinomy or 'self-contradictory judgement' where the antithesis entrains its thesis and vice versa.⁷⁰ Truth is a *coincidentia oppositorum* (Nicholas of Cusa) of multiple affirmations which logically cancel each other out but which are held together in faith.⁷¹ While in heaven there is one truth, here on earth we are faced with 'a multitude of truths,

⁶⁴ Sofronii Sakharov, *Perepiska s Protoiereem Georgiem Florovskim* (Moscow: Sviato-Ioanno-Predtechenskii Monast'ir'/Sviato-Troitskaia Sergieva Lavra, 2008), pp. 76–82 at p. 78 (thanks to Matthew Baker for this reference).

⁶⁵ Bulgakov, *Svet Nevechernii: Sozertsaniia i Umozreniia* [= SN] (1917), in Sergii Bulgakov, *Pervoobraz i Obraz: Sochineniia v Dvukh Tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow and St Petersburg: Iskusstvo/Inapress, 1999), p. 124; *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* [= UL], ed. and trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 133.

⁶⁶ See Gallaher, 'Antinomism', pp. 205–25, and part I of *Freedom and Necessity in Modern Trinitarian Theology* (forthcoming 2014 from Oxford University Press). I am drawing on the latter work in what follows.

⁶⁷ *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), A339/B397, p. 409, A582/B610, p. 559, A619/B647, p. 577, A644–5/B672–3, p. 591, and A702–3/B730–1, p. 622.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, A405–567/B432–595, pp. 459–550.

⁶⁹ See *Spor o Sofii*, pp. 13–14, and TM, p. 64 (MT, p. 65).

⁷⁰ Pavel Florensky, *Stolp i utverzhenie istiny: Opyt pravoslavnoi teoditsei v dvenadtsati pis'makh* (Moscow: Put', 1914; repr. Lepta, 2002), pp. 147ff., 153; *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 109ff., 114.

⁷¹ Florensky, *Stolp*, pp. 156–7 (Pillar, p. 116).

fragments of the Truth, noncongruent to one another'.⁷² Florensky applied this antinomic vision of truth to all the major Christian dogmas from the Trinity to the Chalcedonian definition to eschatology.⁷³

Bulgakov argues that antinomy, a contradiction for rational thought, is especially characteristic of religious consciousness and its experience of the mystery of the 'transcendent, outside-the-limits, divine world'. On the one hand, one has God, as the 'object of religion' who is completely transcendent, completely different in nature and external to the world and humanity. On the other hand, God is revealed to the religious consciousness in that he 'touches it, enters inside it and becomes its immanent content'. Both moments of religious consciousness are given simultaneously like 'poles, in their mutual repulsion and attraction'. The object of this consciousness, divinity, is something 'transcendentally-immanent or immanently-transcendent according to its essence'. God is necessarily both (error comes from emphasising only one of the poles) the one who dwells in light unapproachable (1 Tim 6:16) and the one who 'endlessly abases himself, condescends to the world, reveals himself to the world, dwells in the human being' and comes and makes his home with him (John 14:23). When we translate these basic elements of experience into the language of the philosophy of religion 'we will see immediately that before us is a clearly contradictory combination of concepts, leading to an antinomy' since the immanent cannot be simultaneously transcendent and 'to that extent it is not transcendent'.⁷⁴ Antinomy admits of two contradictory, logically incompatible, but 'ontologically equally necessary assertions', which testify to the existence of a mystery beyond which reason cannot penetrate but which is 'actualized and lived in religious experience'.⁷⁵ Yet 'rational impossibility and contradiction' is no guarantee of a real impossibility so we should be spurred on to disclose and grasp fully the antinomy of religious consciousness in its consequences to discern the mystery.⁷⁶ Just as in Florensky, when applied to theological truths ('dogma') we are forced to hold both thesis and antithesis of the dogma together through an 'ascetic struggle (*podvig*) of faith' which is transformative.⁷⁷

⁷² Florensky, *Stolp*, p. 158 (*Pillar*, p. 117).

⁷³ Florensky, *Stolp*, pp. 164–5 (*Pillar*, pp. 121–3).

⁷⁴ Bulgakov, *SN*, p. 99 (*UL*, pp. 103–4).

⁷⁵ *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, trans. Patrick Thompson, O. Fielding Clarke, and Xenia Braikévitch (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1993 [1937]), p. 77, n. 18.

⁷⁶ *SN*, p. 100 (*UL*, p. 104).

⁷⁷ *SN*, p. 141 and see p. 104 (*UL*, p. 153 and see p. 110).

Faith, for Bulgakov, certainly involved, just as in Lossky, a sacrifice of the intellect as well as *ascesis* in the striving towards perceiving the divine mystery and in this vision becoming what one worships through deification. Indeed, Bulgakov's late work is an extended meditation on deification which is the consequence of God being in union with humanity in Christ. Nevertheless, Bulgakov understood philosophy, quite differently from Lossky, as a necessary aid in discerning the dogmas of faith. He believed that dogmas, though antinomic in structure, were truths of religious revelation which had metaphysical content. They were expressed differently depending on the language of the philosophy of the day, whether it was the Greek philosophy used by the fathers or our own contemporary philosophy.⁷⁸ He lacks Lossky's pessimism in regard to reason, though he was certainly critical of rationalism. Indeed, it is arguable that Florensky and Bulgakov developed antinomism in direct reaction to the pantheism, determinism and rationalism in the sophiology of their predecessor Vladimir Solov'ev (1853–1900).⁷⁹

Bulgakov's theological antinomism can be seen particularly clearly in three key theological antinomies which are laid out in the second chapter of his book on icons. He argues, first, that 'God' in himself, insofar as one can say anything about him at all, is an Absolute 'Not-is' or Divine Nothingness beyond all relations, that is, theological apophaticism: an absolute NO.⁸⁰ Yet God is simultaneously absolute relation in himself (immanent Trinity), that is, theological kataphaticism: an absolute YES. Both the apophatic (NO) and the kataphatic absoluteness (YES) are equally primordial to the Godhead and this antinomy can only be taken together as 'an identity of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*)'.⁸¹ Bulgakov, reminiscent of Lossky's firm focus on the Father as the one *monarchos* of the Godhead, seems to identify the contraries of apophatic and kataphatic precisely in the personal groundless

⁷⁸ See 'Dogmat i dogmatica', pp. 9–24.

⁷⁹ See Jonathan Seiling, 'From Antinomy to Sophiology: Modern Russian Religious Consciousness and Sergei Bulgakov's Critical Appropriation of German Idealism', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2008. On Solov'ev's sophiology see Oliver Smith, *Vladimir Soloviev and the Spiritualization of Matter* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010), and Gallaher, 'The Christological Focus of Vladimir Solov'ev's Sophiology', *Modern Theology* 25/4 (Oct. 2009), pp. 617–46.

⁸⁰ Bulgakov, SN, p. 102 (UL, p. 107).

⁸¹ *Ikona i Ikonopochitanie: Dogmaticeskii ocherk* (1931), in Sergii Bulgakov, vol. 2, pp. 241–310 at p. 260; 'The Icon and its Veneration (A Dogmatic Essay)', in *Icons and the Name of God*, ed. and trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 1–114 at p. 29.

ground of the Trinity – the Father.⁸² The first of Bulgakov's antinomies is as follows:

I. Theological Antinomy (God in Himself)

THESIS: God is the Absolute, consequently, the pure NOT, the Divine Nothing

(Apophatic theology).

ANTITHESIS: God is the Absolute-in-Itself self-relation, the Holy Trinity (Kataphatic theology).⁸³

For Bulgakov, contrary to Lossky,⁸⁴ an apophatic understanding of God must be qualified by kataphaticism, or one risks negating everything including being itself which implies a relationship, above all a relationship of God to creation. One is, therefore, faced with a 'cosmological antinomy' after the 'theological antinomy'. God is, on the one hand, absolute self-relation in himself (immanent Trinity), perfect life circulating eternally in itself and, as God creates all things out of love, putting himself in relation to his creation, allowing himself to be defined by it and, relativised with creation's temporal, relative and becoming being, God is also Absolute-Relative (economic Trinity). God exists in creation (Bulgakov consciously and characteristically adapting patristic thought and indeed the language of Palamas to sophiology without direct citation or exegesis⁸⁵) as divine *energy*, by a supra-essential freedom where he remains himself while renouncing the perfection of his *essence*, and as God he changes the mode by which he enacts his essence, entering into becoming as 'a special form of the fullness of Being'. He limits and empties himself out of love by embracing change and

⁸² See *Utshitel'* (Paris: YMCA, 1936), pp. 406ff.; *The Comforter*, abridged trans. and ed. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 359ff. Also see *Sophia, The Wisdom of God*, pp. 38ff.

⁸³ *Ikona*, p. 264 (*Icons*, p. 35).

⁸⁴ See TM, pp. 23–4 (MT, p. 26).

⁸⁵ Bulgakov considered himself a 'neo-hesychast' and a 'palamite' and said sophiology was simply a development of Palamism. He was engaging directly with Palamas (as well as many other fathers especially Maximus) from at least 1910 onwards but generally he simply adapts patristic thought as needed for his theology and does not, unlike Florovsky and Lossky, develop his theology by exegeting the fathers. For Palamas see Joost van Rossum, 'Palamisme et Sophiologie', *Contacts, Revue française d'orthodoxie*, 222 (2008), pp. 133–45, and Roman Zavyiskyy, 'Shaping Modern Russian Orthodox Trinitarian Theology: A Critical Study of Sergii Bulgakov with Reference to Vladimir Lossky and Georgii Florovsky', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2011, esp. chs 2–4, and for Maximus see Seiling, *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, ch. 5.

process in the creation and redemption of the world.⁸⁶ The second of our antinomies looks like this:

II. Cosmological Antinomy (God in Himself and in creation)

THESIS: God in the Holy Trinity has all fullness and all-bliss; He is self-existent, unchanging, eternal, and therefore absolute.

(God in Himself).

ANTITHESIS: God creates the world out of love for creation, with its temporal, relative, becoming being, and becomes for it God, correlates Himself with it.

(God in creation).⁸⁷

Bulgakov's last antinomy is between the Uncreated or Divine Sophia which is the eternal *ousia*/Godmanhood of the Holy Trinity by which God the Father reveals himself to himself through his 'Dyad' of the Son and Spirit and the Created Sophia which is (variously – Bulgakov is not consistent) the divine basis of creation, divine energy and (more often) creation itself, which is the Divine Wisdom dwelling in non-being and becoming and in this way 'creating' the world. At this very point we can see how sophiology is inextricably bound up with antinomism so might be called, more precisely, 'sophiological antinomism'. 'Sophia', for Bulgakov, is a living antinomy insofar as she is uncreated-created, divine-creaturely being a 'both-and' taking in God and the world. Like Florensky, he applies this antinomic vision of sophiology to Chalcedon and develops a 'two-Sophias Christology'.⁸⁸ Yet it is precisely here that ultimately I think we see the major difference between Lossky and Bulgakov which is that Bulgakov blurs the line between the created and the uncreated. Two modes/images (*obraz*) of Sophia 'exist', one which is primary and divine, and one which is secondary and created, but they are one in a unity in difference.⁸⁹ This might seem to be simply a nice paradox but there is so much in Bulgakov that slides towards pantheism, such as his assertion that the only being that properly exists is divine and that creaturely being is a sort of epi-phenomenon of it.⁹⁰ Bulgakov claimed

⁸⁶ Lossky, *Agnets Bozhii* [= AB] (Paris: YMCA Press, 1933), p. 333; *The Lamb of God* [= LG], trans. and abridged by Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 302; and see SN, pp. 192ff. (*UL*, pp. 214ff.) (the Palamite language in this text is pervasive).

⁸⁷ *Ikona*, p. 264 (*Icons*, p. 35).

⁸⁸ See Gallaher, 'Graced Creatureliness', pp. 172ff.

⁸⁹ *Nevesta Agntsa* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1945), p. 70; *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. and abridged by Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 60; and compare AB, p. 148 (*LG*, p. 126).

⁹⁰ *Nevesta Agntsa*, p. 51 (*Bride of the Lamb*, p. 43); and see *Nevesta Agntsa*, p. 128 (*Bride of the Lamb*, p. 117), AB, pp. 146–7 (*LG*, pp. 124–5), and *Sophia, The Wisdom of God*, p. 148.

he espoused ‘panentheism’ not ‘pantheism’ but the tension indicated in his work is perpetual (although he has, arguably, resources in his work to respond to the problems created by his system):⁹¹

III. Sophiological Antinomy (Divine Wisdom in God and in the world)

THESIS: God, unisubstantial in the Holy Trinity, reveals Himself in His Wisdom, which is His Divine life and the Divine world in eternity, fullness and perfection.

(Noncreaturely Sophia—Divinity in God).

ANTITHESIS: God creates the world by His Wisdom, and this Wisdom, constituting the Divine foundation of the world, abides in temporal-spatial becoming, submerged in non-being.

(Creaturely Sophia—Divinity outside God, in the world).⁹²

It certainly does seem at first that Lossky was hiding the dependence of his apophaticism on Bulgakov’s sophiological antinomism. In fact, the reality may be much more complex and surprising. There are indications in the work of those who knew him that the relationship of Lossky to the older theologian was not simply negative. The French Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clément (1921–2009), who was a former student of Lossky and a close friend, writes of the ‘positive impetus’ given to Lossky’s ‘theological reflection’ by Bulgakov’s theology, for ‘in a sense, V. L.’s entire theology – focussed as it is on the topic of Uncreated Grace and on the Palamite conception of the Divine Energies – can be seen as an attempt to give expression to Father Bulgakov’s basic intuition in a manner that is traditional and fully Orthodox’.⁹³ Clément also writes fascinatingly of various ‘interrupted projects’ of Lossky including a planned more positive work on Bulgakov. He claims that, having battled Bulgakov’s sophiological formulations (with their Idealism, determinism and pantheism) for so long and with such mercilessness, Lossky decided at a certain point that the risk of sophiology had been overcome. He could with all intellectual honesty begin to emphasise Bulgakov’s ‘positive intuitions’ or ideas and begin writing a new, more positive study of his sophiology. Above all, what he admired in Bulgakov was his strong cosmic sense of Christianity which was so strongly present in ante-Nicene Christianity which did not distinguish between the ‘transcendent Trinity’ and the ‘cosmic Trinity’ at

⁹¹ Here see Gallaher, ‘Antinomism’, pp. 218ff.

⁹² *Ikona*, p. 264 (*Icons*, pp. 35–6).

⁹³ Olivier Clément, ‘Notice biographique’, in Lossky, *Sept jours*, pp. 85–8 at p. 86; Clément, ‘Biographical Note’, Lossky, *Seven Days*, pp. 101–7 at p. 103 (in neither French nor English is Clément indicated as the author), which is an unacknowledged reprint of Clément, ‘Notice biographique’, in *Orient-Occident: Deux passeurs*, pp. 94–9 at p. 96.

work in the divine economy (God being all-in-all). Lossky felt he could reintroduce these intuitions into the tradition by underlining the personal character of the divine energies through aligning the 'divine Sophia' with the energies and the created Sophia with the *logoi* of Maximus. In particular, he felt that the divine energies, building on Bulgakov, do not exist outside the divine Persons in whom they are enhypostatised in both the glorious self-manifestation of the Persons and in their creative and recreative action, since the divine energies are 'the living content of their [the divine persons'] presence and action'.⁹⁴

This more nuanced picture of Lossky's attitude to Bulgakov is backed up by Lossky's son, Nicolas, who relates that the young Vladimir was reluctant to publish his *Spor o Sofii* given that 'Fr Sergius' was a close family friend and because he insisted that 'any critical text placed in the public domain should be ultimately positive, not simply negative', but was pressured to do so by his ecclesial confrères. We are told that the two theologians reconciled before Bulgakov's death⁹⁵ and it is said that on the death of Bulgakov in July 1944 Lossky travelled across war-torn France at great personal cost in order to attend his funeral. Yet, most remarkably, we are told by his son something which can only be regarded as 'startling', given how Lossky has up until now been portrayed as a bitter opponent of Bulgakov:

To us, his students, he insisted that Father Sergius was without doubt the greatest Orthodox theologian of the 20th century and that his sophiology deserved to be corrected so as to render it entirely admissible.⁹⁶

It is hoped that a few unknown aspects of Lossky's apophaticism have been brought to light. Lossky's famous form of apophaticism as 'antinomic theology', it has been argued, is dependent on non-patristic philosophical and theological sources, namely, the 'sophiological antinomism' of Florensky and, especially, Bulgakov whom he had accused of heresy. Lossky at first appears to be masking this influence and even goes so far as to read his own form of theological antinomism into a translation of Palamas. However, it may well be that Lossky was also (though to what extent is hard to say)

⁹⁴ Olivier Clément, 'Vladimir Lossky, un Théologien de la Personne et du Saint-Esprit', *Messenger de l'Exarchat du Patriarche Russe en Europe Occidentale Revue*, 30–1 (April–Sept. 1959), pp. 137–206 at p. 205, and (slightly expanded) *Orient-Occident: Deux passeurs*, pp. 92ff.

⁹⁵ Nicholas Lossky, 'New Preface Vladimir Lossky's The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church', in *Seven Days*, pp. 109–22 at pp. 117–18.

⁹⁶ *Seven Days*, p. 117, but Lossky is related to have likewise lauded Florovsky. See 'Transcripts of Lectures of Lossky, 13/12/56', p. 10, as cited in Rowan Williams, 'Theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky', p. 281 (though this comment is not found in the published version of these lectures).

consciously borrowing and adapting concepts from Bulgakov, above all his antinomism, in a conscious project to 'Orthodoxise' a thinker he regarded as the greatest Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century and whose positive intuitions he hoped to build upon in his work, even so far as writing a new positive study of Bulgakov's thought. So it may be the case that, just as Bulgakov may be read as a closet (if not the first) neo-patrologue,⁹⁷ so too Lossky may be a tacit sophiologist. Whatever the case may be, it is arguable that Bulgakov is, as it were, the 'skeleton key' of modern Orthodox theology. A critical knowledge of sophiology with all its flaws is essential for unlocking modern Orthodox theology's history, present controversies and even, perhaps, its future.

Lossky was above all a creative theologian and his writing, though presented by himself as a historical exegesis of the fathers, is best understood as a creative re-envisioning of their wisdom in dialogue with the thought of his day. Far from being a weakness in his oeuvre, Lossky's 'systematic theological' approach to the fathers, as a species of patristically inspired theology, both illumines and deepens our knowledge of the fathers and gives them a new voice in the contemporary arena. It is why Lossky continues to be read while the de Régnons of his period have long been forgotten. Finally, we find, quite surprisingly, that Lossky and Bulgakov have much more in common than is normally believed. They certainly differ in their respective attitudes towards reason and philosophy and, above all, in their position on the uncreated/created distinction. However, the fact that two very different thinkers embraced a common methodology points to a basic continuity in the theological divisions of modern Orthodox theology. What draws Bulgakov and Lossky together is a common emphasis on *theosis* and an understanding of truth and theology as being fundamentally experiential, always involving paradox, awe, transformation and encounter.

⁹⁷ Papanikolaou, 'Eastern Orthodox Theology', p. 541 (an observation he credits to Matthew Baker).