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ON THE POSSIBILITY OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: The article analyzes the correlation between theology and philosophy and discusses the fundamental possibility of creating Christian philosophy. Historical and experimental theoretical grounds for the possibility of developing Christian philosophy within the framework of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy are consistently analyzed. On the basis of the historical and philosophical analogy, the authors trace the origin of those positions and approaches that have received their detailed substantiation and justification for the relationship with philosophy within these confessions. The problems on the way to the creation of Christian philosophy are revealed. The role of Christian philosophy in Catholicism is examined on the basis of the Thomist concept of the coexistence of theology and philosophy. The approach to the building of Christian philosophy from the standpoint of Protestantism is represented both by its radical branch and by its alternative "cultural Protestantism". As the specific characteristics of the Eastern Christian knowledge of God the unity of the contemplative and activity-based path, spiritual cognition and theology are singled out. The importance for Orthodox thought of the apophatic way of cognition, the apophatics of the individual instead of the apothatics of the essence is emphasized (G. Palamas, V. Lossky, D. Stăniloae). In the final statements, the authors come to the conclusion of the possibility of Christian philosophy in the Orthodox version, which is the possibility coordinated with Christian dogmatics, an experience of its living, and therefore reasonable comprehension.

Key words: Christian philosophy, Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodoxy, Russian Religious Philosophy, theology, unitotality, apophatics.

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1. Theology and Philosophy

Having determined the topic to be considered by using such a term as “Christian philosophy”, we knowingly put ourselves in an unenviable position for several fairly obvious reasons. First, it is vulnerable due to not being anchored in a particular Christian tradition; therefore, it cannot compete with the time-tested theology and philosophy. It is no coincidence that É. Gilson, the representative of Neo-Scholasticism, warns of the fate of a lonely thinker who embarks on this path, which simply provokes attacks from both the part of theology and the position of philosophy (Gilson 1995, 9-10). Second, the topic of Christian philosophy seems to be considered a long time ago, and the opinions about it seem quite persistent. Finally, third, the position of Christian philosophy considered from the Orthodox Christian standpoint can provoke a negative reaction in view of its traditional reference to medieval Catholic philosophy – Thomism, which is being actively updated and developed in modern Neo-Thomism.

Theology can perceive a hybrid named “Christian philosophy” at best only as an involuntary gratification to negligent thinkers who persist in their pride related to the excessively enormous role of the human mind, or at worst, it may regard Christian philosophy as the Trojan horse of heresy considering the issues of religious (Christian) faith in an exceedingly free and unprepared manner. Fr. S. Bulgakov, who resisted the temptation of philosophical materialism and idealism, assessed the value of various philosophical trends from the standpoint of theology precisely as a variety of heresies.

Philosophy must suppose that the thinking mind starting a logical series of inferences from itself and discovering a priori principles through itself, inherently faces the limits, and it is offered metaphysical grounds incompatible with the freedom of the reason. The articulation of the issue of Christian philosophy seems to be a rudimentary attempt to reanimate, first and foremost, the problems of the correlation of faith and knowledge (cognition) and the freedom of the will, which repeatedly raise questions of the responsibility of a scientist and the moral choice of man while discussing such common topics as “science and religion”, “morality and universal values”, and similar issues.

2. Christian Philosophy and Catholicism

Christian philosophy seemingly demonstrates the most acceptable and developed form in Catholicism. It is within the framework of Western Christianity that the contradictory role of philosophy as a servant of theology is theoretically substantiated and justified. Medieval scho-

lasticism represented by Thomism is accepted by the Catholic world as the only adequate image of the coexistence of human and divine wisdom. Let us try to understand to which extent the unanimous statements of Catholic theologians and philosophers are fair.

From the very start, we should pay attention to the fact that Catholic thinkers accept the essential independence of philosophy and theology due to the fact that the former is concerned with the natural order of things, and the latter is concerned with the supernatural one. These orders are different, yet there is a connection between them. In order to establish this connection, which is necessary from the point of view of philosophy and absolutely unnecessary from the point of view of theology, J. Maritain, for instance, has to talk about two types of analysis: the analysis by nature (or essence) and the analysis by the actual position (Maritain 1999, 139-154). According to the first analysis and the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, philosophy reveals its truths with the help of *lumen naturale*, that is, the natural light of the reason, without resorting to the Revelation, and it is therefore completely rational. As to theology, it is concerned with the truth of the Revelation, which is suprarational; thus, it is not connected with any truths discovered by the reason. However, the factual situation, as the French Neo-Scholastic testifies, shows philosophy's dependence on theology, reason's dependence on faith, and nature's dependence on the Revelation. Just like God reveals himself to the world in his creation, leaving the freedom of choice to the mortal plane, theology lends a helping hand to philosophy without forcing it to leave its own legitimately occupied place.

In view of the fact that theology and philosophy are essentially different, according to the Catholic position, they cannot create a space, which is common for them and can be referred to as Christian philosophy. Thus, on the one hand, Christian philosophy is not a kind of teaching that can really be represented, developed within certain boundaries or their outlines. However, on the other hand, it does exist, it is spoken about, it is discussed, and Catholic philosophers and theologians argue about it. What is actually happening here? How, according to Catholic thinkers, can this contradiction between the illusory essence and the real existence of Christian philosophy be circumvented or overcome?

The point is that, in a literate theologian's worldview, there is no contradiction at all: a true philosopher, unconsciously, inspiringly, and at the same time objectively cannot be confined only within the framework of nature; neither the problem of nature as such nor the mystery of the personality can be solved by the ideas of a natural order. Following the logic of Catholic thought, one can reach the conclusion that, by their ultimate questioning, philosophers themselves point to the possibility of the existence of the supernatural, or the suprarational. On the other hand, theology should not remain indifferent to the search and inquiry of rational philosophy if it wants to be useful to modern humanity. Just like

the grace of the Lord does not abandon its essentially non-divine creation, theology should enrich philosophy with supportive attention. It should also be taken into consideration that theology, in view of the fact that it is present in the human world and must use ways of asserting itself understandable to man, turns to philosophical systems for acquiring the tools necessary in such cases.

However, a counter-question arises: after all, there are many philosophical systems, and they are in mostly antagonistic relations with one another; does that mean that there can be many theologies? É. Gilson believes that this is so, referring basically to the difference in the theology of St. Augustine, who relies on the philosophy of Plotinus, and the theology of St. Thomas, who uses the philosophical doctrine of Aristotle. Within the framework of the cooperation between theology and philosophy, competition among various theologies also arises. This is where the Catholic Church and the Pope as its chief representative must already act as the arbiters. By the words of Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical titled *Aeterni Patris* (1879), the Catholic Church gives unequivocal priority to the theology of Thomas Aquinas, because it claims to generate the only true relationship with philosophy as the wisdom of the natural world.

And yet, why are Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas chosen? The answer of scholasticism and Neo-Scholasticism is quite predictable: the philosophy of Aristotle, having deprived Plato's natural world of the two orders, created the sum of the order of the natural world, by rationally calculating it in the best possible way. What seemed unobvious to Plato because of its ordinary nature, lost its sacredness and became truly ordinary in Aristotle's opinion. Having thus completely enclosed the space of the natural world by rational schemes, Aristotle at the same time hinted at the existence of a supernatural, or a suprarational world, to which we are compelled to turn while trying to complete the inertia of our thinking, continuing to think of its absence in the same way as we think of the natural world. It is Thomas Aquinas's mission to defend the identity of Stagirite's ideas from attempts to completely forget the connection of the natural and the supranatural, the rational and the suprarational, which seems so optional in a certain way of interpreting the views of the ancient thinker.

Nevertheless, as further events in both the development of philosophy and that of theology demonstrate, the scholastic studies of Aquinas turned out to be irrelevant; moreover, through the Renaissance and the Reformation, they provoked a sharp separation of rational philosophy and doctrinal theology. Anthropocentrism and humanism of the philosophical ideas of Renaissance thinkers, on the one hand, and the *sola fide* concept of Protestantism, on the other hand, to a certain extent, were a historical response to the dissatisfaction with the artificiality of comprehending Aristotle in a theological way.

The Rationality of Faith in the Age of New Atheism by S. Wszolek, a

Catholic priest and a philosopher, is very revealing for Catholic thought developing towards an increasing dependence on rational philosophy in its search for harmony between knowledge and faith (Wszolek 2005). In this book, the Catholic theologian seeks to prove that the act of faith itself has rational characteristics, and the mind that manifests itself in faith is no different from ordinary mind. Without going into a serious and detailed analysis of the suggested concept, we would like to point out a clear contradiction between the descriptions of the dynamics of an act of faith and its logic: whereas in the dynamics, an act of faith begins with a reasonable basis, some evidence, in logic, a person's movement of thought is preceded by an existential volitional decision: whether one should take up a position of faith or not.

3. Christian Philosophy and Protestantism

This approach to constructing Christian philosophy rationalizing the relationship between knowledge and faith and preferring the most "godless" philosophers was most radically criticized during the Reformation. It is well known that M. Luther suggested excluding the study of the heathen philosopher Aristotle as the one sowing the seeds of doubt in the affairs of faith and therefore giving little profit to strengthening the latter (Luther 1997, 97-98).

If we draw a historical and theological analogy, at the stage of the medieval apologetics, we can trace the origin of those positions and approaches that received their detailed substantiation in Catholicism and Protestantism. An analysis of the views of Luther as the mastermind and the essential ideologist of the Reformation demonstrates his commitment to a tradition that originates from Tertullian and his rejection of all Hellenic wisdom in the light of the Christian faith in the Scripture. Following the apologist for early Christianity, as if denying the stage of reception of Christianity that lasted for almost 1.5 thousand years, Luther, by depriving both the priest and the philosopher of the right of mediation, leaves man alone with his faith in God.

Luther's radicalism in opposing the truth of faith and the cunning of mind in Neo-Protestant theology is defended by K. Barth. According to him, the incommensurability of God and man makes illusory and deceptive any attempts of the efforts of a finite being to comprehend the infinity and eternity concluded in the Trinity. Another modern Protestant theologian P. Tillich justifies this radicalism in the concept of absolute faith, which alone is able to maintain a person's state of the "courage of being" in the epoch of the death of God, the godforsakenness of modern civilization. Tillich considers that Luther's *sola fide* which allows justification by faith, i.e. leaves a loophole of rational meaning in faith must be replaced by faith that does not allow any justification. Neither

theology nor religious existentialism, according to the Protestant author, can help man discover a real living God who can be revealed only through absolute faith or the “courage of being”: “The courage of being is rooted in such a God who manifests himself when God disappears in anxiety of doubt” (Tillich 1992, 119).

It is obvious that within the framework of such a radical sort of Protestantism one cannot actually speak of theology, let alone any sort of philosophy, even a religious one. However, this nature of the Protestant position is one-sided and does not fully correspond to the historical moment of the emergence of Protestantism, which is no less important to this phenomenon than the abstract historical, dogmatic aspect.

Therefore, as an alternative to radical Christianity, “cultural Christianity” or “cultural Protestantism” (the terms used by R. Niebuhr) emerges to dissolve Christ in human culture. Yet unilateral flaws in the positions of the Protestant theologies of “Christ in culture” and “Christ vs. culture” (R. Niebuhr) are too obvious, as they absolutize either the otherworldliness of God and the divine essence of Christ, on the one hand, or the presence of God in the world and the God-likeness of the creatures of God, on the other hand. Protestant theologians themselves find in them too rigid initial statement of a certain thinker who subjectively interprets the texts of the Bible and therefore inadequately responds to the challenges of time and incorrectly defines the objectives and functions of theology. J. Moltmann, for instance, regards the fundamental objective of theology as the mediation between the “Christian tradition and the present-day culture” and lists successful syntheses which, while preserving the “Christian message in its undistorted, authentic form” ensure its actual importance and relevance among the assets of the Christian mission of theology (Moltmann 1994, 43). R. Niebuhr prefers discussing the synthesis of Christ and culture, which ultimately unites the seemingly irreconcilable positions of both Christian conservatives and Christian liberals affirming the importance of “civic virtues and fair social institutions” (Niebuhr 1996, 121). Still, he also finds it obvious that the synthetic aspirations of theology are opposed to the dualistic theology, which is equally justified; hence, according to R. Niebuhr, an honest and scrupulous theologian has no choice but to admit his impotence in determining the mission of theology and its use of philosophy and science to clarify the ultimate human questions. The problems of Christianity and its role in the life of man and society are ultimately solved not theoretically, but practically by every free and responsible individual.

This last conclusion of the modern Protestant theologian seems quite natural and justified in view of the common position of Protestantism that it advocates in Christianity since the Reformation: a believer, on the basis of his awareness of his own faith, is endowed with the ability to answer the questions of the meaning of life and act as a true Christian according to his answers.

4. Christian Philosophy and Russian Religious Philosophy

One of the most famous attempts to create Christian philosophy on an Orthodox basis was Russian religious philosophy, which received an impetus for its development from the Slavophiles who deliberately opposed their position regarding religious criteria to the Westernizers: their search for an integral worldview and reflections on the fate of Russia were imbued with religious issues, which, in its turn, relies on the patristic tradition in their interpretation.

However, despite calls and demands to use more actively in philosophical studies the theological methods of the knowledge of God – especially the apophatic one – and the experience of the patristic heritage, the Russian religious philosophers did not avoid problems while implementing their ideas. It should be noted that, whereas they achieved undoubted success in criticism of Western European religious and secular thought and discovered original ways of interpretation and assessment which incidentally served as a starting point for several modern philosophical trends, the constructive part of their philosophical schemes remained entirely at the mercy of what they themselves criticized. An attentive and objective analysis of the concepts of integral knowledge, unitotality, conciliarity, sophiology, and onomatodoxy, which are considered to be the acquisition of an independent religious love of wisdom of the Russian philosophers, reveals the same origins and foundations that can be found in the works by Western philosophers, theologians, and mystics. Perhaps we should agree with a rather strict yet fair general assessment of Russian religious philosophy formulated by Fr. Georges Florovsky, who regards it as one of the most Westernized episodes in Russian development (Solovyov 1990, 1: 737).

Let us provide an example to illustrate it. The prosperity of Russian philosophy in the second half of the 19th century begins with the works by Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov (1853 – 1900), which still have an admirable power and popularity. He sought to generate a system of unitotality, defining the unitotal as an “unconditional existence”. In accordance with the division of methods of cognition, Vl. Solovyov hierarchically divides philosophy and theology: “If we refer to the system of the rational knowledge as philosophy, we must admit that philosophy derives its content from the religious knowledge, or theology” (Solovyov 1990, 2: 741, 778, 194). At the same time, the theological, or, as Solovyov puts it, the “mystical”, “needs the natural for its completeness of reality”, due to which, truth is revealed only in the synthesis of all types of knowledge. Therefore, for Solovyov, his “free theosophy” is the “highest state of all the philosophy... in the internal synthesis of its three essential trends – mysticism, rationalism, and empiricism” (Gaidenko 2001, 12). In addition, it also combines logic, metaphysics, and ethics. As a result, Vl. Solovyov believes that he developed the fundamental ideas of the

philosophy of unitotality through ethics (the idea of the highest good or “unitotality as the supreme demand of the moral will”), gnoseology, and metaphysics (“unitotality as the supreme idea of the mind, or the existent truth”). This unitotality as the “truth of God” is implemented in the historical development of mankind and is expressed in terms of good (the moral sphere, will), truth (the cognitive sphere, for the mind), and beauty (as the realization of unitotality in the area of sensory, carnal existence).

However, the question remains: how could empirical science, notional philosophy, and theology be united to form one truth, one subject and method? For instance, no consistent theologian, philosopher, or scientist will agree with the diffuseness of their spheres in some kind of universality (in spite of the fact that they certainly intersect and interact, nevertheless, without merging). For the above reasons, this unitotality inevitably assumes an abstract and vague nature, which is exactly what Vl. Solovyov spoke against (Florovsky 1991, 492).

5. Specificity of Orthodox Christian Thought

What are the criteria for singling out the Orthodox specificity of Christian thought? On what grounds is Orthodox Christian thought able to identify and express itself? The main starting point of the considerations of Christian thinkers is the meditation on the question of the connection between man and God; this is where a Christian thinker faces a fundamental dilemma, and its solution entirely determines the subsequent course of his thought: on the one hand, God is immanent to the world, He is always present in his creation, on the other hand, He is absolutely transcendental to the mortal plane.

As an alternative to Aristotelianism and Thomism, that is, Christianized Hellenism, Orthodoxy affirms its triumph through Palamism, the teachings of St. Gregory Palamas. It is typical that G. Palamas starts his essential work, *Triads for the Defense of Those Who Practice Sacred Quietude*, exactly from analyzing the correlation between the natural, human, ancient understanding of wisdom and truth and the Divine wisdom. Referring to the Scripture and the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, he solves the problem of human cognition in the light of the Christian Revelation. We must immediately point out Palamas’ strong opposition to the truth of the natural mind and its ability to approach the Divine truth. This is where different orientations of consciousness are immediately “turned on”: the orientation towards a gradual and steady increase in the power of human mastery of nature (the doubt in this case is not absolute; it is only an aspect of the general belief in the possibility of the human reason) and the orientation towards powerlessness, the futility of human effort contrasted to the absolute possibilities of God, the horror of the absolute distance between these possibilities, between the finitude

and the limitations of the human mind and the infinity and eternity of the Divine Wisdom. This distance can never be overcome by man himself; the awareness of this immutable fact is the impulse to acquire a new, a completely new science based on advanced methods and objectives, “whose beginning is the fear of God, giving rise to an incessant tender prayer to God and the observance of evangelical commandments, followed by the reconciliation with God, when fear is transformed into love, and the painfulness of the prayer, turning into sweetness, cultivates the flower of enlightenment, from which, like a fragrance spreading to the one who carries this flower, the cognition of God’s mysteries descends. These are true science and knowledge”, St. G. Palamas concludes (Palamas 2004, 15).

This science does not imply an increase in knowledge, there is no progress of knowledge; instead, there is an inner transfiguration, an inmost making of man. The absolute nature of the distance and the absence of degrees of approximation do not demonstrate man’s powerlessness, his passivity, or the meaninglessness of his efforts. On the contrary, only understanding it reveals the true meaning of human cognition, which is in this very manner inseparable from cognition generated by an integral, transfigured man. The totality of truth can only be mastered by an integral man. It can no longer be refuted; it no longer needs to be extracted by human labor of the natural mind. Palamas considers that these last criteria, i.e. falsifiability of the truth and the intellectual efforts shown, reveal the absence of truth, its hidden nature.

Therefore, on the one hand, the wisdom of God and that of man are two kinds of wisdom, and the wisdom of man can oppose itself to God and become the true madness of the Nietzschean man embodied in such a formula as “God is dead”; on the other hand, the Divine wisdom is the only possibility of the fulfillment of the human wisdom, which, by means of abandoning its specialty – the pride of mind – and through humility, can find the insanity of the human wisdom or the true wisdom, which is born out of this world.

How, then, can we reach the consistency of a combination of two such seemingly incompatible messages in the correlation between the Divine and the human wisdom? There can be only one answer – a solution is adequate through the Palamitic division of the Divine essence and energies: man’s access to the Divine is impossible in its essence, but it is quite possibly empirically in terms of energy. St. Gregory Palamas and the councils of the 14th century (1341, 1347, 1351, and 1368) only dogmatically confirmed the truth that the Eastern Fathers of the Church stated from the first centuries of Christianity. Orthodoxy has remained true to this tradition; therefore, the Eastern Church maintains the assessment of Hellenic intellectual wisdom as the “wisdom abolished”, the “wisdom of this epoch”, or an “empty seduction” (Palamas 2004, 33).

When V. Lossky, a distinguished Russian theologian and philosopher of the 20th century, singles out the unity of the contemplative and activity

paths, mysticism and theology as specific characteristics of the Eastern Christian knowledge of God (Lossky 2003, 112-121), he also clarifies the Palamitic discourse on the correlation of faith and knowledge in Christianity, the wisdom and the Holy Wisdom. The modern domestic thinker S. Horuzhy, analyzing the difference between the Eastern and the Western traditions in Christianity, comes to the conclusion that “they are correlated as an energy discourse (speaking of energies – ‘speeches’, ‘thoughts’, volitions, aspirations, impulse ...) and an essential discourse (speaking of essences, ideas, principles, teloses...)” (Horuzhy 2000, 26-27). With these conclusions agrees Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, who believes that the lack of energy discourse in Catholicism distorts the nature of love. “Unlike Catholicism – notes Dumitru Stăniloae – which does not agree with the uncreated energies of God, and which therefore must consider love to be a created gift, Orthodoxy regards love as uncreated energy, imparted by the Holy Spirit, by the energy of the Divine and by the energy created by God, by means of which we actually participate in the life of the Holy Trinity” (Stăniloae 2009, 16).

The apophatic way of cognition is extremely important for Orthodox thought, and V. Lossky considers it generally decisive. Its interesting and profound analysis can be found in the work by the modern Greek philosopher and theologian Christos Yannaras titled *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*. According to Yannaras, Eastern Christianity is characterized by apophaticism of personality, not that of the essence (Aristotelianism). Following the Russian religious philosophers who, on the basis of the Christological and especially the Trinitarian dogma, proved the compatibility of apophaticism and logic, pointing out the modifications in logic itself and its acceptance of the principle of contradiction, when both assertion and denial are equally acceptable – S. Frank called the method of such logic the method of “antinomistic monodualism” – the Greek thinker also emphasizes the logical connectivity of apophatic knowledge, i.e. its non-identity to logical indifferentism, irrationalism, and individual mysticism. The main difficulty of this analysis by the Greek author is seen in the fact that both Western Christian and Eastern Christian theologies are equally heavily reliant on the Areopagite corpus of works in their understanding of apophaticism. Nevertheless, the epistemological apophaticism of the Western Christian tradition was adapted to the requirements of an “objective” comprehension of truth, when “truth is exhausted by its definition” (Yannaras 2005, 42), whereas apophaticism of the Eastern Christian tradition chose to overcome these requirements. Thus, the Greek author tries to substantiate the idea that the adequately understood apophaticism, which arose in the Tradition of the Eastern Church, is a radical revision of the foundations of logic that was developed in ancient philosophy and transformed into Thomism.

An important element that serves as the basis for the revision of the ancient logic of Aristotle, according to Yannaras, was the image (icon), which took the place that used to be occupied by the concept in Aristotelian logic in apophatic knowledge. Maintaining the analogy of cognition, that is, cognition by analogy and through analogy, methodically, which, according to Aristotle, implies three ways – that of abstraction, that of surpassing, and that of causality – the imagery of analogous thinking simultaneously overcomes the compulsion of evidence and the compulsion of the discursive definition of God. The “image” adds the characteristics of otherness and freedom to the “likeness”; the divine image is the action of the Divine, i.e. its energies. In addition, Ch. Yannaras considers that the figurative use of the analogous method gives a possibility to adequately represent the result of logic with the simultaneous assertion and negation, the definition of both the existent and the non-existent: “The image arising from the synthesis of opposite characteristics is a semantic figure in relation, superior to both assertion and negation. This image determines the way of liberation from any gnoseological position or method; it implies renunciation of any binding in judgment” (Yannaras 2005, 49).

Therefore, according to the Greek author, apophaticism as an analogous figurative thinking, using logical, rational definitions, notions, and categories, contains an understanding of the limitations of man’s intellectual capabilities in his striving to cognize God. Intellectual efforts can only serve as an incentive to an experiential attitude toward comprehending the Divine reality. Yannaras insists on searching for truth in the dynamics of life communication, existential experience instead of merely improving the intellectual apparatus.

Interesting arguments about the impossibility of a rational and logical description of the fundamental Christian truths we find in the remarkable modern Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae (Koman 2008), which, in his opinion, does not testify to their absolute inexpressibility. “All attempts at scientific definition and doctrinal explanations – notes Dumitru Stăniloae – with which the West tried (and is still trying to) replace the symbolic explanation of the mystery, come from the delusion that this mystery can be clearly expressed in human words. But this mystery narrows or even dissolves, as soon as an attempt is made to conclude it into some clear words and scientific definitions” (Stăniloae, 2013). In his attempt to emphasize the Christian philosophy of the Orthodox tradition for the XXth century man, Stăniloae proceeds to criticize the XXth century philosophers, especially Martin Heidegger and Martin Buber. In contrast to their work, he proposes a philosophy based on the encounter between man and transcendence, at the border between reason and living experience, between symbolic communication and the experience of mystical light. Thus, Stăniloae builds a relational ethics that is suitable for the way of thinking of the Christian patristic philosophy

(Frunză 2013, 115). At the foundation of this philosophy one finds the theory of divine energies, such as the one spelled out by Gregory Palamas. This is important for the Christian philosopher through the existential dynamic it makes possible as experience of God: „this experience of the apophatic abyss of divinity is itself the experience of a presence of God in man, and any new form of expressing and experiencing him represents some progress into God” (Stăniloae 1980, 174).

6. Concluding Remarks

What do all these arguments mean for the idea of Christian philosophy in the light of the Orthodox doctrine? Is the union of philosophy and Orthodoxy possible, and if so, on what conditions could it exist? In our opinion, Palamism forms a philosophical and theological position due to which philosophical contemplations that demonstrate kinship and the desire to cooperate with Christian apologetics deserve closer attention. The freedom to use philosophy in Christian theology and the philosopher’s freedom of choice do not guarantee a compulsory combination of theology and philosophy, and even if that happily takes place there is no guarantee of its continuation. But even the search for such a meeting can lead to interesting intellectual insights; the search in this case does not mean reconciling the truths of nature and the truth of the Revelation, because a Christian philosopher “does not distinguish between faith and mind. Christian philosophy begins with the truths of faith and reveals the light of mind in them” (Florovsky 2005, 316).

M. Heidegger, the famous German philosopher of the 20th century, expresses an original (but that is all there is to it) position regarding “Christian philosophy”: he calls it a “thing even more ridiculous than the idea of a square circle” (Heidegger 1993, 113). The German philosopher bases his conclusion on the idea that Christian truth can only be a doctrine by its nature, a “sum” of established provisions; hence, the school is the only possible form of its representation, which, of course, is incompatible with the free creativity of a philosopher.

Noting the ambiguity and complexity of the construction of Christian philosophy, the constant dangers of reducing either philosophy to theology or vice versa, one of the domestic researchers observes: “Yet Christian religious philosophy has a difficult path... Therefore, one can always expect that in the practical implementation, the compilers of systems of Christian philosophy will be forced to sacrifice principles of one area in favor of another one. The church consciousness welcomes sincere experiences of creating a harmonious philosophical Christian worldview. Still, the Church regards them as private, personal constructions, and does not authorize them with its authority. In any case, there must be a clear separation between dogmatic theology and Christian philosophy, and any

attempts to turn dogmatics into Christian philosophy must be rejected” (Pomazansky 2004, 416-417).

The possibility of Christian philosophy from the Orthodox standpoint was defended with the greatest consistency by Fr. V. Zenkovsky. In his opinion, “Christian philosophy is a philosophy derived from faith. Cognition of the world and man, a systematic summary of the fundamental principles of existence are not presented in our faith; they have to be constructed in our free creative work, but in the light of Christ” (Zenkovsky 1997, 22). Fr. Georges Florovsky, according to whom faith is not limited to dogmatics, and many aspects of its experience, unlike a dogma, have not acquired their clear and unambiguous definition yet and reveal themselves in images and symbols, is in agreement with him. For their correct selection and explication, one also needs to have a philosophical experience, but this experience has to be transformed by the experience of the Revelation (Florovsky 2005, 451-452). Consequently, one can draw a conclusion about the possibility of Christian philosophy coordinated with Christian dogmatics, through the experience of its alive, and therefore reasonable, comprehension.

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