Wiener Slawistischer Almanach 38 (1996) 37–49

Catherine Evtuhov

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF BULGAKOV AND FLOROVSKY: CHRONICLE OF A FRIENDSHIP

As Dean of the St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris, and author of a theological system often referred to as "monumental," Father Sergius Bulgakov was doubtless one of the dominant figures of "Russia Abroad" in the 1920's and 1930's. He was also, as mentor, friend, and colleague, one of the dominant intellectual and spiritual influences for Georges Florovsky, who came to the Institute to teach in 1926 at the age of 33 (Bulgakov was twenty years his senior). As is well known, Florovsky's two major works – on the Church fathers, and *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* – were written while he was at the Institute, and, as John Meyendorff recounted, were conceived as a response to or even refutation of Bulgakov's doctrine of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, or Sophiology.[1]

In the fragmented yet intellectually vibrant world of the Russian emigration, personal relationships like that between Bulgakov and Florovsky became central to the definition and emergence of new ideas, world-views, and approaches to history. The nature of Bulgakov's and Florovsky's friendship, however – a relationship central to our understanding of Russian ideas, culture, and religion in the twentieth century – remains shrouded in mystery. Florovsky's engagement with and subsequent rejection of the Eurasian movement, for example, or his well-documented argument with Nikolai Berdiaev, are amply substantiated by published polemics. In contrast, the personal and intellectual discussion between Bulgakov and Florovsky, despite – or, perhaps, because of – its centrality and depth for both men, has left absurdly scanty traces in print, whether in the works of the two authors or in the polemical journals of the emigration.

Scholarly attention, moreover, to this relationship has centered exclusively on the sensational Sophiological controversy which erupted in 1935, when Sergius Bulgakov was accused of heresy by both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Karlovci Synod, and Florovsky, against his will, was enjoined to serve on the commission which finally exonerated him.[2] Ironically, the most brilliant students of the St. Sergius Academy – most notably, John Meyendorff and Alexander Schmemann –, perhaps because they were witnesses to the acid and often unfair polemics of the Sophia controversy, have tended vastly to oversimplify the intellectual disagreement between Bulgakov and Florovsky, reducing it to a polar

opposition.[3] Following their lead, the common wisdom has become to lump Bulgakov, together with Soloviev and Florensky, into one "camp," as "Sophiologists," in contrast to the historian and son of the Church, Florovsky. Recently, Andrew Blane has helped remedy this excessively polarized account by drawing a more subtle picture of Florovsky's friendship with Bulgakov, bringing out the complicated and painful nature of the relationship. If public debate and public misinterpretation construed Bulgakov and Florovsky as "enemies," private comments testify to the depth of the friendship.[4]

While there is no doubt either that Bulgakov and Florovsky disagreed about Sophia, or that this disagreement was important, the nature of their relationship is hardly exhausted by this single fact. Behind discussion of Sophia lay an interaction of two world-views, two approaches to history, philosophy, and religion whose interplay was the stuff of which intellectual history is woven – a combination of influence, absorption, rejection, and inheritance. An essential question remains: if they were not enemies on the Sophia issue, what were they? What, really, was the relation between their intellectual positions: to what extent did Florovsky share or inherit Bulgakov's assumptions? how complete was his rejection of Bulgakov's philosophy?

The absence of public discussion in Bulgakov's and Florovsky's relationship increases the value of their private correspondence. Father Florovsky's recently systematized archive at Princeton University contains seventeen letters from Bulgakov. I would like here to present these letters which, while they do not of course provide a definitive answer to the question of intellectual inheritance and rebellion, do contain some valuable insights, and suggest directions in which we may continue to investigate this chapter of twentieth-century Russian intellectual history.

The correspondence between Bulgakov and Florovsky began while both still lived in Prague, in 1923; it intensified as Bulgakov moved to Paris, and as the two made extensive arrangements for Florovsky to come teach at the newly-founded St. Sergius Theological Institute; written communication was renewed, though in a much terser manner, in the mid-1930's as both became active in the ecumenical movement and meetings with representatives of the Anglican Church. Bulgakov's letters help concretize three important aspects of their relationship. First, naturally, they impart a sense of the tone of the two men's personal friendship. They also deal reasonably explicitly with the philosophical issues which divided and united them. Finally, the correspondence, less consciously, gives us a glimpse of the more mundane, material business of setting up life in emigration – a no less important context for the evolution of their ideas.

The relationship between Bulgakov and Florovsky was one of teacher and student, rather than of two equals. Bulgakov, as Meyendorff puts it, was

Florovsky's "older (and respected) colleague."[5] Bulgakov's letters shed some light on the genesis of this particular relationship, and indicate that this sense of inequality was meaningful for their friendship, and the result of more than a mere difference in age.

The tone of Bulgakov's and Florovsky's friendship was established relatively early, in 1924/25, and developed in response to a specific crisis. In the summer of 1924 Florovsky decided to leave the circle, founded by Bulgakov in 1919 and headed by him in Prague and in Paris, known as the Brotherhood of St. Sophia. Bulgakov took this very badly; the friendship seemed on the verge of breaking off. Alternately accusing and cajoling, Bulgakov argued against Florovsky's decision:

> Для этого (нехотения) у меня три причины, кроме одной – главной и единственной, что это явится препятствием для слабых наших сил любить друг друга: во-первых, я ценю Ваше участие, Ваше мнение, слово, критику [...]. Во-2х, Ваш выход из братства, как бы мы ни хотели быть друг к другу великодушны, все-таки не может не отразиться дальше и на наших основных отношениях, напр. в академии, как совершившийся в некотором роде духовный развод, и во всяком случае акт нелюбви. В-3х – и главное – я Вас очень жалею в этом, п. ч. считаю этот порядок мыслей и чувств неправильным и самоубийственным, как своенравие: можно и должно отрекаться и отсекать от себя многое, в том числе и общение, ради Бога – на этом основана аскетика монастыря и пустынничества, ради труда и творчества, на этом основана аскетика всякого мастерства, но не ради простого самоопределения (утверждения): я – таков.[6]

Above all else, Bulgakov saw Florovsky's departure as an assertion of willful individualism, as an unwillingness to take part in the "common task" of the Brotherhood. Dismissing, rather abruptly, Florovsky's misgivings about what he perceived as the Brotherhood's "Tolstoyism" and tendency to elevate "feeling" above "knowledge," Bulgakov described Florovsky's withdrawal as an exercise in negation (*netovshchina*). In concluding his letter, Bulgakov wrote irately, "If I am not mistaken,...your personal affairs are unfavorable to you, but favorable to your misanthropism. I am sorrowful about this."[7]

The incident both strengthened the bond between them, forging a deeper love; and added an element of sorrow, an acknowledgment of the gulf that divided them. It was in direct response to this event that Bulgakov developed a new attitude towards Florovsky, filled with love for his younger friend, yet also with disappointment, and sometimes bitterness, that they could not agree: he dealt with Florovsky's "betrayal" by assuming the tone of a loving father, caring deeply for his "son" yet constantly disappointed by his wayward manners and lack of true

understanding. More than a year later, Bulgakov wrote, in a suspiciously bitter tone, that he had got over the Brotherhood's dissolution (Berdiaev, and others, had also abandoned it); here he formulated his new position:

> Я ощущаю для себя и за себя выход из братства как грех и обмирщение, но я, разумеется, не хочу навязывать своего отношения или мерить Вас своею меркою. А поверх всего остается слово апостольское: *любя долготерпит*, вся покрывает, всему веру ёмлет, вся уповает, вся терпит. Пусть это и для нас остается высшим законом бытия, и еще прошу Вас: пожалуйста не думайте, что я ощущаю Ваш выход как неприязненное для себя действие, такого *личного* отношения у меня нет (или я не умею себя видеть). Вы по-прежнему остаетесь для меня духовным сыном и лично близким человеком, и я понимаю, что и Вам нелегко.[8]

The tone of "spiritual father," simultaneously loving and patronizing, pervades Bulgakov's communications to Florovsky from then on. When Florovsky tried to explain his turn to the Church fathers, Bulgakov patted him on the back, applauding his progress – which, for him, was Florovsky's recognition of the centrality of the dogma of Chalcedon and attention to the hesychastic teaching concerning energies – but noting that Florovsky had not quite got the point.

> Богослов *должен* быть библеистом, не может им не быть, и это раньше или, по крайней мере, одновременно с изучением отцов. Отцы всетаки сплав золота и шлаков, Библия – чистое золото. И вот проблема сущности и энергий есть всетаки проблема Софии, как Deus ad extra. Это есть самое центральное, обобщающее понятие всего богословия.[9]

The same attitude manifested itself in more trivial matters. Bulgakov, for example, treated the assignment of professorial positions at the Theological Institute a bit like rewards for winning his philosophical approval: initially, Florovsky received the position in patristics because it was supposed to be good for him; later, he got philosophy, as Bulgakov half-jokingly (but half-seriously) noted, when he showed that he had come around to something closer to Bulgakov's position.[10] Another amusing incident took place when Florovsky, obviously trying to be friendly, sent Bulgakov the book of a German "Sophiologist." Bulgakov thanked him in a tone of resignation: Florovsky had betrayed his utter lack of understanding.[11] The sophiological ruminations of an obscure German thinker were of no value to Bulgakov, who, as the preceding quotation underlines, had already found the "central concept of theology" and was interested in bringing it to fruition, not engaging in abstract philosophical speculation.

Bulgakov's authoritarian manner by no means contradicted the seriousness of his feelings for Florovsky. Their friendship – from Bulgakov's perspective – could become, through their personal bond, a living enactment of theological ideas, and was heightened (or should have been) through their involvement in a common project. In a moment of identification with the Trinity (this was not the first time this had happened to Bulgakov), he argued that the fact that he and Florovsky were of two different natures (*inoprirodnye*) need not preclude their working together in a common task. In moments of ire, Bulgakov seems truly to have seen their relationship in theological terms. Florovsky's individualism was a betrayal of *sobornost*: "For our famous *sobornost* is not just a verbal fist we use to hit Catholics in the snout, but labor, exploit (*podvig*), the ascesis of collective (*sobornogo*) self-creation." *Sobornost* here, to put it bluntly, meant that Florovsky should do as Bulgakov wished; but he seemed genuinely surprised, and hurt, that Florovsky might refuse to join in. Bulgakov had a heightened sense of mission – one that, he felt, one he loved should share.

This intensity of emotion, coupled with a heightened sense of mission and urgency, was summed up in the stance of spiritual father that Bulgakov assumed towards Florovsky.

In their correspondence, Bulgakov and Florovsky addressed quite explicitly some of the philosophical issues essential to their dialogue. One of them, not surprisingly, was Sophia. In his public defense of Sophiology, Bulgakov repeatedly insisted on two points: first, that his doctrine was an interpretation of Christian dogma, and that he did not claim status as dogma for his own theories; second, that he had no intention of inventing a fourth hypostasis.[12]

What lay behind these two claims becomes clearer from his letters. Bulgakov perceived his Sophiological doctrine as 1) an interpretation of what, to him, was the key formulation of Christian dogma – the dogma of Chalcedon;[13] 2) a reiteration of the beliefs of St. Gregory of Palamas – i.e., what might be called "neo-hesychasm;" 3) a refutation of what he saw as the pernicious (perhaps, heretical?) philosophical views of Karsavin, whose "philosophy of all-unity" Bulgakov interpreted as "monism." Around Easter of 1926, Bulgakov wrote to Florovsky, warning him of the dangers of Karsavin's ideas:[14]

> Всетаки в основе всего догмат св. [...] и единосущныя Троицы и, как его раскрытие в Творении, Халкидонский догмат. И вот соединяя это в некоторое единство, определяющее фундамент всего богословствования, я продолжаю не видеть иного исхода, иной возможности это богословски осмыслить, как помощью теологумена о Софии, предвечной, тварной и, наконец, в единении той и другой, – Халкид<онский> догмат. Иначе единственный исход – в монизм, дуо-монизм Карсавина. И мне кажется,

> что Вы при всей Вашей антипатии к этому пути, идете именно им, как богослов.[15]

In another passage, Bulgakov clarified the relation of his own neo-hesychasm to Gregory of Palamas' original doctrine.

> Ваше софиеборство ведет Вас к таким сомнительным идеям как "акцидентальность" энергий и ("Слава" же это и есть София, весь В.З. говорит об этом!) к разсечению Св. Троицы, когда Вы разлагаете отношение тварного сознания к Богу как к ипостаси Христовой *и* ипостаси Духа, а при этом неизбежно проводитесь или к "философии всеединства", к монизму Карсавинскаго типа. В частности в отношении к св. Григорию Паламе следует различать исихастическую сторону учения, где сам за себя и о себе говорит подвиг, и религ<иозно>-филос<офскую> формулировку учения об *энергиях*, к<ото>рая, если не прямо недостаточна, то во всяком случае требует уточнения, хотя бы понятий: аристотелевская *ἐνέργεια* берется не в отношении к *δύναμις*, но к *οὐσία*: получается пара понятий, трудно совместимых. Но это, конечно, относится также к богословской форме, но не существу, но терминов. Трудности ведут и к нелепостям, пока не преодолены: полная аналогия с терминами *ὑπόστᾶσις* и *οὐσία* до каппадокийцев. А полемика с Паламой, что он вводит многобожие, есть полное аналогия с обвинениями софиеборцев относительно четвертой ипостаси[16]

What is interesting about Bulgakov's identification with Palamas here is that he perceived Sophia not as the introduction of a new element or new hypostasis, but the only means of conserving the perfect unity of the Trinity – a unity that Florovsky was in danger of sacrificing as had Karsavin. Subjectively, as least, Bulgakov believed not that he was inventing a new dogma, but providing the only interpretation that could make sense of the stated doctrine of the Christian Church, and thus defending it against the incursions of mystical philosophy.

While clarifying the hesychastic references of Sophiology, the letters also shed light on a second philosophical issue: the relation of Bulgakov's theology to the philosophy of his great predecessor, Vladimir Soloviev. There is no doubt that, when Bulgakov first spoke of Sophia in his early and important religious-philosophical work, *Filosofiia khoziaistva*, the inspiration came from Soloviev. By the late 1920s and 1930s, however, there was much water under the bridge; and Bulgakov's words to Florovsky warn us against identifying the two philosophers, or labelling Soloviev himself a "Sophiologist."[17]

Bulgakov's intellectual biography was punctuated by sharp shifts in world-view: from Marxism to idealism (1900), from idealism to religious philosophy (1909); and, finally, from religious philosophy to theology.[18] The letters are

helpful for understanding this final dramatic shift, when Bulgakov began his "second life" as a theologian, and tracing it to a specific date: 1926.

Like the previous intellectual shifts, this one was associated with a deep personal crisis and, through it, a moment of epiphany. Bulgakov fell seriously ill in January of 1926. He recounted, in his essay "*Sofiologiia smerti*" (appropriately excerpted in the *Avtobiograficheskie zametki*), that this illness was like a "furnace of fire" [Mat 13:42].[19] Through the fever of his illness and the cool relief when it ended, Bulgakov experienced the miracle of God's forgiveness: "There was the feeling: my sins had burned up, they were gone."[20] This was a moment of rebirth, when Bulgakov began a new life.

Bulgakov's letters to Florovsky, at this time, provide insight into the intellectual content of Bulgakov's rebirth. Here, too, Bulgakov told his friend, "it seems to me, partly, that many things finished burning, while others burned up completely in my fever."[21] The main thing to burn in the fire, as his next lines make clear, was Bulgakov's old relation to Vladimir Soloviev. Whereas he had earlier chided Florovsky for "using Soloviev as a springboard"[22] without respecting him sufficiently, he now relinquished his defense of the philosopher.

> Страницы из Тихих Дум, к<ото>рые Вы, очевидно, разумели, сгорели еще раньше, вместе со всей Шмидтологией. Мне нечего идеологически защищать против Вас во Вл. С<оловье>ве, я с особой очевидностью для себя это почувствовал, когда была его память. Есть разница эмоционально-психологическая, кроме того, что для меня он остается одним из "отцов". Есть закономерно возникающие в душевности (не духовности) "трансцендентальныя иллюзии", к<ото>рые тают просто при переходе в духовную жизнь. В С<оловье>ве мне кажется известное религ<иозное> несовершеннолетие, с его свойствами – диллетантизмом, экспериментированием, полетами воображения и проч. Tel quel он просто *религиозно* неубедителен и неавторитетен, не старец, а всего писатель (впрочем совершенно тоже я думаю и о Д<остоевско>м). Я согласен с Вами, что подлинная жизнь в Церкви означает даже не преодоление, а освобождение или перерастание С<оловье>ва, он *там* не питает. Но и хотел бы, чтобы оно было зрячее, свободное, без всякаго зажмуривания и пред трансц<ендентальными> иллюзиями [...]. Ведь С<оловье>в живет еще и поныне в наших современниках, к<ото>рые нуждаются в какой-то помощи, а не только *противлении или крещении*.[23]

Bulgakov's "entry into the spiritual life" definitively set him apart from the mystical "other worlds" of the Silver Age youth he had shared with his Symbolist contemporaries – Blok, Bely, Gippius, Merezhkovsky; now they seemed to him mere "transcendental illusions." He noted, with some amusement, the shock

experienced by Zinaida Gippius, when he referred to Soloviev, in his speech at the philosopher's memorial service, not as "Vladimir Soloviev," but as "God's servant Vladimir, may he rest in peace" (*pochivshii rab Bozhii Vl.*). "But," he remarks, "I could and wanted to speak and see him only thus."[24]

This was the moment when Bulgakov decisively crossed the boundary from religious philosophy to theology: the next year his first "Sophiological trilogy" appeared, to be followed in the 1930's by his vast treatise – also a trilogy – on Godmanhood. Bulgakov's turn to theology – his intellectual "new life" which continued until his illness (1939) and then death – was subjectively made possible by the "burning up" of Soloviev, by his growing out of Soloviev's philosophy from within. The Sophia of Bulgakov's final period was no longer the half-Romantic *Ewig Weibliche*; she had been replaced by the ecumenical, spiritual Divine Wisdom of the Church in Constantinople.

Getting Soloviev out of the way cleared the path for a philosophical and intellectual rapprochement between Bulgakov and Florovsky. It was with considerable relief that Bulgakov welcomed what he saw as Florovsky's parallel "release from the shallows of anti-Solovievianism [...] into the open waters of theology and new themes and thoughts."[25] Following their "parting of the ways" over the Brotherhood of St. Sophia, the two thinkers found each other again in their mutual discovery of theology. Even if the two did not, ultimately, agree, they had common ground and a common understanding.

By the end of the 1920s, neither Bulgakov nor Florovsky was a "Solovievian;" yet both had "been through" his philosophy. In a broad sense, the appeal of Soloviev's Universal Church continued to animate both thinkers. As Florovsky once put it, Soloviev "could be reinterpreted in a wider sense, and, in that case we would have an important and truly ecumenical plea."[26] In terms of the history of ideas, Soloviev was of immeasurable importance to both Bulgakov and Florovsky; he pointed the way, for one, towards a theological system and, for the other, towards patristics and the history of the Church.

This exchange forms the backdrop for Florovsky's sensitive and respectful (if scant) remarks on Bulgakov in *Puti*:

> От Соловьева путь назад к Шеллингу и к неоплатоникам, но и к патристике, к опыту Великой Церкви, в историческую Церковь, в Церковь предания и отцов. Власть немецкой философии очень чувствуется и у Булгакова, острое влияние Шеллинга в его хозяйственной философии [...]. Но от религиозной философии Булгаков уверенно возвращается к богословию. В этом его историческое преимущество, в этом его сыновняя свобода...[27]

Florovsky's intimate knowledge of, and sympathy for, Bulgakov's views, explains, as well, the position he took up when asked to serve on the commission to judge his friend. Unable to agree with Bulgakov's theological position, he was equally unable to condemn his views as heretical.

Bulgakov's and Florovsky's friendship, and the evolution of their ideas, developed in the context of emigré life. Amidst philosophical ideas and ecumenical projects, the letters chronicle Bulgakov's gradual immersion in the unreal realities of emigration. These realities, to judge by the letters, were not all bad.

On the negative side, naturally, were the sheer material difficulties of emigré existence in the France of the 1930's. Bulgakov had trouble even arranging for a room for Florovsky and his wife to stay in when they came to the Institute; timely salaries were sometimes a problem; and each additional course, each addition to the Institute's program caused a strain in the budget, mostly provided by gifts and grants from "foreigners."[28] These difficulties grew particularly acute in 1936, when British and American money dried up.[29] The status of the Institute was also a problem: juridically, for example, its lack of recognition as an institute of higher learning prevented it from exempting students from the draft (the case of a Polish student);[30] more fundamentally, the Institute remained, of course, subject to the political and jurisdictional divisions of the Orthodox Church in diaspora, and all the practical problems this entailed.

More positively, even penury itself was in some ways a liberating experience. Bulgakov sounded truly happy when he spoke, early on, of his *detishche* (child) – the Theological Institute – and its modest resources. Peace and love, he said, reigned in their small pedagogical family, and "the blessing of St. Sergius and his help clearly and tangibly hovers over all of this."[31] In contrast, for example, to Marina Tsvetaeva's pained songs of loss and loneliness, Bulgakov noted that he had no complaints concerning the attitude of the French, though he also remarked that he noticed Paris but little from his "cloister."[32] As time went on, there were more and more rewarding contacts with British, American, and French friends, the founding of the St. Sergius-St.-Albans Fellowship, congresses of the Russian Christian Student Movement, travel to England and America. The antipathy of both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Bishops' Synod of Sremski Karlovci to Bulgakov's teaching was to some degree compensated by a growing interest from representatives of the Western Churches, and Bulgakov's ecumenical activies and writings about Orthodoxy certainly did much to spread familiarity with the faith in Europe and America. By the mid-1930's, Bulgakov's letters were peppered with English names and expressions.

The philosophical differences between Bulgakov and Florovsky translated, as well, into the particular practical roles they played in the ecumenical movement. While Bulgakov sought to create a rapprochement on the basis of common

doctrine, and believed that Sophia could hold the key to such union, Florovsky's "ecumenism in time" relied on what George Williams has called "neo-patristic synthesis," on a return to and reanimation of Christian Hellenism.[33]

The experience of emigration as it emerges from the correspondence, characteristically, might best be summarized as a coexistence of fragmentation, in which the contours of life have been exploded and it becomes a struggle for daily existence, and a sort of forced cosmopolitanism, in which the impossibility of return to Russia productively directed emigré intellectuals into defining and articulating the Orthodox faith, and communicating its message to others.

* * *

The correspondence between Bulgakov and Florovsky documents a friendship in which Bulgakov conceived himself as "spiritual father;" a philosophical dialogue that dealt with both thinkers' interpretation of dogma and their relation to Soloviev's philosophy; and an emigré existence that was at once fragmented and cosmpolitan. A key to its significance, however, lies outside the letters themselves. In 1923, having just left a Russia consumed in the flames of civil war, Bulgakov stood inside the cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. As he wandered about the church, he felt himself experiencing a new apocalyptic vision: a new, true Third Rome, in which, *before the end*, the Church must appear in its fulness and entirety. St. Sophia would fulfill its designated role of universal, ecumenical Church – a role it had lost in history. It would become, once again, the meeting place of heaven and earth experienced by Vladimir's emissaries almost one thousand years earlier. Bulgakov chided himself immediately: the time for such visions was over, for "launching new schemes" and building "houses of cards." Had he not just seen where projects of this kind might lead?[34]

But in the end he could not resist. The powerful vision won him over, and he concluded that in this vision lay the voice of the Church. The last twenty years of Bulgakov's life were a playing out of this theme, this inner struggle, as, amidst the details of petty fund-raising and scraping to make the Theological Institute and the RSKhD work, he launched on an extraordinarily ambitious, messianistic effort to reinterpret Christian doctrine for the modern age. Bulgakov's life, from his "flirtation" with Catholicism "by the walls of Chersonesus" through his answers to Catholic dogma in his mariology and angelology, to his ultimate efforts to introduce a new principle for defining the relation between Christ's human and divine natures in *On Godmanhood*, and ending with a "final" book on the Apocalypse of St. John the Divine, constituted a passionate, apocalyptic expectation – *chaianiie* – of an Eighth Ecumenical Council, in which his challenge to Orthodoxy and to Christian doctrine in general would finally be met. If, intellectually, Bulgakov "grew out of" Soloviev, in his personal life and social

goals he "couldn't resist" the messianism, intensity, excitement that bound him to his own Silver Age and to a tradition of the Russian intelligentsia that reaches back to the fervid intensity of Russian Hegelianism and the Romantic friendships and circles of Premukhino, of Stankevich and Bakunin, Herzen and Ogarev, in the 1830s and '40s.

The dialogue between Bulgakov and Florovksy, I would suggest, is about the end – or at least the crisis – of the Romantic tradition in Russian thought. Florovsky, I suspect, neither understood nor wished to understand Bulgakov's insistence on a personal playing out of Christian dogma, whether it took the form of identification with Christ or the replication of *sobornost* through unity in a common task. Florovsky's historicism, from the moment of his rejection of the Brotherhood of St. Sophia to the *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, represents a new beginning in Russian ideas. Florovsky belonged to a new generation, comfortable in a new international world, at once Russian and cosmopolitan, and decidedly antipathetic to messianistic projects.

Florovsky himself observed a kind of "silence about Sergius Bulgakov": while commenting on virtually every other major Russian thinker, he merely mentions Bulgakov in passing. Yet his works bear ample testimony to the importance of this friendship for Florovsky's own task as an historian and carrier of the Orthodox tradition.

Notes

1 See John Meyendorff, Foreword to Prot. Georgii Florovskii, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* (Vilnius, 1991). [Reprint of 1937 Paris edition.]

2 For a succinct yet nuanced account, see Andrew Blane, "A Sketch of the Life of Georges Florovsky" in Blane, ed., *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press), 65-68.

3 For Schmemann's version of this "polar opposition," see Blane, 63.

4 Ibid.

5 Meyendorff, Foreword, op. cit.

6 Bulgakov to Florovsky, 18/31 August 1924.

7 Ibid.

8 Bulgakov to Florovsky, 17/30 December 1925.

[9] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 27 April/10 May 1926.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 13/26 August 1926.

[12] See Bulgakov's defense in Sergei Bulgakov, *Dokladnaia zapiska mitropolitu Evlogiiu* (Paris, 1936).

[13] The dogma of Chalcedon stands at the center of Bulgakov's theology in his large trilogy, *On Godmanhood.*

[14] Ironically, Bulgakov is frequently categorized, together with his erstwhile friend and colleague Pavel Florensky, as a "philosopher of all-unity." See, for example, V.N. Akulinin, *Filosofiia vseedinstva* (Novosibirsk, 1990).

[15] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 27 April/10 May 1926.

[16] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 7/20 July 1926.

[17] Both Meyendorff, op. cit., and Akulinin, op. cit., use this label, as do others.

[18] Bulgakov's assumption of the priesthood in 1918, of course, was also an important moment in his life. The intellectual transition from religious philosophy to theology, however, followed only later.

[19] Bulgakov, "Sofiologiia smerti," excerpted as "Moia bolezn'" in *Avtobiograficheskie zametki* (Paris, 1946), 137.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 8/21 February 1926.

[22] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 18/31 August 1924.

[23] A.N. Schmidt was a journalist in Nizhnii Novgorod who composed her own theological system, *The Third Testament.* When she learned about Vladimir Soloviev shortly before his death, she began to correspond with him, and was hailed by the Moscow and St. Petersburg intelligentsia as the incarnation of Soloviev's Sophia. Bulgakov was fascinated by her: he published her works in 1916, and wrote several essays on the significance of her relationship with Soloviev, published in his collection of essays, *Tikhie dumy* (Moscow, 1916).

[24] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 1/21 February 1926.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 27 April/10 May 1926.

[27] Cited in George Williams, "The Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky" in Blane, ed., op. cit., 312. Williams points out that, although Florovsky emphatically insisted that he was not a "Solovievian," he continued to have sympathy for Soloviev's ideas, interpreted in the broadest sense.

[28] Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, op. cit., 493. The emphasis is Florovsky's.

[29] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 17/30 December 1925.

[30] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 11/24 April 1936.

[31] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 3 September 1929.

[32] Bulgakov to Florovsky, 17/30 December 1925.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Williams, op. cit., 329.

[35] Bulgakov, "V Aiia Sofii," *Avtobiograficheskie zametki*, op. cit., 94-102.