

Theology of God's Energies in Selected Texts by Georges Florovsky

Teologia Bożych energii w wybranych tekstach
Georges'a Florovsky'ego

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Abstract: Georges Vasilievich Florovsky (1893–1979) was a prominent 20th century Orthodox priest, theologian and writer involved in the ecumenical movement. In his writing he addressed almost every aspect of the Christian life. G. Florovsky is part of the great emigration of Russian intellectuals, together with M. Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov, M. Lossky, A. Schumann and J. Meyndorf. In his speech to Orthodox theologians gathered in Athens in 1936, he emphasized that the doctrine of energies is one of the truths that needs to be rediscovered by Orthodox theology. His teachings on this subject can be found primarily in three studies: *Твар и тварность, Понятие творения у святителя Афанасия Великого, Святитель Григорий Палама и традиция Отцов*. The starting point for Florovsky's thought is the thesis that the created world does not have to exist. Creation finds its foundation in God's will, not in God's nature or essence. The distinction between nature/essence and will becomes the basis for G. Florovsky to justify the distinction between essence and energies in God. The distinction between essence and energies is effectively the distinction between necessity and free will. This, in turn, becomes the basis for the proper ontological distinction between God and creation. The energies represent God's will and grace that make creation and new creation (deification) possible. The energies are understood as the action of the entire undivided Holy Trinity.

Keywords: Georges Florovsky, divine energies, Orthodox theology

Abstrakt: Georges Vasilievich Florovsky (1893–1979) był wybitnym dwudziestowiecznym prawosławnym kapłanem, teologiem i pisarzem, zaangażowanym w ruch ekumeniczny. W swoim pi-

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sarstwie podejmował prawie każdy aspekt życia chrześcijańskiego. G. Florovsky stanowi część wielkiej emigracji rosyjskich intelektualistów, razem z M. Bierdiajewem, S. Bułhakowem, M. Łoskim, A. Schumannem i J. Meyendorffem. W swoim przemówieniu skierowanym do prawosławnych teologów zebranych w Atenach w 1936 r. podkreślał on, że doktryna o energiach jest jedną z tych prawd, które potrzebują być na nowo odkryte przez prawosławną teologię. Jego naukę na ten temat znajdujemy przede wszystkim w trzech opracowaniach: *Твар и тварность, Понятие творения у святителя Афанасия Великого, Святитель Григорий Палама и традиция Отцов*. Punktem wyjścia myśli Florovsky'ego jest teza, że świat stworzony nie musi istnieć. Stworzenie znajduje swój fundament w woli Bożej, a nie w naturze czy istocie Bożej. Rozróżnienie pomiędzy naturą/istotą a wolą staje się dla G. Florovsky'ego podstawą tego, aby uzasadnić rozróżnienie pomiędzy istotą a energiami w Bogu. Rozróżnienie pomiędzy istotą a energiami jest faktycznie rozróżnieniem pomiędzy koniecznością a wolną wolą. To z kolei staje się podstawą właściwego ontologicznego rozróżnienia pomiędzy Bogiem a stworzeniem. Energie reprezentują Bożą wolę i łaskę, dzięki którym stworzenie i nowe stworzenie (przebóstwienie) stają się możliwe. Energie są rozumiane jako działanie całej niepodzielonej Trójcy Świętej.

Słowa kluczowe: Georges Florovsky, Boże energie, teologia prawosławna

Teaching on divine energies is one of the characteristic features of Orthodox Church theology.² Alongside the Filioque problem, the understanding of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, the role and place of the Eucharistic epiclesis, it belongs to the significant points of doctrinal controversy between the Christian East and West.³ Briefly, God's energies can be described as God's actions that result from His will.⁴ Theological rediscovery and redevelopment of the doctrine of energies in Orthodox theology were initiated in the 1960s. It was the result of the return to the sources and the discovery of the great patristic and Byzantine theology. Special credit is given to theological inspirations of Gregory Palamas,⁵ recalled through the works of outstanding Orthodox theologians, Myrrha Lot-Borodine⁶ and Włodzimierz Łoski. The latter believed that the Palamite teaching on energies was of vital importance for the identity of Orthodoxy and that, apart from the Filioque problem, it constituted the main point of Orthodox-Catholic controversy.⁷ Classic

² I have already discussed the topic of God's energies in the article, *Nauka o Bożych energiach w teologii Georges'a Florovsky'ego*, "Studia Bydgoskie" 4 (2010), pp. 77–94.

³ Cf. D. Reid, *Energies of the Spirit: Trinitarian Models in Eastern Orthodox and Western Theology*, Atlanta, GA 1997, pp. 1–6.

⁴ Cf. A. Siemianowski, *Tomizm a palamizm. Wokół kontrowersji doktrynalnych chrześcijańskiego Wschodu i Zachodu*, Poznań 1998, pp. 7–22.

⁵ Cf. Y. Spiteris, *Ostatni Ojcowie Kościoła, Kabasilas, Palamas*, tłum. B. Widła, Warszawa 2006, pp. 158–161.

⁶ See: M. Lot-Borodine, *La déification de l'homme*, Paris 1970.

⁷ Cf. W. Łoski, *Teologia dogmatyczna*, tłum. H. Paprocki, Białystok 2000, pp. 28–32; id. *Teologia mistyczna Kościoła Wschodniego*, tłum. I. Brzeska, Kraków 2007, pp. 69–89.

studies on our topic include the writings of Father John Meyendorff from the United States⁸, and the Greek theologian, Georgios I Mantzaridis.⁹

The problem of the divine energies was explored in his research by the outstanding Orthodox theologian Father Georges Florovsky.¹⁰ Born in Odessa in 1893, carefully educated, as a result of the revolutionary turmoil, he and his family emigrated from Russia. First he lived in Sofia, Bulgaria, and then in Prague, Czech Republic, where he lectured on the philosophy of law. In 1926, thanks to the invitation of Father Sergei Bulgakov, he took the chair of patrology at St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris. In 1932 he was ordained a priest. Fr. Florovsky served among the Orthodox diaspora in the West. In 1936, he participated in the first congress of Orthodox theologians in Athens. He actively participated in the creation of the Ecumenical Council of Churches. In 1948, he moved to the United States, where he took the chair of Orthodox dogmatics and theology at St. Vladimir Seminary in New York. In addition, he lectured on Orthodox history and theology at Columbia University and Boston University. In 1956, Fr. Florovsky became Professor of Eastern Church History at Cambridge University, and in 1964, Professor of Slavic studies at Princeton University. His numerous works have significantly contributed to the great cultural heritage of Russian emigration in Western Europe and the United States. He considered the return to patristic sources to be the primary task of Orthodox theology. He strove to create a neo-patristic synthesis. He wrote over 200 scientific works in which he addressed issues in the field of theology, Church history, patristics, philosophy of Slavic studies and ecumenism. He died in 1979 in Princeton.¹¹

Father Georges Florovsky did not deal directly with the problem of God's energies. He returned to them by addressing other topics, especially the Christian understanding of the mystery of the Creator and creation, and the divinization of man. In his speech addressed to Orthodox theologians in Athens, he emphasized that it was impossible to discover the depth of Orthodox theology without understanding the mystery of God's energies.¹² In this article, we would like to present the theology of divine energies based on three texts:

⁸ See: J. Meyendorff, *Święty Grzegorz Palamas i duchowość prawosławna*, tłum. K. Leśniewski, Lublin 2005, id., *Teologia bizantyjska. Historia i doktryna*, tłum. J. Prokopiuk, Kraków 2007, pp. 62–64.

⁹ See: G.I. Mantzaridis, *Przebóstwienie człowieka. Nauka świętego Grzegorza Palamasa w świetle tradycji prawosławnej*, tłum. I. Czaczkowska, Lublin 1997.

¹⁰ I use the spelling of the surname from *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, Lublin 1989, vol. V, p. 346; we also encounter the spelling: Gergij Vasilievich Florovskij.

¹¹ Cf. *Leksykon wielkich teologów XX/XXI wieku*, red. J. Majewski, J. Makowski, Warszawa 2004, t. II, pp. 110–124; W. Hryniewicz, Florovsky Georges, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. V, Lublin 1989, col. 346–349.

¹² Cf. D. Reid, *Energies of the Spirit...*, p. 34.

Твар и тварность,¹³ *Понятие творения у святителя Афанасия Великого*,¹⁴ *Святитель Григорий Палама и традиция Отцов*.¹⁵ They will also determine the next three stages of our research.

1. Creation and creaturehood¹⁶

This is the earliest of the texts discussed, published already in 1928. Our author's starting point was the contingency of the created world. The world is created and contingent. It was created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) together with time. Creation exists in time and it changes. The created world began to exist. Therefore, it may not have existed. There is no necessity in it, it is not self-sufficient, it does not exist by itself. Its entire existence points to the loving and almighty God, in whose will it finds its origin. There is an infinite ontological difference between the Creator and the creation. The created world remains 'outside' the essence of God. Any merging, mixing or transubstantiation of the divine and created natures is impossible. In a way typical of Orthodox theology, he refers to the Christological definition of the Council of Chalcedon, which taught that in one Hypostasis, in one divine person of God-man, with all the fullness of mutual interpenetration (*perichoresis*), two natures remain 'without mixing, without change, without separation and disconnection',¹⁷ retaining the characteristics of their respective natures. Creation is of a completely different nature than the nature of God. And at the same time, its existence depends on God's will and desire. Creation finds its basis not in nature, but in God's will. Father Georges Florovsky recalls the fundamental distinction clarified by the Fathers of the Church. 'Creation' is the work of God's will, the 'procreation' of the Son from the Father is according to nature/essence (*γεννα κατα φυσιν*). Fundamental for this distinction is the real distinction between God's nature/essence and His will. It, in turn, will be used by the author, following the Byzantine Fathers, to distinguish God's essence and His

¹³ Г. Флоровский, *Твар и тварность*, in: id., *Догмат и история*, Москва 1998, pp. 108–150. The text was published for the first time in Russian: "Православная мысль" 1 (1928).

¹⁴ Г. Флоровский, *Понятие творения у святителя Афанасия Великого*, in: id., *Догмат и история*, Москва 1998, pp. 80–107. The text was originally published in English, *The Concept of Creation in Saint Athanasius*, "Studia Patristica", Berlin 1962, vol. 6, part 4, pp. 36–57.

¹⁵ Г. Флоровский, *Святитель Григорий Палама и традиция Отцов*, in: id., *Догмат и история*, Москва 1998, pp. 377–393. The text was originally published in Greek: Ο Άγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμας καί ή παράδοσις πατέρων, Πανηγυρικός Τόμος, 1960. English translation: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers, "The Greek Orthodox Theological Review" 5 (1959–1960) 2, pp. 119–131.

¹⁶ In English, the title was translated as 'Creation and Creaturehood'.

¹⁷ *Breviarium fidei. Wybór doktrynalnych wypowiedzi Kościoła*, red. S. Głowa, I. Bieda, Poznań 1989, VI, 8.

energy. What is of God's essence (e.g. giving birth to the Second Person in the Holy Trinity) is necessary. What is God's will (e.g. the creation of the world and man) is accidental, it could have happened, but it did not have to.

According to the Orthodox theologian, the arguments of the anti-Arian polemics of the 4th century are based on this distinction. The thesis that the descent of the Son would depend on God's will would make Him contingent and belonging to the sphere of creatures. The thesis that creation comes from the essence of God would make it necessary and concurrently, blur the essential difference between the Creator and the creature. Creation would be an emanation of divinity (as in Neoplatonism) and it would be placed on some level of the hierarchy of the ontology of divinity. The distinction between essence and will in God is indispensable for a correct doctrine of creation.¹⁸ God freely creates man and the world. In this freedom, He invites and calls creation into communion with Himself. The creature, in turn, is not forced to accept this invitation. The creature can accept or reject it in its finite freedom. Consequently, it will either only 'exist' or 'live'.¹⁹ Creation 'lives' when it freely accepts God's invitation and remains in communion with God. Outside of God it 'exists' without 'life'. Not accepting God's proposal and escaping from it in various ways, it exists in 'death', in a false and illusory existence. God's creative activity is described through various dimensions of freedom. The first is the absolute freedom of God, who can create or not create. It corresponds to the freedom of creation to 'live' or merely 'exist in death'. A contingent world by itself cannot 'be' or 'not be'. It can only choose to 'live' or only 'exist'. The persistence of creation is guaranteed by God's, 'Let there be' (Genesis 1:3), which creates and preserves creation within the limits of time and its eternity. 'Life' accepted in freedom means achieving the perfection that God intended for creation. It exists as an ideal in God's thought.

Father Georges Florovsky discusses the views of Origen (d. 254) on eternity and the necessity of creation. God created the world in perfect freedom. And creation in its 'being' is completely dependent on God. In the context of Origen's teaching, according to the author, a justified question arises whether there was no necessity in God to create. The Orthodox theologian believes that in Origen he finds the erroneous belief that God is, and does not become, the almighty Creator. Consequently, in God there is the need to self-reveal and graciously bestow 'the other'. Since God is always the Creator, then what is created must always exist. This difficulty is solved by the distinction present in Byzantine theology between God's essence and God's historical saving action *ad extra*. While it is quite easy to reject the thesis about the eternity of creation, the thesis about the eternity of the idea of creation in God is much more incomprehensible. Referring to the

¹⁸ Cf. D. Reid, *Energies of the Spirit...*, pp. 34–35.

¹⁹ Cf. Г. Флоровский, *Твар и тварность...*, p. 115.

theological inspirations of Methodius of Olympus (d. 311), the author argues that the ideas of the created world cannot belong to the inner Trinitarian life of God. This would mean their necessary eternal existence. The ideas of creation are in a sense eternal, but they are not co-eternal with God and are not co-existent with Him, since they are separated from God by His will. God's ideas of the world are eternal. However, this is different eternity than God's existence.²⁰ It is possible because in God there is a distinction between His essence and His will, to which God's action *ad extra* is related. This distinction proposed by the Fathers of the 4th century does not introduce any division in God. The ideas of the world have their conditioning not in God's essence, but in His will. God does not so much possess the ideas of the world as 'invents' them in complete freedom.

Father Georges Florovsky admits that the terms used in theology always remain imprecise, but by referring to God's revelation and the experience of faith, the theologian rightly undertakes the task of expressing God's truths. God creates in freedom, out of the 'excess' of God's love, which in no way adds or perfects anything in God. God's eternal freedom is bound by His will, desire, thinking, action, His energies. These energies are eternal, but not co-eternal in the sense that the Son and the Holy Spirit are co-eternal with the Father. The eternity of energy is different from the eternity of God's essence. The name 'Creator' does not belong to the same hierarchy of names that designate the triune nature of God (Father, Son, Spirit). Referring to St. Athanasius (d. 373), Father Florovsky specifies that being the Holy Trinity comes first to God's will and thoughts. In God, generation comes first than creation. For the entire Holy Trinity, God's energies, actions and will are common. Being the Trinity is prior to Their common free actions.²¹ The distinction between essence and energies is the distinction between necessity and will. God's ideas of creation have a certain 'contingency', these ideas may not have existed. They remain eternally in God with the freedom of God's will. There is no necessity here. In creation, God's freedom of the entire Holy Trinity is revealed. Therefore, the Christian confession of the absolute contingency and non-self-sufficiency of the created world leads to the distinction of two types of names in God. The first of them are intra-Trinitarian names (Father, Son, Spirit), which express intra-Trinitarian acts of generation and descent. The second of them are names that receive their existence thanks to the external acts of the entire Holy Trinity (Creator).

We can only know God insofar as He reveals Himself in His turning to the world, that is, in His external actions (God's economy). Pre-Nicene theology was not yet able to precisely distinguish the historical saving action of God (the economic Trinity) from the theology of God (the immanent Trinity). Imprecise

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 120.

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 125.

Trinitarian models connected God's *aseitas* with the person of the Father, while they associated God's revelation with the persons of the Son and the Spirit. As a consequence, they opened the way to subordinationism. The Fathers of the 4th century, especially the Cappadocian Fathers, introduced a model in which *aseitas* concerns the essence of the entire Holy Trinity, and God's historical saving actions concern His energies.²² Thanks to God's revelation, in God's works one can recognize the inseparable actions (energies) of the entire Holy Trinity. Simultaneously, the only essence of the indivisible Trinity remains unknowable and unattainable to man.²³ God's unknowable essence is simple, God's knowable actions are manifold. God's numerous names term God's actions that give life to the world and at the same time define God's relationship to the world. These are the names of God's undivided but multiform way of being towards the world. God's life-giving actions (energies) in the world are God Himself, inaccessible in His essence. God's actions (energies), resulting from God's graciousness, constitute God's presence in the world, without mixing with creation, without being their content or essence, and concurrently, they are their beginning and final goal. Energies are God's face turned towards creation.²⁴ It is God's *processiones* of graces, giving life to the principles of all created beings.

The doctrine of energies was refined by Byzantine theologians of the 14th century, especially Gregory Palamas (d. 1359), and adopted by subsequent synods of Constantinople (1341, 1347, 1351). Grace is not God's essence, but His action (energies). Creatures are affected only by God's actions leading to union with God, divinization, and adoption as sons by grace. The distinction between essence and energies does not violate the prior unity in God. God's actions (energies) are not God's essence, but they are not His afflictions either. They are immutable and co-eternal. They express God's creative will. In God there is not only essence, but also what is not essence and is not affliction. It is God's will and His action. The essence is God's internal self-being, actions (energies) are God's relations to the 'other'. The distinction between essence and actions, essence and grace corresponds to the distinction in God between the necessary (triune) and the free (creation). God is and cannot not be in three Hypostases. The Trinity of Persons is prior to God's will. The three hypostases are of one nature, inseparable and interpenetrating (perichoresis). The creation of the world presupposes the prior Triuneness of God, and the Trinitarian seal was impressed on every creature. Creation is an act of freedom of God's perfect and fulfilled being. The entire justification for creation and its duration is founded in the freedom of God's gracious love.²⁵

²² Cf. D. Reid, *Energies of the Spirit...*, p. 39.

²³ Cf. Г. Флоровский, *Твар и тварность...*, p. 132.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 136.

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 143.

God eternally ‘thinks’ the image of the created world. By His will and according to His plan, He creates the world and with it time. Creation, within its temporally marked freedom, is called to actualize God’s intention for Himself. The ‘idea’ of a thing eternally ‘thought’ by God is at the same time God’s will for it and its purpose. Energies are God’s grace directed towards every countless creature, so that they may achieve their fulfillment in God. The purpose of creation is divinization. It does not mean any transformation of creation into the essence of God Himself or mixing of both natures. Deification means the fulfillment of God’s sense of creation. In the case of man, this means adoption as sons, becoming a child of God through adoption and grace (energies). Only Jesus Christ is the Son by nature. The Incarnation of the Son made possible the adoption as sons and the divinization of man. And it is the work of God’s energies, the uncreated grace. Thanks to God’s action, a human person becomes a carrier and, as it were, a vessel of grace that penetrates and transforms him, so that he becomes more and more a son. Man, in his freedom, can open himself to God’s action and increasingly become a member of the Mystical Body, the Church.²⁶

2. The concept of creation in Saint Athanasius the Great

The article *Понятие творения у святителя Афанасия Великого* was published many years later, in 1962. This study is not so much a discussion of St Athanasius’ on creation, more importantly, this teaching became an opportunity for Father Georges Florovsky to systematically teach that being, and acting in God must be carefully distinguished. Any identification or confusion of the intratrinitarian being of God and His historical saving action leads to the loss of the difference between generation and creation.²⁷

The Christian doctrine of the world creation *ex nihilo* is deeply biblical and simultaneously, foreign to Greek thought. According to the Greeks, the world, the Great Cosmos, is eternally given, necessary and indestructible. If it is in motion, it is only within its eternal existence. The Bible, however, begins with the story of creation. The world is contingent, not self-sufficient or necessary. Its existence and duration depends on God’s will and God’s action. There may have been no created world.²⁸ In this sense, Greek and biblical thought, especially Christian thought, were incompatible, and the categories of Greek philosophy were unsuitable for expressing the Christian doctrine of creation. Christian thought had to

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 149.

²⁷ Cf. D. Reid, *Energies of the Spirit...*, p. 42.

²⁸ Г. Флоровский, *Понятие...*, pp. 80–81.

undergo a creative transformation, developing new terms and models or giving the old ones new content. This often happened through trial and error.

One of the problems requiring new and precise solutions was the relationship of God's creative will with His essence. It was a gradual process of liberating the theology of God from its cosmological context. Initially, Trinitarian reflection was presented in the context of the historical economy of salvation (creation-revelation-salvation). According to the Orthodox theologian, these were the features of the Trinitarian theology of St. Justin (d. around 165) and Tertullian (d. 220) who were not yet able to precisely separate the categories of God's 'existence' and God's 'action'. He is especially critical of Origen's theological formulations. The point is to put the intratrinitarian name of the Father on an equal level with the historical and redemptive name of the Creator, Pantokrator. According to Origen, there can be nothing potential in God. Just as He is always the Father, so He is always the Creator. This consequently leads to the thesis about the eternity of the created world. Origen used the word παντοκράτωρ found in the Septuagint, which contains numerous contexts of meaning. According to the Alexandrian theologian, God is eternally παντοκράτωρ. As stated by Georges Florovsky, in this approach it is impossible to separate between the generation (of the Son) and the creation (of the world). It assumes the eternity of both acts in God: the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal creation of the world.²⁹ Moreover, in order to avoid the danger of losing the simplicity of God's essence, Origen associated the generation of the Son with the action of the will, not His essence.

Father Georges Florovsky admits that only a few of Origen's texts are available. However, his formulations are still imprecise. As for Christological thought, its direction was pro-Nicene with a clearly anti-Arian perspective. The ambiguities concern cosmological problems that lead either to the thesis about the eternity of the created world or could ultimately question the eternity of the Son. This was revealed in the thought of Arius, in which the pagan Greek rather than the Christian perspective prevailed. For Arius, God is the Creator. There is no theology in his approaches (teaching about the immanent Trinity). He cannot say anything about the inner life of God. The Father, as having no beginning, is the Creator. The Son, as having a beginning, is on the side of creatures, obviously, in a completely unique sense. All creation is by the will and desire of the Father. The answer to the erroneous teachings of Arius was already formulated by the pre-Nicene synod in Antioch (324–325). He taught that the Son was born of the Father, not by His will, but by His hypostasis. The Son coexists eternally. The correct formulations were influenced by the theology of St. Athanasius (d. 373).

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 83.

The Greek Father of the Church had already addressed the problem of creation in his research before the controversy with Arius. The Incarnation of the Word involves understanding the mystery of creation. There is an impassable boundary between the absolute existence of the unchanging God and the contingent existence of the created world, subject to transience and change. The world was created by the will of the Triune God. Logos is clearly on the side of God, not creation. He is the Only Begotten of the Father. Logos is radically distinguished from the entire created world. Creation receives existence from Him, who continues to sustain it in existence. He is present in this world in a dynamic way through His energies, forces and actions.

The Orthodox theologian admits that the distinction between essence and forces (energies) can already be found in Philo, Plotinus and Clement of Alexandria. The model distinguishing essence and forces (energies) was used by early Christian thinkers to express the relationship between the Father and the Son. By Athanasius it was used in another, new way to differentiate between God's inner existence and His historical saving action. This is the distinction between God's inner being (theology) and His creative revelation and action *ad extra* (economics).³⁰ The boundary of nature is not between the Father and the Son, but between the Creator and the creature. The Logos is the Creator because it is God. Even if God did not want to create, the Word would be with God and God in It. The being of the Trinitarian God is primary to God's will and action. Before God creates, He is the Father. The Christian God is always Triune and always works that way. He does not choose His existence and essence. God freely chooses to reveal Himself and create.³¹ God does not need creation. His being in Himself is perfect and complete. Divine and created are two separate modes of existence that can be described as necessary and accidental being. Corresponding to this distinction is the distinction between the forms of God's existence, in substance and in action.³² It was accepted by the Church. And Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) introduced the term 'God's energies' in place of the concepts of God's will and desire. Hence comes the valid theological formulation that creation takes place thanks to energies, and generation takes place thanks to nature. They were then spread by St. John Damascene (d. 749), making it an important feature of the theology of the Orthodox tradition. Ultimately, it was clarified by the Byzantine theologians, Gregory Palamas and Mark of Ephesus (d. around 1444).

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 94.

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 97.

³² Cf. D. Reid, *Energies of the Spirit...*, p. 44.

3. Saint Gregory Palamas and the tradition of the Fathers

The third important text in which Father Georges Florovsky addresses the topic of God's energies is the article *Святитель Григорий Палама и традиция Отцов*, published in 1960, originally in Greek, and then translated into English and Russian. Undoubtedly, the teaching of the Church Fathers had an important kerygmatic and existential dimension. Theology, like all preaching, grows out of the saving experience of faith and must lead to it. Otherwise these are empty words. As stated by the Russian theologian, Byzantine theology also had this character, with such great figures as Symeon the New theologian (d. 1022) and Gregory Palamas. Especially the theology of the latter, developed in the context of defending the experience of hesychasm, referred to the truth about the possibility of actual divinization of man, fundamental for Orthodox anthropology.³³

The Greek tradition, followed by Gregory Palamas, teaches that the goal of Christian existence is divinization. Thanks to deification, man remains a creature. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, promised and gave man participation in God's eternal and everlasting life. This means that thanks to Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, he is united with God. It is not just moral union or purely human perfection. Deification should be understood in ontological and personalistic categories. It means an encounter through which God's presence pervades all human existence.³⁴ However, an important question arises here: how to reconcile the truth about the divinization of man with the truth about the absolute transcendence of God? Further, can you actually encounter God in prayer? Father Georges Florovsky, along with all the Fathers, responds positively: during his prayer, man actually meets God and contemplates His eternal Glory. He asks further how this is accomplished, remembering that, especially for the Eastern tradition, God remains absolutely unknowable and inaccessible in His essence. The solution is the already familiar distinction between God's essence and His actions. The essence remains completely inaccessible to man. Man knows God only through His actions and in His actions.³⁵ It is God's energies that reach out to man, not God's essence, which remains inaccessible.

Energies are God's actions through which God truly reveals Himself and is truly present in the world. Through them, God draws closer to man. Man encounters God through God's energies and in them. God's grace is deifying energies. The source and cause of divinization, according to Gregory Palamas and Georges Florovsky, is not God's essence (ουσια), but God's uncreated grace, i.e. God's energies. This distinction, according to Gregory Palamas, does not introduce any

³³ Г. Флоровский, *Святитель...*, p. 386.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 387–388.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 388.

separation in God. The energies ‘come’ (προϊέναι) from God and reveal His essence. The verb ‘to come’ again means only distinction, not separation. God’s grace, distinguished and not separated from the essence, is understood in personalistic terms, a personal saving encounter. Salvation means not only the forgiveness of sins, but the actual renewal and fulfillment of man as a son of God. It is achieved not only thanks to human, natural efforts, but above all thanks to God’s uncreated grace and God’s saving energies.

Commenting on the thought of Gregory Palamas, the author emphasizes that the distinction typical of Orthodox theology between God’s ‘essence’ and God’s ‘will’ and ‘energies’ is very real, and at the same time does not violate the simplicity of God. It is crucial for the proper expression of the Trinitarian and protological-cosmological mystery. He also admits that it is difficult to accept the theology of the Western tradition, which has been significantly influenced by the Trinitarian and cosmological thought of St. Augustine.³⁶ Georges Florovsky calls Gregory Palamas’ concept ‘existentialist’, as opposed to ‘essential’ approaches, which are unable to answer such key theological problems as God’s freedom and its dynamism or the realism of God’s divinizing actions. The only true Christian metaphysics is the metaphysics of the person. The starting point for theology understood in this way is the history of salvation, the history of God’s saving acts, at the center of which is the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word and Its glorification through the cross and resurrection. It is the history of God’s acts of freedom, to which man, a pilgrim towards perfection, responds in his temporal freedom. It is a theology of events and a theology of freedom.³⁷

This short discourse on the teachings of Father Georges Florovsky on ‘God’s energies’ may become an opportunity to become acquainted with this doctrine, which is extremely important for Orthodox theology and usually unknown in Western theology. In the texts of the Russian theologian we find the essential elements of this concept. The teaching about the distinction between the essence of God and His will and energies, between what is necessary in God (triune, generation) and what is based on the free will of the entire Holy Trinity (creation), the origins of which we find in the theology of Athanasius the Great and the Cappadocian Fathers, is the key to understanding the Orthodox doctrine of the immanent Trinity, the doctrine of creation, uncreated grace and the doctrine of deification. Father Georges Florovsky calls this way of practicing theology ‘existential’, in the sense of the existential nature of God. In the light of this theology, God is a simple being because He is not composed of an essence that would be different from His existence. However, it is complex in a double sense: firstly,

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 391.

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 393.

as a community of Three Hypostases, and secondly, as a being whose essence is not identical with His activities, i.e. energies.³⁸ This raises many justified questions, doubts, reservations, and even opposition,³⁹ especially within the concepts of Thomistic theology. However, it is not our purpose to mention them. It is good to remember that Thomas Aquinas himself wrote in *Contra errores Grecorum* that many formulas which sound good in Greek may not sound good in Latin. For this reason, the Latins and Greeks profess the same truth in different words.⁴⁰

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³⁸ A. Siemianowski, *Tomizm a palamizm...*, p. 98.

³⁹ Cf. H.U. von Balthazar, *Teodramatyka*, t. 2: *Osoby dramatu*, cz. 1: *Człowiek w Bogu*, tłum. W. Szymona, Kraków 2006, pp. 12–183.

⁴⁰ Cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Dziela wybrane*, tłum. i red. J. Salij, Poznań 1984, p. 159.