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Research Article

Antinomic Understanding of the Secular in Georges Florovsky's Works[1]

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Abstract. The present article analyses the approach of Georges Florovsky to the problem of the *secular (worldly, earthly, immanent)*. Georges Florovsky gave the secular tendencies in the Christian world a negative assessment as they led to cultural crises. He proposed to seek their origin in the antinomic (God–human, both earthly and heavenly) nature of the Christian church. He deduced that the origins of secular culture stemmed forth from the medieval attempts to break this antinomy, to create Heaven on Earth. This could be seen in the Byzantine Empire (the subordination of the Church to the Emperor), in the Latin world (the assignment of secular power to the Pope), in the European post-Reformation thought (through the blurring of the distinction between theology and de-Christianized philosophy), and later in the Russian religious philosophy (attempts to formulate the idea of Christian state). Drawing on the concept of the divine-human antinomy of the Church, Georges Florovsky insisted that the Church should neither try to blur the line between the religious and the secular, nor attempt to influence secular politics, but should instead proceed from the fact that culture is intrinsically religious and substantially theologized. In fact, he objected to the ecclesiasticization of politics and offered to proceed from the assumption that Christianity (religion) is universal by default. Florovsky used a dual, dialectical approach in which secular discourse is seen as a religious discourse that aspires to secular power and consequently ceases to be religious, creating a kind of secular culture that threatens Christianity itself. In order to overcome this secular culture, Christianity is called upon to abstain from direct political influence on it. While avoiding limitations of the religious–secular du-alism of the Enlightenment and allowing the Church thought to prevent aggravating relations with secular politics, this approach fails to properly distinguish between the causes and the effects of secular discourse. The conclusion identifies ways of furthering Florovsky's approach and thought.

Keywords: Florovsky, secular, antinomy, Church, religion, Christianity

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Current discussions of the nature and limits of secularization and the prospects of a "post-secular" approach to analysing religious processes in today's world make it particularly relevant to turn to previous discussions of the secular that had been actively conducted in the second half of the 20th century.[2] The topic was also prominent among Russian religious philosophers of the time (with very few exceptions, Russian émigrés) since the time of Vladimir Soloviev, and it echoed through the works of Frank, Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky, Shmeman, Berdyaev, etc. Fr. Georges Florovsky offered a particularly substantive treatment of "secularization." His thought had developed in the general vein of Russian religious philosophy. However, what set him apart from his predecessors was his frequent use of the terms "secular"/"secularization" (and "profane"/"profaning" as their synonyms), which had cropped up only very rarely and non-systemically before that. This was largely due to the "secularization theory" being developed in western sociology in the 1960s. That is, the notion of secularization as such became a widespread academic phenomenon (Florovsky lived in the United States at the time and, therefore, dwelled, if one might say so, in the western intellectual space). It makes it all the more interesting to understand Florovsky's interpretation and use of this term within his own religious and philosophical approach.

Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) lived a full life as a scholar, philosopher, priest, teacher, and public figure (he is particularly known for his active involvement with the World Council of Churches). His life spans the larger part of the dramatic 20th century. Florovsky spent his childhood and youth in imperial Russia (in Odessa). A few years after the Revolution, he emigrated to Europe (living in Sophia, Prague, and Paris), where he spent the inter-bellum years of the 1920s–1930s and the wartime period of the 1940s. After the war, he moved to the United States and lived and worked there until his death.

Florovsky's active involvement in public life garnered him renown both among Russian émigrés and in western intellectual circles. Late in life, Florovsky became a focus of intense academic interest. His legacy is the subject of many fundamental studies. Andrew Blane authored the first biography of Florovsky as a scholar and a public figure (Blane, 1995), while G. Williams offered an analysis of his neopatristic approach (both had known Florovsky personally). Their books were published in New York in 1993 (Williams, 1995). Pavel Gavrilyuk interpreted Florovsky's legacy as part and continuation of Russian religious philosophy ("renaissance"), casting him not as a fighter against the "modernism of the fathers of the renaissance" (Vladimir Soloviev, Sergei Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky, Nikolay Berdyaev), but as a follower of

[2] An analysis of the current state of the discussion of the secular and the post-secular goes beyond the scope of the present article. Publications on the matter number in hundreds (see the works of Y.Y. Sinelina, A.I. Kyrlezhev, D.A. Uzlaner, A.V. Appolonov, A. Belokobylsky, V. Levitsky, and I.G. Kargin in Russia, to name but a few, and also the works of Hermann Lübbe, Jürgen Habermas, José Casanova, Charles Taylor, Peter Berger, John Caputo, Kristina Stöckl and many others). As a specific example, see *The Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity* (2018), which contains papers by authors from all over the world.

them (Gavrilyuk, 2017: 475–498). Additionally, an important collective monograph entitled *Georges Vasilievich Florovsky* and authored by experts on Russian religious philosophy was published (V.S. Glagolev, P.L. Gavrilyuk, S.S. Khoruzhii, A.P. Kozyrev, M.V. Silantieva, M.A. Maslin, et al.) (Georges Vasilievich Florovsky, 2015). Not counting individual reviews of Florovsky's works written and published by Russian émigré philosophers (including V.V. Zenkovsky, Nikolay Lossky, Nikolay Berdyaev, and Myrrha Lot-Borodine), the first full-fledged studies of Florovsky's works were penned by English-speaking authors, many of whom had known Florovsky personally (Andrew Blane, Marc Raeff, F. Thomson, G. Williams, and Lewis Shaw). It was only after the arrival of *perestroika* that the philosopher's legacy began to be actively studied by Russian academics (archpriest I. Sviridov, N.K. Gavryushin, A.V. Sobolev, A.V. Posadsky and S.V. Posadsky, and many others) (Chernyaev, 2010: 5–12). The scholar Matthew Baker compiled the most complete bibliography on Florovsky's life and works, containing over 600 publications in Russian and many European languages (adapted into Russian and supplemented in 2015) (Baker, 2015). Another important author to mention is Alexis Klimoff, an American Slavist who emigrated from the USSR in 1944 and is known for his correspondence with Florovsky (Klimoff, Yermishin, 2016), and for his analysis of Florovsky's argument with Fr. Sergei Bulgakov on Sophiology (Klimoff, 2003).

Before embarking on an analysis of Florovsky's use of the concepts of "secular" and "secularization," we need to outline the range of our sources. This task faces us with two problems.

First, during his long and fruitful career, Florovsky wrote a large number of works. Alexis Klimoff believes that only part of them was included in the 14-volume American edition of the philosopher's works (Florovsky, 1972–1989), while many of his articles and speeches are still scattered through various journals and limited-edition collections that are virtually inaccessible (Klimoff, 2020: 117). Currently, there is no verified complete collection of Florovsky's works that contains all his texts in their original and authorized versions.

Second, until the mid-1930s, Florovsky mostly wrote in Russian, while after emigrating, and particularly during his "American" period, he largely wrote in English (Senokosov, 1995: 368). Accordingly, the absence of such a collection has hampered attempts to determine the original language of a particular work, and to determine which translations are original and accurate. The situation is complicated by the quality of the most voluminous edition of Florovsky's works, the 14-volume American edition, varying hugely from volume to volume. While the first volumes were checked and corrected by Florovsky himself,[3] subsequent volumes were published posthumously, thereby gradually turning into a montage of Florovsky's works with arbitrary titles

[3] There are testimonies of Florovsky being dissatisfied with some titles editors suggested for his articles. This shows that Florovsky paid a great deal of attention to interpretations of his views and to the accuracy of their presentation.

and deviations from their original composition, and accompanied by texts of other authors (the quality of the edition gradually deteriorates from volume 7 to volume 14) (Klimoff, 2020).

As a result, in some cases, we cannot be entirely certain about the original language of an article published in English or another European language. Moreover, we cannot even be certain that the article was originally written in Russian and whether it had been approved by Florovsky himself. We proceed from the premise that all the works published in Florovsky's lifetime (in any language), as well as the texts in the first four volumes of the 14-volume American edition edited by Richard Haugh were approved and, therefore, authorized by Florovsky himself.[4]

Bibliographical lists of Florovsky's works assist in working with his texts. The first and most well-known such list was compiled by the American Slavist Andrew Blane in 1993 (it was adapted into Russian in 1995 by Y.P. Senokosov) (Senokosov, 1995: 368–409). Later, Matthew Baker added a few works to the list (Baker 2015). The most complete and accurate list of Florovsky's works, including new posthumous editions, translations, and collections was compiled by A.V. Chernyaev in 2015 using and updating Blane's data (Cherniaev et al., 2015: 437–458).

It is important to keep in mind that Flovorsky's philosophical and theological views did undergo a certain evolution: his "Eurasian" period gave way to a "European" (Parisian) period, when he became disappointed in the prospects of Eurasianism. It was at this time that he undertook a fundamental study of Byzantine patristic thought in order to shape a traditionalist alternative to the modernist direction in religious philosophy. Finally, in his "American" period, Florovsky was immersed in work on public and theological problems, and became actively involved in developing international ecumenical dialogue. Florovsky focused on the problematics of the secular in the later stages of his career, when the term "secularism" itself began to spread throughout western academic writing. Nevertheless, Florovsky's views did not develop in a "revolutionary" way. Rather, they evolved gradually and in stages: in his "Eurasian" period, he was concerned with searching for alternatives to the secular western culture, which, in turn, influenced his interest in studying Byzantine theology and his further writing in general. At the same time, a "traditionalist" Orthodox religiosity played an integrating role in the development of his worldview.[5]

In the first half of his career, when Florovsky wrote in Russian (the monograph *The Ways of Russian Theology,* studies of Eastern Church Fathers, philosophical and theological articles published in various collections), he almost never used the concept

[4] Alexis Klimoff described Florovsky's close attention to translations of his works published during his lifetime. He cited a conflict between Florovsky and the publisher of the 14-volume American edition of his works: Florovsky was so unhappy with the publisher's unauthorized renaming of some of his articles written in English he considered suing him (Klimoff, 2020: 120).

[5] See a recent book by the French theologian Jean-Claude Larchet about Archpriest Georges Florovsky (Larchet, 2022).

of "the secular." Still, reconstructing his attitude towards secular problematics in the second half of his life, when he wrote mostly in English and used the word with greater frequency, is virtually impossible without turning to his earlier texts.

Florovsky viewed secular tendencies in culture as a historiosophic and ecclesiological problem. In this 1955 article "Faith and Culture," he offered a negative assessment of secularism, noting that 20th-century Europe had become a centre of "militant secularism" (Florovsky, 1974: 28). He linked these developments with a crisis the Christian world had been plunged into, both in the East and in the West. He suggested that the causes of this crisis should be sought in the history of the Christian Church's development. In his opinion, before Christian culture appeared, religion was not separate from politics and public life were not separate, they had a common nature and operated as a single whole. That was the case in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, where religious life and theology were parts of the socio-political system. Florovsky believed the same applied to the history of Ancient Israel, where "God's Law" and religious commandments operated in all areas of life and did not distinguish between "spiritual" and "secular" aspects. "Israel" itself, with all its political, economic, and religious features, was an integral "Church," a God-established society. Florovsky claimed the same of the European Middle Ages, where the same (religious) rules extended to all areas of life (Florovsky, 1974: 29–44).

Florovsky concluded that, from a religious point of view, culture has an integral nature, it does not involve a division into "the secular" and "the religious." He opposed dividing life into autonomous areas governed by their own internal rules – he opposed serving "two masters" (Florovsky, 1974: 29).

Florovsky saw the roots of the secular European mindset in the unique "antinomic" nature of the Christian Church (Florovsky, 1974: 28). In his opinion, the Church that exists both in heaven and on earth, theologically has an intangible dual nature that is both secular and spiritual. In time, this resulted in the concepts of two paths to salvation (monastic and secular), two types of authority (spiritual and secular), and two ideals of the Church system: monastic (a comprehensive transformation of the human being's inner world), and the ideal of building a Christian state, an empire (developing its outward appearance: legal, political, economic, and cultural, i.e., a society based on Christian foundations). Ultimately, Florovsky believed that, historically, two ways of arriving at a convergence between the Church and the world had emerged – one that attempted to subordinate the Church to the world, and another that attempted to subordinate the world to the Church. And he believed both ways to be "ineffective" (Florovsky, 1974: 28).

Florovsky, therefore, traced the origins of secular culture both to the Byzantine and Catholic church systems.

Florovsky saw Byzantium as a fusion of the Church and the state. There was no division into the secular and religious. Society was "internally" monolithic, it was a "universal Christian Society" (that has features of both the church and the state). But even Byzantium exhibited a struggle between secular and ecclesiastical, religious and

political trends. At the same time, even that society had "bodies" that performed different functions and differed from one another: "spiritual" and "secular"; "ecclesiastical" and "political."[6] The principles of the Byzantine church system were laid down back under Theodosius the Great (the last ruler of the Empire undivided into West and East), who made the affirmation and establishment of Christian faith and resolution of dogmatic issues a matter of state and attempted to unite by force the secular and the religious, the spiritual and the profane. Florovsky subjected this approach to a rigorous criticism, calling it "suspicious and ambiguous," claiming that the spiritual and profane aspects of life ("two forces") cannot be united and these attempts were precisely the source of the state's (the "kingdom's") pernicious effect on the Church and ultimately resulted in the collapse of Byzantium.[7] Similarly, Florovsky transitioned from an infatuation with the ideas of Soloviev and of the "renaissance" of the Silver Age's religious philosophy to criticizing them in his first years in emigration: on the one hand, he spoke of his contemporary culture having a shortage of "integral knowledge," and of "a religious synthesis" – that is, he claimed that culture of the time had come up short in terms of extending the religious approach to all areas of life; on the other hand, he was opposed to such a synthesis being based in Sophiology, claiming that it was incapable of Christianizing Hellenism (to offer a religious, Orthodox interpretation of contemporary European philosophy based in classical antiquity), unable to achieve a synthesis through some philosophical and mystical instruments separate from the Church (Gavrilyuk, 2017: 55–212), including pantheistic means (Posadsky, Posadsky, 2004: 265). Florovsky was inspired by Soloviev's ideas of unitotality, yet could not accept his non-Christian mysticism, and it prompted Florovsky to start formulating the "neopatristic" model of cognition (even if it did not assume a finished shape in his own works, it did push philosophical thought in that direction).

Florovsky used the same outline to describe the history of western Christianity: he saw the western Roman Empire, too, as an internally monolithic "political and ecclesiastical institution"[8] (both before and after the arrival of Christianity), and he linked the beginning of its cultural decline with attempts to artificially overcome the internal antinomy of the Church. Only the Catholic Church itself fell to the temptation of secular power instead of being ruled by the power of state. This drive within the Catholic Church led to a "religious and historical immanentism," to Christianity becoming "profaned," to a transformation of the faith into "gnosis," and to dogmas becoming formal and abstract legal norms, and sacraments turning into "naturalistic magic" and means of maintaining discipline (Florovsky, 1923). Nevertheless, Florovsky pointed to the Reformation as the principal cause of European secularization in the age of Modernity, as the Reformation opposed Catholic scholasticism and philosophy, even

[6] Florovsky G.A. "The Empire and the Desert." *Eastern Fathers. An Addendum.* Archpriest Georges Florovsky: From Unpublished Lectures on Patristics. URL: https://azbyka.ru/otechmk/Georgij_Florovskij/vostochnye-ottsy/4

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

though it was later forced to go back to a philosophy that had already been stripped of "Christian initiative": Aristotle made a comeback to now-Protestant societies; Leibniz and Wolff appeared; and pagan philosophical Hellenism, mysticism, and abolition of historicism were revived. Ultimately, in Florovsky's opinion, these developments resulted in German idealism becoming detached from Christianity (Florovsky, 1930).

Florovsky believed that secularization in Russia started with Peter the Great and was a state project. Citing the historian Yevgeny Golubinsky, Florovsky supported his claim that secularization in Russia became "a heresy of state and everyday life," a heresy that had been transferred from the West. Florovsky saw the principal contents of the government *reforms* of Peter the Great to lie in secularization, not westernization ("The innovations of the Petrine reform did not consist in westernization, it consisted in secularization") (Florovsky, 2009: 113). Florovsky saw German idealist philosophy as an important source of secular ideas in Russia in the 19th century (Florovsky, 2009: 192).

Florovsky adhered to the approach formulated by John Chrysostom: the Church is to advance a society based on the Christian principles of equality and fairness, a society practicing coenobitic life "as a monastery of sorts," without private property, where God owns and administers everything while people are his "servants." Historically, this idea has never been fulfilled, and, in Florovsky's opinion, it cannot be, since the Church (unlike the state) is limited in its instruments: it can only persuade and preach, but it cannot force and must not rely on secular centres of authority and power. Florovsky, therefore, understood the Church and the ecclesiastic system not as a special social institution, but as an ethical system based on three principles: the equality of all people; care primarily for the penitent, those in need, and the humiliated, not of the prosperous (a social problem is treated as a moral one); and preserving and transmitting the memory of the Church being "rather a spiritual home, than an authoritarian institution" (Florovsky, 1950–1951).

Florovsky criticized Byzantium, the Catholic world, and new European philosophy, as well as Russian religious philosophy from the Slavophiles to the followers of Soloviev (the very fact that Florovsky saw them as phenomena of the same order is noteworthy) for moving away from such an understanding of the Church. He criticized Soloviev for preferring the "human" to the "divine," for seeing the point of religion primarily in being a means of building a special society and state ("a free theocracy"). Florovsky accused Dostoevsky of the same, connecting the writer with the claim that the state should become a church "throughout the world." He levelled the same charge against Slavophiles who had sought ways of building a perfect Russian society based on Christian principles. Florovsky ranked Russian religious philosophy's ideas of building a Christian state alongside Catholic caesaropapism and clericalism, on the same level as freemasons, utopian socialists, and religions messianism ("Polish and Russian"), accusing them of searching for an "earthly kingdom," attempting to overcome the "yawning" gap between the heavenly and the earthly (the religious and the secular) through the use of "Gnostic dialectics," and using the "holy" for handling

earthly tasks (Florovsky, 1923: 169–170). On the whole, Florovsky criticized historical attempts to *churchify* politics and state, viewing the political as something incompatible with the religious (Christianity), as a threat that destroys the Church from within.[9]

At the same time, Florovsky also criticized the attempts of "Russian ecclesiastical liberalism" to conform the Church to the world, to force it to accept a secular culture. He called these directions of thought naïve external attempts to provide a religious justification for worldly prosperity and create a "secular religion" of sorts that would have no asceticism (Florovsky, 2009: 492). However, the danger of ecclesiastical liberalism, in Florovsky's opinion, has a far lesser scale and significance than any attempts to create a Christian state, a Christian theocracy – attempts that lead to a "secularization of Christianity" (Florovsky, 1948).

Florovsky never fully clarified the level at which the secular and the religious principles opposed each other before the emergence of the current secular European culture both in the East and in the West of the Christian world. By emphasizing its "inner" nature, the philosopher believed that, at first, there was no struggle between the church and the state, two societies or parties, because they constituted a single society; but there was a struggle of two inner forces and trends. It is not entirely clear what Florovsky meant specifically: whether this struggle had been theological, whether there was a certain higher general proto-theological and proto-political level of discourse; or whether it had been a dualistic struggle between two originally irreconcilable ontological principles.

As an Orthodox thinker, Florovsky throughout his writing career strove to overcome the dualistic gap in European modernity between religion on the one hand and the secular rational mind on the other. This is why Soloviev's ideas so inspired Florovsky in his youth (Gavrilyuk, 2017: 188) even though he refused to use Sophiology (which he consistently criticized) as his foundation. In this regard, he was attracted by the apophatic approach of the early Church Fathers who pondered "churchifying the mind" (Florovsky, 1931: 6). He was also attracted by the ideas of Christianizing Hellenism in the shape of a "neopatristic synthesis," i.e. interpreting the teachings of the Church Fathers from the point of view of their creating a qualitatively new Christian Hellenism. Even though the Russian scholar A.V. Chernyaev criticizes Florovsky precisely on these grounds and even calls this approach weak and unoriginal, he confirms Florovsky's intent to achieve a synthesis of the religious and the secular: Chernyaev views Florovsky's works as an attempt to offer an "Orthodox" reading of the history of philosophy using a "spiritualistic" approach, presenting a "religious and psychological interpretation" that borders on "religious reductionism" (Chernyaev, 2010: 182–185). What matters here is not specific positive or negative assessments, but the very fact that Florovsky and his predecessors strove to overcome the dualism inherent in Euro-

[9] For Florovsky, his criticism of historical attempts to politicize Christianity did not mean a believer's refusal to engage in politics as such. Florovsky's own participation in ecumenical conferences contains elements of a political activity.

pean Modernity. To achieve this, he derived the nature of secular ("profane") discourse from chiliastic religious teachings that, in his opinion, are too taken with the idea of a perfect earthly kingdom and forget the life eternal (Florovsky, 1923: 169–171). He termed such a worldview a religious teaching of a special kind, a "religious and historical immanentism" that believes in the earthly world and is engaged in building an earthly kingdom, a worldview that affirms the "covenant of law" instead of the "covenant of grace." By calling ecclesiastical liberalism a "secular religion," Florovsky essentially traced it back to the same chiliastic source. Subsequently, he concluded that disputes between secular and religious cultures, between belief and non-belief, between theology and secular learning are religious disputes between "rival beliefs" (Florovsky, 1974: 11): a person's attitude to any cultural process is always a "theological decision," and a controversy about culture is a theological controversy (Florovsky, 1974: 15).

On the other hand, he described secularization as a process leading to a negation of religions mind. For instance, he described the "capitalist civilization" of European Modernity as "inwardly secularized," a process that is opposed to "any religion" (Florovsky, 1974: 22). The same applies to his assessments of "immanentism" that leads to a decline of the religious mind as such. Florovsky saw secular trends as the main danger of today, and consequently he devoted a major part of his works to searching for ways to overcome the secular culture.

The thinker contrated secular culture with religious culture, which he understood to mean a "normative setting of personal creativity," i.e. solely as a human being's spiritual state and ethical norms. For Florovsky, religious culture should shirk from any desire to set up a "system," bureaucratic institutions, and particularly a state. Florovsky adhered to Christian individualism: he denied the existence of external objective social laws and public ideals. For Florovsky, the absolute may manifest itself solely in a personality, in a "feat of perfecting one's self" (Florovsky, 1923: 171). A person's public role and activity are part and consequence of their personal spiritual development (the "personal" includes the "social"). He called "belief" a path towards the true world, yet "belief is just a map of the true world, and should not be mistaken for reality" (Florovsky, 1951).

Thus, while criticizing secular culture and contrasting it with Christian culture, Florovsky repeatedly said that true Christianity is alien to any public and state functions and powers, that Christianity is an exclusively individual, private practice: "new Jerusalem" will never become a "caliphate," a "public ideal," God's Kingdom on Earth. Consequently, the Church should not try to influence any state system, any social and political normativity.

Florovsky saw the principal threat for today's Christian world in the "secularization" of culture. Essentially, however, he did not suggest opposing this culture by erecting a certain alternative to it in the shape of a new religious culture. Instead, he proposed bolstering the Church and faith, living and acting as if the secular world did not exist. He did not advocate fighting against it in public space, using any political methods. Rather, he suggested that only the practice of "self-improvement" be used to oppose it (Florovsky, 1951). That is, while discerning implicitly religious features (to

use Edward Bailey's term) in the secularization trends of the European Modernity, seeing it as a religion of an earthly kingdom, he simultaneously perceived these trends as anti-religious. Florovsky eliminates the clear paradox inherent in these views by stating that the earthly and the heavenly are antinomic in nature as a matter of principle. However, some gaps remain in his arguments, and this prompts questions.

First, it remains unclear why secular (profane, immanent) discourse, being a form of chiliastic religion, leads to the decline of any religion: How can a religion exist that is not merely nihilistic, but denies its own existence? This contradiction is partially eliminated if we take into account the fact that Florovsky frequently took "religion" to mean Christianity itself (this is indirectly evidenced by his claim that a synthesis of all beliefs is incapable of creating a true and universal "religion," that it will not produce Christianity, since different beliefs are not equal, and are not equally true (Florovsky, 1923: 160)). In this case, however, Florovsky's claim that secular discourse (which ultimately denies Christianity itself) stems from the antinomic nature of the Church remains incomplete and unfinished. If a third follows from an antinomy, it smacks of dialectics which Florovsky also mistrusted as a secular philosophical method.

Second, Florovsky deduced the antinomy of the religious (Christian) and political principles from the antinomy of the secular and the heavenly in the Church. But he never developed this opposition further. On the one hand, admitting such an antinomy leads to the claim that politics is closely tied to religion, that they form an indivisible whole. On the other hand, this claim means that the political has its own nature and agency: while criticizing the Church's "political" claims, Florovsky never critiqued the existence of the "political," thereby essentially leaving this space untouchable, inaccessible, but boosted its reality as self-sufficient. Also, while noting the inadmissibility of the Church participating in politics, Florovsky never provided an ultimate definition of the political in its connection with the secular.

This approach inevitably creates methodological contradictions: the programme of churchifying first Hellenism and then culture runs into the fact that it either produces secular discourse out of itself or cannot identify its subject since the nature of secular discourse remains incompletely described. The fact that Florovsky turned to Church Fathers did not eliminate this problem: going back to Orthodox patristics in order to alter the 20th-century (secular) culture inevitably depended on the historical and linguistic features of this culture; it needed an answer to the question of what "religion" and "secular" are.

Finally, there was the unresolved task of defining the causes of the origins and nature of secular culture, which complicated the task of distinguishing its causes and consequences.

Mikhail Maslin offered a very accurate description of the duality of Florovsky's methodological programme that does not diminish its fundamental nature. In his view, Florovsky consistently replaced "philosophy with theology," but ultimately the "philosophical element" in Florovsky's works proved to be stronger than the "theological element" (Maslin, 2015: 378).

The contradictions listed above partially explain why Florovsky's contribution to philosophy still receives varied assessments. Some authors use his approaches to criticize theological modernism (primarily within Russian religious philosophy), while others use it to develop liberal trends in Orthodox theology (for instance, Florovsky's student John Ziziulas, a theologian and a titular bishop of the Patriarchate of Constantinople who is today frequently criticized for how close his views come to Catholic personalist theology (Larchet, 2021)).

Presumably, Florovsky's ideas could further develop in three major directions. First is the recognition of secular discourse as inevitable, planned, and decreed by God, arising from the very nature of the Church as a divine-human organism: this approach would attempt to legitimize secular discourse from a Christian point of view, as Protestant political theology and liberal Catholic movements in the 20th century did. Second is the search for the source of secular discourse in some "third" dimension that overcomes the antinomy: in an additional, Gnostic, Sophian element in God and the universe. Neither of these directions was acceptable for Florovsky, as they would conflict with Orthodoxy rooted in patristics. A third way would require a major reworking of the language of his exposition, going beyond the established language of 20th-century religious philosophy that was seeking to conform to the conventional language of international (western-centric, Protestant/Catholic) academic community. This would create a need for philosophy to be radically re-subordinated to theology while fully incorporating the "secular religion" (secular discourse) into theology. However, Florovsky's philosophy is "diplomatic" rather than "militant": he proposed moving away from secular culture peacefully, without giving grounds for persecution on the part of "militant secularism," and without staking a claim to overturning the social system, much less revising the conventional, "profaned" language of philosophy. Essentially, Florovsky suggested that the Church abandon its participation in political projects, build ecclesiastical life focused solely on parishioners' individual and private religiosity as if the outer secular culture did not exist, and abolish attempts to outwardly *churchify* secular culture, focusing instead on preserving the *churchified* Hellenism as the foundation of the Christian present, while glossing over the fact that this approach as such has significant political content.

Florovsky used patristics ("Christian Hellenism"), legitimized not so much by the Revelation as by the Hellenistic origins of contemporary culture, as his "third" fulcrum point, which allowed him to make certain unequivocal judgments and rise above antinomy and dialectics (Gavrilyuk, 2017: 20–21, 74–77). Accordingly, Florovsky gave Christianity a universal (catholic/ *kafolichesky*) tinge through the use of Hellenism that, in turn, produced and justified the philosophical (or religious and philosophical) method. Deviations from this method towards the "old" classical Hellenism were the source and threat of the secularization of the Church and culture. That, in turn, created dialectic tensions along the axis from by Christianity on the one hand and Hellenism and its antinomic nature on the other (Hellenism here acquires a universal

philosophical status and becomes a euphemism for cognition itself – that is, it has a certain fulcrum in itself that is different from Christianity), and subsequently, these features affect the perception of the secular.

Thus, Fr. Georges Florovsky used the term "secular" as a synonym for "profane," "earthly," "immanent." He saw the source of secular discourse in historical attempts to overcome the insurmountable spiritual/worldly, divine/human antinomy of the Church, and he saw the principal danger for Christianity in the desire to build a "Christian state." In his eyes, many were guilty of such attempts: Byzantium, Catholics, Protestants, and even Russian religious philosophers from Slavophiles to the followers of Vladimir Soloviev, who used Christianity to formulate and construct a chiliastic socio-political utopia ("heaven on earth") in the shape of a "Christian state," a formalized public order where the Church is stripped of its inner antinomy and Christian norms are fused with bureaucratic procedures and political decisions. He consistently traces the sources of secular culture to the medieval practices of integrating the earthly and spiritual natures of the Church: Byzantium did it by subordinating religions issues to political authorities; the western world did it by having the ecclesiastical primate (the Pope) appropriate secular power first and then, after the Reformation, by erasing the boundary between theology and de-Christianized philosophy, which created secular learning. Florovsky saw both ways as leading towards a strengthening of "secular culture," secularizing (profaning) the Church and Christianity. He placed Christian "religious culture" in opposition with "secular culture." Florovsky viewed Christianity ("religious culture") solely as an ethical system, a personal faith, a private practice regulated by the ecclesiastical tradition, but stripped of any political claims. Therefore, for Florovsky, the Church should not directly influence the state system or social and public norms, and it particularly should not attempt to create a Christian state. Citing the God-man antinomy of the Church, he insisted that the Church should not erase the boundary between the religions and the secular (the profane), nor should it attempt to influence worldly culture and politics, because from the Christian point of view, any culture (including philosophy and politics) is already a religious phenomenon and has a theological dimension (in Florovsky's thinking, the religions element in culture did not claim to combat the secularity of Modernity, and was treated as a general premise typical for Russian religious philosophy overall). Essentially, he called for accepting the universal nature of Christianity (religion) by default and for abolishing attempts to *churchify* politics. In other words, he proposed not engaging in conflict with politics and secular ontology. Florovsky attempts to avoid both providing a Christian justification for "secularization" (as Protestant theology did sometimes) and explaining the secular through Gnostic elements (which was not entirely alien to some Russian religious thinkers). Essentially, Florovsky used a dualistic antinomic approach wherein the secular discourse is a religious discourse that yearns for secular power and consequently ceases to be religious and creates a secular culture that threatens Christianity itself. In order to overcome this secular culture, Christianity should abandon attempts to exercise direct political influence on it. This approach was largely buttressed by his "Christian Hellenism" concept, where

the problem of secularizing culture was presented as a result of a struggle between two modalities, two Hellenistic antinomies (Christian and that of classical antiquity), while Hellenism itself in this picture became a veiled euphemism for secular philosophy amid the outward *churchifying* of philosophy.

This approach prevented Florovsky from clearly discerning the causes and consequences of secular discourse, from giving clear answers to the questions of how the original "religious sources" of the secular may lead to the denial of religion itself, of what exactly "religion" and "politics" are and how "Christianity" differs from "religion" (such a thought can be seen in Florovsky), and, finally, of what the original source of secular discourse is. In *churchifying* philosophy via a "neopatristic synthesis," Florovsky added patristic Christianity to the antinomic and partially dialectical interpretations of secular thought without undertaking any serious attempts to revise the very concept of a secular present. It allowed for a non-conflicting and expansive introduction of an interest in the patristic legacy into the western thought, but it also, from the very outset, restricted the interpretative possibilities of this line of thinking.

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