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## ***THE NOVGOROD SOPHIA ICON AND "THE PROBLEM OF OLD RUSSIAN CULTURE": BETWEEN ORTHODOXY AND SOPHIOLOGY***

Father George Florovsky's writings have been authoritative for the fields of Eastern Orthodox theology as well as Old Russian culture. His famous 1962 article, "The Problem of Old Russian Culture," has been reprinted three times and his conclusions echo through scholarship, West and East. There he presented his thesis about the uncreative, rigid, nature of Muscovite culture<sup>1</sup>:

The great national state, aware and conscious of its vocation and destiny needed a culture. . . . The plan itself was deeply rooted in the awakened consciousness of national greatness. But the vision was intrinsically static. . . . The overarching idea was that of order. . . . Cultures are never built as systems, by orders or on purpose. They are born out of the spirit of creative initiative, out of intimate vision, out of spiritual commitment, and are only maintained in freedom. . . . The weakness of the Moscow culture was not so much in the poverty of the content as in the failure of the spirit.

Florovsky asserted that Muscovy departed from the "existential approach to the problem of man" expressed in the great art of the fourteenth and fif-

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1. See George Florovsky, "The Problem of Old Russian Culture," *Slavic Review*, 21, No. 1 (1962), 11-12. Andrew Blane, ed., *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993), p. 368 lists its three reprintings without the original comments of Andreyev and Billington. D. S. Likhachev who commented on Florovsky's reprinted article in D. W. Treadgold, ed., *The Development of the USSR: An Exchange of Views* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1964), pp. 125-72 reiterated Florovsky's viewpoint in his *Razvitiye russkoi literatury X-XVII vekov* (Leningrad: "Nauka," 1973), p. 124. "Predreinessans ne pereshel v Renaissance . . . Tsentralizovannoe gosudarstvo otmalo vse dukhovnye sily. . . . Ne dav razvitogo novogo stil'a, Predreinessans stal formalizovat'sia, i v XVI v. porodil vse te pyshnye ofitsial'nye stili v literature, kotorye byli lisheny podlinnykh tvorcheskikh potentsii [my italics]." Leonid Ouspensky in *Theology of the Icon*, vol. 2 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), p. 302 echoes Florovsky's view in his evaluation of the Muscovite Hundred Chapters Council as a reflection "of the theological powerlessness of the epoch, when the criterion of authenticity was replaced by conservatism, and the living, creative tradition by superficial regulations."

teenth century. To him, Muscovy represented a kind of "political-cultural utopia, not in full conformity with the higher aspirations of Christian man." He felt that the "perfection, completeness, and harmony of Byzantine civilization," placed Muscovy under a kind of spell. Its attempt to recreate this harmony through an "enormous synthetic effort was the most conspicuous sign and symptom of decline. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

Florovsky built up this thesis around the testimony of Russian iconography, maintaining that "Russian art definitely declined in the fifteenth and especially the sixteenth century and lost its originality and daring." His lesser known 1932 article, "On the Worship of Sophia the Wisdom of God in Byzantium and Rus'," laid the groundwork for his thesis.<sup>3</sup> There he saw the Novgorod Sophia icon (see figure 1), which he believed was written no later than the end of the fifteenth century, as an indicator of Muscovy's turn away from Orthodox humanism towards a static harmony and ideal.<sup>4</sup> This icon's attested innovativeness, he claimed, is not an outgrowth of national tradition, but rather a borrowing from the West, heralding future trends. He described it as the progenitor of the arid Muscovite Wisdom iconography sponsored by the Metropolitan Macarius in the age of Ivan IV, presaging the empty formalism and spiritual "dead-end" of the Old Belief.<sup>5</sup> For him, it was the poetic counterpart to the sixteenth-century cultural systematization accompanying the centralization of the state.

Recently, Alexis Klimoff has demonstrated that the abiding concern of Florovsky's life was to distinguish Orthodox thought from Sophiology.<sup>6</sup> This study will show that Florovsky's hidden polemic against Sophiology, and particularly his opposition to the sophiological writings of his mentor, Father Sergius Bulgakov, influenced his vision of Muscovite culture and the Novgorod Sophia icon. By showing that a hidden agenda informed his thesis about Muscovite fixation on harmony, I hope to break any remaining spell that his authority has placed on our attitudes about Muscovy and its iconography.

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2. Florovsky, "The Problem of Old Russian Culture," pp. 11-13.

3. G. Florovskii, "O pochitanii Sofii, Premudrosti Bozhiei v Vizantii i na Rusi," *Trudy piatogo s"ezda akademicheskikh organizatsii za granitsei* (Sofia, 1932), pp. 485-99.

4. Figure 1 is taken from I. Iu. Kachalova, N.A. Mayasova, L.A. Shchennnikova, *Blagoveshchenskii sobor Moskovskogo Kremliia* (Moscow: "Iskusstvo," 1990), plate 192.

5. On this "dead-end," see George Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology: The Collected Works of George Florovsky*, vol. 5 (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1979), p. 88.

6. See his article originally delivered in October 1993 at the Centennial Conference on George Florovsky entitled "George Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy." Klimoff defines the subject matter of sophiology as "the way in which the link between God and His created world is effected and manifested."

Rather than directly attack Bulgakov for presenting his sophiology as Orthodox, Florovsky devoted his theological writings and essays to the problematics differentiating Orthodoxy from Sophiology. Klimoff has noted that the 1932 article, "On the Worship of Divine Wisdom," "appears to be a point-by-point rejoinder to Bulgakov's 1927 attempt to establish the traditionality of the Sophiological enterprise."<sup>7</sup> (Characteristically, Florovsky mentions Bulgakov and Sophiology nowhere in the article). Accordingly, Florovsky's 1932 article demonstrates the Novgorod Sophia icon's unorthodoxy because Bulgakov and other sophiologists used it to prove the Orthodoxy of their intellectual system, claiming that its seemingly feminine image of Sophia was a precursor to their own.<sup>8</sup>

Florovsky developed the context for his critique of the icon in a group of writings between 1926 and 1932 – a 1926 letter to Sergei Bulgakov, a 1928 article, "Creation and Creatureliness," a 1930 article, "The Dispute about German Idealism," and the 1932 article, "On the Worship of Sophia. . . ."<sup>9</sup> As we will see, these articles express a common set of concerns about the Orthodox values of freedom, creativity, historical authenticity and transcendence. The opposition he creates between these values and the Muscovite utopia in the "Problem of Old Russian Culture" is analogous to the implicit opposition he set up more than thirty years before between Sophiology and Orthodoxy, and between Wisdom in the Novgorod Sophia icon and in Orthodox tradition. These oppositional structures reflect his main concern about Sophiology – that its systemic and abstract nature denies the authenticity of history and the autonomous spiritual life affirmed by true Orthodox culture.

The first part of this article elucidates the basis of Florovsky's critique of Sophiology in his writings between 1926 and 1932, and especially his "Dispute about German Idealism." I demonstrate how this critique determines his strategy for approaching the Novgorod Sophia icon and ultimately Muscovy. The second part describes Florovsky's view of the Orthodox humanistic values which he believed informed Byzantino-Russian culture before the six-

7. Klimoff, in "George Florovsky," is speaking of Bulgakov's brochure *O Sofii Premudrosti Bozhiei* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1935), pp. 61-63. A succinct statement of Bulgakov's sophiological views can be found in S. Bulgakov, *Sophia The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfame Press, 1993). On the evolution of Bulgakov's thought, see Aiden Nichols, "Bulgakov and Sophiology," *Sobornost*, 13, No. 2 (1991), 17-31.

8. See Mitr. Antonii, "Iz istorii Novgorodskoi 'konografii'," *Bogoslovskie trudy*, 27 (1986), pp. 61-80.

9. See G. Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood [Tvar' i tvarnost']," in *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1976), pp. 43-78, 269-77; and "Spor o nemetskom idealizme," *Put'*, 25 (1930), pp. 51-80. Alexis Klimoff quotes the 1926 letter in "George Florovsky and the Sophiological Controversy." He presents the 1928, 1930 and 1932 articles as examples of writings pervaded by Florovsky's hidden polemic with Bulgakov.

teenth century. Then, building on the work of the Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff and others, I show that the Novgorod Sophia icon embodies these values as conveyed by the hesychast culture flourishing in Novgorod beginning in the fourteenth century. Rather than a symptom of stasis and decline, its innovations reflect a creative approach to Orthodox theology. I thus indicate that the icon's actual meaning invalidates the categories that Florovsky derived from his battle against Sophiology to explain Muscovy's betrayal of the vigor of Byzantine civilization and descent into "intellectual silence." Rather, the icon establishes the language in which Muscovite theocratic ideology will use Orthodox values to sanction the state.

### Florovsky's critique of the "illusory Sophia"

A letter of 1926 from Florovsky to Bulgakov is, I believe, a key to the hidden polemic informing Florovsky's evaluation of the Novgorod Sophia icon. Although Florovsky was speaking of Vl. Solov'ev, he had Bulgakov and Pavel Florensky also in mind when he set up an opposition between Sophiology and the patristic tradition of the Orthodox Church.<sup>10</sup> He wrote:

I have long insisted that there exist two doctrines of Sophia, one might even say two Sophias, or, more exactly put, two images of Sophia: a true and genuine one on the one hand, and an illusory one on the other. In the name of the former, holy temples were erected in Byzantium and ancient Rus', while the latter served to inspire Solov'ev and his Masonic and Western predecessors, all the way back to the Gnostics and Philo. Solov'ev simply had no knowledge of Sophia of the Church; he knew the Sophia of Boehme and his followers, the Sophia of Valentinus and the Kabbalah. And this Sophiology is heretical and uncanonical [*ereticheskaia i otrechnennaia*]. What you have found in Athanasius belongs to the other Sophia. There is even more about Her

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10. In 1935 both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad independently condemned Father Sergius' teachings on Sophia. On Bulgakov's relation to Orthodoxy, see Thomas Hopko, XIII, the introduction to S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988); Barbara Newman, "Sergius Bulgakov and the Theology of Divine Wisdom," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 22, No. 1 (1978), 39-73; Aiden Nichols, "Bulgakov and Sophiology," pp. 17-31. V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 879-80 writes of Florensky that, "he wishes to develop his ideas on a basis of religious 'experience'; hence he always offers his own philosophic ideas as 'ecclesiastical thought' rather than individual theoretical constructions. This gives his book a stamp of deliberate affectation, despite its extreme saturation with ecclesiastical material, it includes many extra-ecclesiastical ideas. He himself does not notice their basic difference, and he thus imperceptibly misleads the reader. . . . He always wants to pass his new ideas as old - very old ones."

in Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa – the direct predecessors of Palamas.<sup>11</sup>

He stated that "Solov'ev" was missing "the main thing:"

... the road to discovering it lies through Christology not through Trinitology, since only with Christ Jesus did the worship of the Trinity become a reality. The point here is that only in history, in the realm of historical experience, are we capable of understanding the creatureliness of creation (*tvarnost' tvari*) and the eternity of the divine thought and will for creation (*vechnost' mysli-voli o tvari*).

Two years after he wrote these words to Bulgakov, Florovsky produced an article whose title, "Creation and Creatureliness" (*Tvar' i tvarnost'*), alluded directly back to this letter. Its main thrust was to identify "true" Orthodox Wisdom with a creative freedom and respect for history based in Christological theology. The ensuing article, "The Controversy over German Idealism," identified idealism as the cause of Sophiology's attitude towards history and creativity. Finally, "On the Worship of Sophia ..." distinguished the Orthodox christological concept of Wisdom from the essentialist conception in the Novgorod Sophia icon. He credited the icon as the first appearance of the "illusory" Sophia on Russian soil. It was to his mind a turning point, changing the Orthodox interpretation of Sophia through history and existential freedom into a glorification of an ideal absolute.<sup>12</sup>

Florovsky's 1930 critique of German Idealism prepared the ground for his critique of the icon for its overly symbolic nature.<sup>13</sup> He wrote that the idealists turned history into a "shadow," a "symbol," an "allegory" or a "myth," "excluding time."<sup>14</sup> Idealists using a Christian vocabulary viewed history as a manifestation of God – "the idea of all ideas ... the focus of cosmic har-

11. On the Sophia of Valentinus and of Gnostic tradition, see Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), pp. 48-69 and Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), pp. 174-205.

12. Florovskii, "O pochitanii Sofii," p. 494.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 494-95.

14. Florovskii, "Spor," pp. 61, 65, 68, 72: "... from the point of view of idealism everything is revelation. Therefore revelation submerges itself in history, and dissolves into its continuum. The general nature of Revelation makes specific revelations impossible. From a discontinuity Revelation ... is transformed into development. By revelation the idealist understands a manifestation, an appearance [*raskrytie*] of the divine powers and principles in the world. All of Revelation becomes symbolic ... the basic tendency is the dissolution [*razlozhenie*] of history into symbolism, that is – the exclusion of time. ... Revelation is a reason or end [*povod*] and not a path." All translations from this article are mine.

mony" all of whose relations "are outside the empirical plane."<sup>15</sup> Florovsky thought that this rationalism closed them off to existentially problematic reality outside their intellectual constructs, and endowed these constructs with the status of an absolute.<sup>16</sup>

In Florovsky's view, Idealism led to cultural crisis by transforming Hellenistic estheticism into an authoritarian-type system:

One could say that in its underlying meaning, ancient philosophy was a universal metaphysical morphology of being, a teaching about the ideal structure or architectonics of the world . . . and in the new age hellenism is reborn namely as a teaching about world harmony. . . . Idealism exaggerates the harmony (*stroinost'*) and smoothness (*slazhennost'*) of being, the organized and systemic nature of the world. This is the source of its deductive pride, the pretension to being able to isolate out or construct the whole world from its first principles to the last grain of sand . . . and not only in "panlogism" is this motif of harmony felt . . . the world opens up in romanticism like one magnificent and whole poem. . . .<sup>17</sup>

The Idealist conception of history as a harmonious "development" – the unfolding of a cosmic theogonic process – implied, in Florovsky's eyes, a de-

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15. Florovsky links nineteenth-century Idealism with twentieth-century Sophiology by his allusion to a "contemporary crisis of Idealism. . . . defined first of all by religious motifs." He emphasized that the collapse of idealistic systems in the middle of the nineteenth century did not mean that these systems did not exercise a formative role in later Russian thought. His article addressed the problem of the corruption of national spiritual traditions by pointing out how German idealistic philosophy was incompatible with the patristic thought of the Church. See Florovskii, "Spor," pp. 51-52. Florovsky dedicated "Spor" to Lev Shestov. It seems that this article inspired the title of Shestov's 1937 work *Athens and Jerusalem*. Laying down a boundary between German Idealism emerging from reformation thought and Christianity, Florovsky wrote, p. 77: ". . . there is nothing in common between Athens and Jerusalem, between the 'school' and the Church." On the debt of Bulgakov's Sophiology to German Idealism, see A. Nichols, "Bulgakov and Sophiology," pp. 18-21.

16. Florovskii, "Spor," pp. 71, 73, 75. On pp. 60-61, Florovsky noted the influence of the Neoplatonic teaching about the One in Idealism's search for the path to the absolute. In *Sophia*, p. 42, Bulgakov called the words of the Word, "certain intelligible essences . . . like Platonic ideas, ideal and real at the same time, and endowed with the power of life." Nichols, "Bulgakov and Sophiology," p. 27, paraphrases Bulgakov's defense of the "Absolute." In *Sophia*, p. 61 Bulgakov defines the absolute nature of Sophia. On pp. 146-47 he lays bare the authoritarian implications and implicit determinism of this idea: "The liberty of the creature cannot stand up to the end against the compelling attraction of Wisdom. This power of persuasion is grounded in the long suffering of God and wins its victories only by enduring much from the stubbornness of the creature."

17. Florovskii, "Spor," pp. 55-57.

nial of humankind's ability to change and to influence it.<sup>18</sup> In Idealism, he says, Nature rather than the person is the creator:

The person is . . . not a doer but a contemplator – not a creator but a diviner of the mysteries of the creation . . . all actions appear symbolic – that is, they signify something but are not creative . . . and in time nothing occurs. . . . This meant that the person was excluded from the boundaries of history. And there developed a teaching about the extra-divine, but eternal being of the world and of man.<sup>19</sup>

For the Idealist, Godmanhood thus signified a unity of like essences, created and uncreated rather than a paradoxical union of two radically different natures, human and divine.<sup>20</sup> For Florovsky, the Idealist denaturing of history amounted to a denial of its "otherness" and of humanity's autonomy and freedom in relation to the divine essence.

Florovsky's 1930 article offered an alternative to the Idealist conception of history as a "symbol" manifesting God. Building on an Orthodox theology explicated in "Creation and Creatureliness," he described a scenario where

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18. On development, see Bulgakov, *Sophia*, pp. 73-75. Nichols in "Bulgakov and Sophiology," pp. 27-29, elucidates Bulgakov's idea of "natural" impersonal process: "In acting as creator, God allows his own wisdom to enter into nothingness. His wisdom begins to exist in the mode of limitation, as process of becoming. It begins to develop, taking the differentiated form of the varieties of creatures found in, and as, the world. It is [a] natural, ontological union of the world with God. . . . In his kenotic love for his own creation, God allows his own essence to exist apart from his trinitarian hypostases, and to become instead enhypostatized in man. In other words, the divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia are apparently the same reality under two different modes of existing. . . . Starting with his 1925 essay on hypostasis and hypostaseity, Bulgakov insists that Sophia is not a personal principle but rather an 'ontological principle of life.'" B. Meehan in "Wisdom/Sophia: Her significance for Russian Identity and Western Feminine Theology," *Cross Currents* (Summer 1996), provides us with an example of the estheticism which goes hand in hand with this concept of "total-unity," what Bulgakov calls the "all in all." In an autobiographical writing Sergei Bulgakov lyrically addresses the Caucasian mountains: 'I saw your ice sparkling . . . , your snows reddening under the morning dawn . . . and my soul melted away with delight. . . . In front of me shone the first day of the World's Creation. Everything was clear, everything became reconciled, and filled with ringing joy. . . . But there was no word, no NAME, there was no "Christ is Risen" to be sung. . . . A limitless and powerful IT reigned, . . . that apocalypse, that wedding banquet, the first meeting with Sophia'."

19. Florovskii, "Spor," pp. 66, 69, 78, 73-75.

20. V. Solovyev's "Lectures on Godmanhood" have been reprinted in J. M. Edie, J. P. Scanlan, M. Zeldin, G. Kline, eds., *Russian Philosophy*, vol. 3 (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) from VI. Solovyov, *A Solovyov Anthology* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1950). Bulgakov calls his conception of Godmanhood "theandry." See *Sophia*, p. 85.

... revelation in the world [is] a series of events and not only a chain of symbols. In the fabric of time unrepeatable junctures form, the points of a mysterious discontinuity (*razryv*) emerge. And the greatest event is the incarnation of the Word. The Word is an event not only a manifestation. . . . *One must see God in history not only through history.* . . . [My italics].<sup>21</sup>

Florovsky's "true" Sophia is a Word presupposing the authenticity of history and a divine relation to the world in personal, experiential and unique terms. We have illuminated Florovsky's idea that the Idealist (and implicitly sophiologist) use of the symbol conveys an unorthodox essentialist and abstract notion of Sophia. Next we will describe how he finds this "illusory Sophia" in the Novgorod Sophia icon by applying to it poetic and other criteria he worked out in his essay on German Idealism.

### The "illusory Sophia" in the Novgorod Sophia icon

In 1932, Florovsky critiqued the Novgorod Sophia icon for abandoning an Orthodox "realistic" poetics oriented on the incarnation for a Westernizing symbolic poetics oriented on the ideal. Florovsky focussed on the symbolic representation of Wisdom as an angel in this icon. He acknowledged that the portrayal of Wisdom as Christ, angel of great counsel, according to Isaiah 9: 6 had Orthodox precedents. He claimed, however, that such "Old Testament and symbolic images did not correspond to the basic tendency of Byzantine iconography" which was towards a historical-hieratic image of Christ and "transfigured evangelical realism." Thus, he argued, the Angel's unfamiliarity evoked confusion, and opened it to interpretations influenced by the West.<sup>22</sup> These interpretations, he believed, lay the groundwork for a late seventeenth century Kievan icon presenting Wisdom as a winged female allegory of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>23</sup> He thus used poetics to place the Novgorod

21. Florovskii, "Spor," p. 71.

22. The translations from "O pochitanii" are mine. On the Wisdom Angel, see Florovskii, "O pochitanii Sofiia," pp. 489-92. See also J. Meyendorff, "L'iconographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la tradition Byzantine," *Cahiers archeologiques*, 10 (1959), 266-74. On the Western tradition of viewing Sophia, see Barbara Newman, "The Pilgrimage of Christ-Sophia," *Vox Benedictina*, 9, No. 1 (1992), 9-37. On pp. 21-32 she outlines the multifold character of the Western allegorical understanding of Divine Sophia in the Western Middle Ages. It is this understanding which, according to Florovsky, influenced German Idealism and the sophiologists through the prism of the Reformation and Jakob Boehme. Newman points out the dual association of a female Sophia with Philosophy and Nature, understood as a "world soul," and associated with "reason," "beauty" and harmonious "order."

23. See G. Filomonov, "Sofiia Premudrost' Bozhiia," *Obshchestva Drevne-russkago iskusstva. Vestnik* (1974) (1-3), pp. 16 and further.



Sophia icon at the beginning of a Westernizing tradition culminating in the sophiological "illusory" Sophia.

Florovsky presented possibly corrupted versions of a "Narration about Wisdom . . ." as the authoritative interpretation of the Wisdom Angel in the Novgorod Sophia icon. Following the lead of A. G. Filomonov, he proposed that the "Narration" came out of the Westernizing intellectual milieu around the late fifteenth-century Novgorod Archbishop Gennadii. He believed its interpretatiary reflected the influence of Gennadii's service on the Dormition, celebrating the feast day of the Novgorod Wisdom cathedral, since the Novgorod Sophia icon was the patronal icon of this cathedral.<sup>24</sup> This service expressed confusion as to whether or not the Mother of God signifies Wisdom itself or "Wisdom's house" (a place manifesting the Wisdom of the Word).<sup>25</sup> Also, the concluding prayer associates Wisdom both with Christ and with the "soul of virgins" (*devstvennykh dusha*) in the same sentence.<sup>26</sup> The "Narration" in its turn asserted that the icon's Angel is "The image of Sophia the Wisdom of God [which] manifests the unspeakable purity of the Mother of God's virginity. For virginity has a fiery maiden's face. . . ."<sup>27</sup>

Since Archbishop Gennadii used a Dominican priest to oversee the publication and translation of Western religious books, Florovsky argued, it was likely that the higher clergy were familiar with Western mystical writings about Wisdom, especially the work of the fourteenth-century German mystic Suso. These writings, Florovsky inferred, were responsible for the allegorizing tendency in the interpretations of the Novgorod Sophia Angel. Florovsky went so far as to associate the Angel with the miniatures of Divine Wisdom accompanying Suso's life.<sup>28</sup>

24. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

25. See, for instance, troparion four of Gennadii's service: "Velii i neizrechennaia Premudrosti Bozhiia sila, Sofiia preimenitaia, prechestnyi khrame, ogneczachnyi prestole Khrista Boga nashago: v tia bo vselisia neizrechenno Slovo Bozhie i plot' byst, nevidimyi iavisia i neprikosnovennyi iz tebe izyde i s cheloveki pozhive...cheloveki ot kliatvy drevniia svobozhdaia." See *ibid.*

26. See *ibid.*: "Nepostizhimaia i vsepetaia Premudrost' Bozhiia Sofiia preimenitaia, devstvennykh dusha, sirech, Edinorodnye Syn Slovo Bozhie. . . ."

27. See *ibid.*, p. 7. My translation. Here Filomonov is citing a seventeenth-century manuscript. Mitr. Antonii, "Iz istorii novgorodskoi ikonopisi," p. 67, comparing the earliest, late fifteenth-century manuscripts with the seventeenth-century ones, argues that the equation of the Mother of God with Wisdom is the fruit of later interpolations.

28. See, for example, the fifteenth-century French miniature of "Wisdom in Majesty," which was the frontispiece of Suso's "Clock of Wisdom" published by Peter Rolfe Monks, *The Brussels Horloge de Sapience* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), Fol. 13, pp. 134-35. Suso's female Wisdom in Majesty was an allegory of "the virtues and knowledge of God the Father." See also A. M. Ammann, "Darstellung und Deutung der Sophia im Vorpetrinischen Russland," *Orientalia christiana periodica*, 4 (1938), pp. 138-49, and ill. #3.

Suso's personification of Wisdom built on medieval esthetics' "cosmic" and "rational" allegory.<sup>29</sup> Portrayed as an androgynous type figure in royal garb with a scepter in hand, sometimes with wings, this Wisdom was in Florovsky's mind a "symbol of the living soul," a kind of archetype of the cosmic world soul.<sup>30</sup> Florovsky also called Suso's Wisdom a symbol of the "disembodied (*bezplotnyi*) spiritual marriage" occurring between the readers and the "world soul." Florovsky believed that Gennadii and his circle viewed the Novgorod Wisdom Angel analogously, as an allegory of the Mother of God's or the Soul's virgin marriage with Christ.<sup>31</sup>

Florovsky's desire to find in the icon an erotic yearning towards the Ideal led him to look for eschatological symbolism as well. He used this symbolism to argue that the icon expressed Muscovy's mood at the end of the fifteenth century. Expecting the end of the world in 1492, "religious thought moved from the distinct limits of Byzantine dogma into the sphere of rapturous and excited visions and contemplations." In Florovsky's intellectual context this

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29. S. Bigham, *The Image of God the Father in Orthodox Theology and Iconography and Other Studies* (Torrance, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1995), p. 185, defines allegory as the "visual representation, in human [or other] form, of an idea, quality or sentiment, [in which] artistic forms . . . are not intended to represent actual historical human persons [or things but rather] point away from themselves to abstractions." Umberto Eco in *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 53-56, describes the understanding of the symbol in the Western Middle Ages. He sees it as a "prolongation of the mythopoetic dimension of the classical period," an "unconscious striving after proportion," a search for "form," and harmony, for "analogy of essences." He notes, pages 58-64, the move from cosmic to rational allegory and the loss of historicity. Noting on pages 56-57 that "John Scotus Eriugena, gave the Middle Ages the most fruitful formulation of metaphysical symbolism," he writes: "For Eriugena the world was a great theophany, manifesting God through its primordial and eternal causes. The fundamental character of his aesthetics was determined by his capacity . . . to consider ontological values in light of the theory of divine participation – as well as by his tendency to downgrade the concrete in favor of the true and unique reality of ideas."

30. See Barbara Newman, "The Pilgrimage of Christ-Sophia," pp. 30-31, for a discussion of Suso's androgynous image of Sophia. On androgyny in Gnostic tradition, see Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, pp. 48-69.

31. See R. A. Horsey, "Spiritual Marriage with Sophia," *Vigiliae Christianae*, pp. 33, 30-54, for a discussion of the gnostic and Hellenistic roots of the conception of spiritual marriage which Florovsky doubtless believed influenced Suso, and through German Idealism, the sophiologists. Virgin marriage is implicit in a passage in the "Narration" which Florovsky doesn't quote. It declares that the figure of Christ is above the Angel's head because "the head of wisdom is the Son, Word of God. He fell in love with [*vozliubi*] the virginity of the . . . Mother of God and with her humble wisdom and in truth willed to be born in the flesh from her [my translation]." See Filomonov "Sofia Premudrost' Bozhia...", p. 7. On corruptions in this passage, see Mtr. Antonii, "Iz istorii Novgorodskoi ikonografii," p. 67. On the Western tradition and iconography of the virgin marriage between Christ and the Mother of God, see Elena Iakovlevna Ostashenko, "Ob ikonografii tipa ikony 'Presta tsaritsa' Uspenskogo sobora Moskovskogo Kremliia, in *Drevne-russkoe iskusstvo* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), pp. 179-81.

movement implicitly signified an escape from history and an embrace of Western style subjectivism.<sup>32</sup>

Florovsky believed that the wings that appear on John and Mary in some renditions of the Novgorod Sophia composition confirmed their eschatological significance.<sup>33</sup> Wings associate the Mother of God with the apocalyptic woman of Revelation (12) "given two wings of a great eagle." Wings associate John with the angel ("messenger") of Malachi 3: 1-4 who heralds God's eschatological Coming as "purifying fire."<sup>34</sup> Thus Florovsky found ways to infer that the Mother of God and John allude to an eschatological dimension beyond time, divorced from their historical actions.<sup>35</sup>

Through this reasoning, Florovsky argued that the Novgorod Sophia icon is a direct precursor of a late seventeenth-century Kievan Sophia icon.<sup>36</sup> There a female allegory of Wisdom is portrayed under the guise of the apocalyptic Mother of the Manchild with the wings of an eagle. She stands on the clouds on a crescent shaped moon. She holds a cross and a scepter (Rev. 12: 1, 14) and tramples on an allegory of the seven deadly sins. In a contemporary Tobolsk rendition she has a crown with twelve stars.<sup>37</sup> Her image explicitly reflects the Western iconographic tradition associating Wisdom with the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin.<sup>38</sup> This Catholic dogma asserted that the

32. Florovskii, "O pochitanii," pp. 489-92, associates the Angel with *Revelation* 1: 13, 16; 19: 12; and Daniel 10.

33. Florovsky does not tell us what specific icons he has in mind, and when they were made. However, Iakovleva, "Obraz mira," p. 394, fn. 16, notes that the exterior fresco of the Moscow Kremlin Dormition cathedral shows John and Mary with wings by analogy to the Sophia angel.

34. Florovskii, "O pochitanii," pp. 493-94.

35. Moreover, their implicit analogy to the Wisdom Angel above them may have suggested to Florovsky their role as created reflections of uncreated Wisdom by analogy to Bulgakov's created and uncreated Sophia and masculine and feminine principles in the Godhead. See his *Sophia*, pp. 18, 80, 98. Since the Wisdom Angel represented to Florovsky an androgynous reality, an ontological divine feminine and masculine, he might have thought that the Mother of God and John mirrored the Angel's feminine and masculine respectively.

36. His interpretation was also likely influenced by G. Filomonov's description of the Kiev icon in "Sofiia Premudrost' Bozhie," pp. 17-18, which notes, among other things, shared symbolism from Proverbs 9: 1-5, "Wisdom builds her house." There can be no doubt that this similarity indicates a desire to place the Kiev icon in a continuum with the Novgorod Sophia icon. However it does not demonstrate anything about the meaning of the Novgorod Sophia icon in its own time – the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

37. See Filomonov, "Sofiia Premudrost' Bozhie," illustration between pp. 19 and 20.

38. On the Immaculate Conception in Western tradition, see M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), pp. 236-54. Florovskii, "O pochitanii Sofii," points out that, expounded by twelfth-century French theologians, this doctrine was later propagated by the Jesuits so that compositions on this theme became especially popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Warner, p. 246, notes that Francisco Pacheco (d. 1654) established the iconography for this subject in his *Arte de la Pintura*, which was itself inspired by the mystic visions of Beatrice de Silva (d. 1490). Western portrayals

Mother of God did not inherit sin during her sexual conception by her parents. To the Orthodox, this idea exempted her from the need to overcome sin through the free exercise of will.<sup>39</sup> To Florovsky's mind, it likely reduced Mary to a kind of disembodied ideal essence, laying the ground for the a-historicity of German Idealism and Sophiology. By placing the Novgorod Sophia icon in a tradition with the Kiev Sophia icon, Florovsky implicitly located it in the cultural stream of the "illusory Sophia."<sup>40</sup>

Florovsky's most telling attempt to place the icon in an unorthodox sophiological canon was his argument about its symbolic nature.<sup>41</sup> Insisting

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of the Immaculate Conception frequently associated the Virgin with Wisdom by alluding to Proverbs 8: 22, since the liturgical service for the Conception of the Virgin included this passage. There female Wisdom exclaims, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." This allusion in the service associates the Mother of God's birth with ontological truth inherent in the creative act. Warner, p. 248, notes that Western iconography of the Immaculate Conception enhanced her association with Wisdom when it portrayed her contemplating herself "Venus-like, in a mirror." This image is taken from the Wisdom of Solomon 7: 27 where Wisdom is described as the *specula sine macula*, the unspotted mirror of God. Although theologians avoided making this direct connection between Wisdom and the immaculately conceived Virgin, mystics and preachers were less careful until it became a kind of norm. Kievan Orthodox theologians openly embraced this Catholic doctrine, and understood the Immaculate Conception icon as a Wisdom icon.

39. See V. Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), p. 203. Nonetheless, E. Ia. Ostashenko, "Ob ikonografii tipa ikony 'Presta tsaritsa,'" p. 187, fn. 34, quotes a thirteenth-century writing of Gregory Palamas, which associates the Virgin's mystical marriage with Christ with her Immaculate Conception: "'Mariia sdela-las' tsaritsei vsekhi tvarei zemnykh i nebesnykh blagodaria svoemu neporochnomu zachatiu. Ee dvortsom iavliaetsia teper' nebo, ona predstala sprava ot Vsederzhitelia, oblachennaia v zolotoe odeianie, kotoroe vyshiti, soglasno slovam psalmopevsia. . .'" See Migne. Patr. Gr., t. 151, col. 465, 459A. She believes his remarks are describing the icon "Predsta tsaritsa."

40. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 247, writes of the Immaculate Conception: "Mary was conceived in all purity in the mind of the creator, like the birth of an idea – Athene from the splitting head of Zeus. The Immaculate Conception thus became a metaphysical virgin birth of the kind that had once been suggested in Alexandrian mystical thought on the generation of the Logos: the issue of the ideal by the power of the spirit." Warner, p. 252, notes that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception seems to tend towards a "Gnostic dualism." On Gnostic dualism and its relation to allegory, see Jones, *The Gnostic Religion*, pp. 48-97. Filomonov, "Sofia Premudrost' Bozhiia," p. 8, provides possible grounds for a tradition leading from the Novgorod to the Kiev icon – a sixteenth-century interpretation of the former associating the Angel's wings with the wings of an eagle: "'Imat' zhe kryle (orli) ognene – vysokoparivoe prorochestvo i razum skor iavliaet. Bogozrachna . . . ptisa siia . . . egda vidit lovtsa, vyshe v'zletaet. Tako i liubi-ashchei devstvo neudob' ulovleni budut ot lovtsa diavola.'" Here, however, the metaphor of the wings is not associated with the Immaculate Conception but with the saving attributes of Christ-Wisdom. On the question of continuity, see also A. M. Amman, "Darstellung und deutung der Sofia im vor petrinishcend Russland," *Orientalia christiana periodica*, No. 4 (1938), pp. 120-56.

41. Florovsky continued to argue for the non-orthodox nature of symbolic representation in later works. See, for example, "Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church," and

that it went against the "basic tendency of Byzantine iconography," he relied on the narrow definition of the seventh-century Council of Trullo.<sup>42</sup> In so doing, he disregarded the rich symbolic poetics of Orthodox Wisdom tradition, and of the mid to late Byzantine culture flourishing in the hesychast age.<sup>43</sup> The Trullo council asserted that true Christian art should eschew symbolism and base itself on the human representation of Christ, out of respect for Christ's incarnation.<sup>44</sup> The council's opposition to symbolism in favor of realism coincides with Florovsky's opposition to "history as chain of symbols" in favor of "history as events" and to the "illusory" in favor of the "true" Sophia. Based on the council's authority, he implied that the icon's symbolic poetics placed it in the idealist, sophiological canon.

Florovsky described the "Novgorod Sophia icon" as a pathbreaker that established a new type of symbolic composition that flourished in mid-sixteenth-century Muscovy. Affirming their implicit sterility, he noted that these compositions illustrated literary passages, used Western motifs, and conveyed ideas rather than depicting persons. He buttressed his radical position with testimony from the sixteenth century. He noted that a Muscovite secular official, the *d'iak* Ivan Viskovatyi, himself referring to the Council of Trullo, objected to the new iconography's symbols.<sup>45</sup> He further remarked that the monk Maksim Grek was reacting to the technique of indiscriminately combining images from a wide variety of textual sources with the words, "whoever has the desire can compose images from scriptural passages in innumerable variations."

When he measured the Novgorod Sophia icon through the opposition symbolism-realism, Florovsky believed he had cast the last stone, expelling it from Orthodox Wisdom tradition. His various strategies all add up to an at-

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"The Patristic Age and Eschatology," first published in 1938. See the *Collected Works*, vol. 4, pp. 13-15 and 72.

42. See Florovskii, "O pochitanii Sofii" pp. 490, 495.

43. E. Ia. Ostashenko, "Ob ikonografii tipa ikony 'Predsta tsaritsa'," pp. 179, 186, describes a similar fourteenth-century icon, whose symbolic language combines old images in new ways and uses literary sources in the spirit of "that stage of late Byzantine philosophy linked with the name of Palamas." On the hellenizing tendencies of this period, independent of Western tradition, see S. Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1970).

44. L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. 2 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), pp. 93-95. Ouspensky notes that "For the first time, a conciliar decision formulates the link between the icon and the dogma of the Incarnation, the 'life of Christ in the flesh'."

45. See "O pochitanii," p. 495. Like Florovsky, L. Ouspensky, *The Theology of Icons*, vol. 2, p. 311 is sympathetic to *d'iak* Viskovatyi's readings of contemporary icons which exhibit a similar poetic strategy as the Novgorod Sophia. Ouspensky paraphrases Viskovatyi thus: "... the painters extrapolated the visible or verbal prophetic images from their context and adapted them in a different manner to a different context, 'according to their idea,' whereby their witness lost its authenticity."

tempt to read into the icon the attitude towards history and the human person that he associated with the "illusory" Sophia. His later view of Muscovy's sterility also reflects the categories he used to distinguish between the true and the illusory Sophia. His thesis that Muscovy had abandoned the creative Byzantine heritage resonates with his critique of Sophiology's idealism for undercutting creativity.<sup>46</sup> Florovsky must have felt that the "Narration's" perception of the Novgorod Sophia icon in the spirit of Western Idealism was a symptom of the Muscovite "paralysis" – its fixation on external harmony and system, detached from historical experience.

Florovsky's evaluation of Muscovy reflects the deep structural categories informing his approach to Sophiology. The result is a hidden parallel order between 1) Sophiology's implicit construction of a "whole worldview from first principles to the last grain of sand," 2) the icon's use of allegory and eschatological archetypes to present something analogous to a "metaphysical morphology of being," 3) Muscovy's utopian imposition of order and arbitrary system on a "free" and creative culture.

So far we have established the striking analogies between Florovsky's critique of Sophiology through the prism of German Idealism and his critique of the Novgorod Sophia icon. We have argued that these analogies are not accidental but derive from his desire to place the Novgorod Sophia icon in the sophiological canon by proving its unorthodoxy. Thus, his 1932 article "On the Worship of Sophia . . ." had a hidden agenda when it emphasized the Novgorod Sophia icon's break from the Wisdom tradition of the major Orthodox Wisdom cathedrals (prior to Archbishop Gennadii). His argument enabled him to accept the Sophiologist's claim to the Novgorod Sophia icon without imputing the orthodoxy of the Old Russian Sophia.

Furthermore, his 1932 analysis of the Novgorod Sophia as a herald of future trends set the stage for his 1962 thesis about Muscovy. As a break from the past, the icon was symptomatic of Muscovy's new sterile relation to its Byzantine heritage about which he would write thirty years later. Implicitly Muscovy's self-differentiation from the past implicitly foreshadowed modern Russia's separation from Orthodox tradition, and its turn to Western utopian thinking, embrace of German Idealism and development of Sophiology.

However, there is ample evidence that the Novgorod Sophia icon is a product of Orthodox rather than Western tradition when read apart from the "Narration," and that its Muscovite descendents are in the same Orthodox vein. Further analysis will show that it is 1) a product of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Novgorod culture associated with hesychasm and late Byz-

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46. Klimoff in "George Florovsky," notes that a letter of December 30, 1925 to Bulgakov urges "liberation" from "the whole murky tradition [initiated by Solov'ev] for I believe that it has been this very tradition that has shackled our creative powers."

antine poetics; and 2) a direct continuation of the Byzantine Wisdom tradition inspiring the iconography of the Wisdom cathedrals of Kiev and Novgorod. I will thus demonstrate that Florovsky's anti-sophiological agenda blinded him to its true content, and to the icon's implications for Muscovy's relation to its past.

Before describing the icon, however, I will illuminate Florovsky's understanding of the Orthodox ideals betrayed by Sophiology. Florovsky's 1926 letter to Bulgakov presented hesychast culture and the patristic tradition as authorities on the "true" Sophia. His 1928 article, "Creation and Creatureliness," drew on these authorities to articulate aspects of Orthodox theology that differ from Sophiology. The 1928 article thus elucidates the Orthodox values which he believed inspired Byzantine and Russian culture before the Novgorod Sophia icon and the Muscovite decline. As we will show, Florovsky's explication of Orthodox theology provides a framework for understanding the Novgorod Sophia icon and the Byzantino-Russian tradition it carries into the Muscovite sixteenth century.

### Orthodox theology and the "true Sophia"

Every point in "Creation and Creatureliness" (*Tvar' i tvarnost'*) can be read as a response to Sophiology. Florovsky presents history existentially, as a series of events marked by "unrepeatable junctures." He insists on creation's otherness to God, and on history's empirical nature. His radical emphasis on uniqueness and otherness is, I believe, his response to Sophiology's reduction of history to a symbol, denying the possibility of a unique event.<sup>47</sup> Florovsky counters the sophiological idea that the "essential" and the "Absolute" can be known by asserting that revelation occurs through uncreated energies that are outside the essence. He emphasizes that revelation is a free personal act rather than an impersonal theogonic process. He asserts that it involves active human co-participation with God (as opposed to morally passive quietistic contemplation).

Florovsky's article shows that the problems of history, freedom, transcendence and creativity are integral to the Wisdom idea and the proper subject of Wisdom iconography. The uniquely Orthodox concept of history and freedom reflect the hesychast understanding of the Trinity as transcendent and unknowable by nature and yet manifest "outside" its essence in uncreated energies. Because these energies are not an emanation of the divine nature, and

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47. Florovsky's assertion of the unbridgeable distance and "otherness" of the world from God is almost Calvinist, and relies heavily on the authority of St. Augustine. Vladimir Lossky, in his *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), pp. 91-113, gives a less polarized view of creation's "otherness" which I believe is more in the spirit of Orthodox tradition.

therefore not absolute, they are capable of revealing the Godhead in a created "other," with a different nature than the Godhead itself. They join uncreated and created nature in a transcendent wholeness that does not violate either. This transcendence allows for places of "rupture" comprised of existentially open events where God communicates "in" rather than "through" history.

Responding to the determinism of sophiological thought, Florovsky places special emphasis on the role of free will when he presents Orthodox theology. His exploration concerns the "economic" Trinity i.e., the Trinity's energetic relation to the "other" (*pros eteron*), eschewing Sophiology's self-referential "Trinitology." Florovsky argues that in Orthodox tradition, the creation is a volitional act, a personal expression of God's love for what is not Himself. Creation does not result from any inner necessity in the Godhead. It did not have to occur.<sup>48</sup>

In Florovsky's interpretation, creation is the first rupture (*razryv*), bringing created out of uncreated being, and establishing a world with a beginning marking its autonomous existence. According to Florovsky, God created through two kinds of "predicates or acts" outside the essence. The first occurs within the Trinity as a "counsel" in which the three divine persons evoke their common will. Florovsky presents its mutual decisions as existential and "determinate" in their relation to the world even as they are eternal, unchanging, and unaffected by the creation, an aspect of the Trinity's interior life. As Florovsky states, when the Word and Spirit depart from the Divine Counsel, they reveal in "acts and deeds" the "whole entire and undivided operation (*energeia*) of the . . . Trinity."<sup>49</sup>

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48. Florovsky's insistence on the willed nature of creation is directly contradicted by Bulgakov. In *Sophia*, page 72, he writes: "The Creation could not not have been." On page 92 he develops the implications of this idea, the denial of the freedom and autonomy of the human will: "Christ's human nature retained its own will, *beside and below* his divine will [my italics]. Nothing can be divinized which has not the capacity and ontological aptitude to receive such a gift, which does not bear within itself some intimate exigency of such an end . . . its entelechy." Nichols, "Bulgakov and Sophiology," p. 28, finds Bulgakov's sophiology incompatible with the "idea of creation." "To some degree, Bulgakov seems to have allowed a certain rationalism to penetrate his theological thought, in that he refuses to allow creation ex nihilo its proper status as mystery. Creation from out of nothingness is a mystery in that by means of it God lets a creature be. He lets it share in his own act of existence. . . . The enduring significance of Bulgakov's thought lies . . . in the stress which he laid on divine immanence. . . . But the question here is whether or not precisely by virtue of his transcendence, by his absolute difference from the world, that God can be immanent within all things and intimately present to them." Similarly, V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, p. 877, notes in P. Florensky a conception of "total-unity" which is "incompatible with a basic principle of Christian metaphysics – the idea of *creation*."

49. Florovskii, "Tvar' i tvornost'," p. 65.



Describing this creative "thought," Florovsky emphasizes that it is a "pattern," which is not involved in the "process of formation" and is not "the subject of becoming." Rather it always "remain[s] outside of the created world, transcending it. . . ."50.

God creates by "thought" and the thought becomes deed . . . he contemplated everything from before its being, from eternity pondering it in His mind; hence each thing receives its being at a determinate time according to his timely and decisive thought which is predestination and image and pattern. . . . These patterns and prototypes of things that are to be constitute the "pre-temporal and unchangeable counsel" of God.<sup>51</sup>

Florovsky calls this pattern the "Proto-Image." The Persons of the Logos and the Spirit existentially reveal the Proto-image even as they eternally will it in the Divine Counsel.<sup>52</sup>

This understanding of the Trinity in Divine Counsel and in relation to the world expresses a dialectical conception of wholeness. For Florovsky this wholeness is the opposite of the essentialism and monolithic oneness of the sophiological total-unity. He describes a theology in which wholeness is inseparable from transcendence, is founded in freedom, and posits an autonomy of God's creation which can be fully realized only in the context of history. This theology informed Florovsky's conception of the "true" Sophia through Whom God manifests His wholeness in the world. As we will see, the Novgorod Sophia Angel expresses this dialogic conception of wholeness rather than an essential archetypal Truth beyond history. In existential, energetic, and personal terms, it actualizes the partnership between the Word, messenger of the Trinity in Divine Counsel, and the Church personified by Mary and John.

The way Florovsky's article addresses the Orthodox understanding of this partnership further illuminates the icon's meaning. Florovsky describes an Orthodox view of humankind's "image and likeness" to God which presupposes humankind's active partnership in divine revelation. According to this view, the human person achieves the divine likeness Wisdom when he/she mirrors God's creativity in a synergy of divine and human will. The person's choice to contribute to God's creativity enables him/her to "know" the Proto-Image

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50. *Ibid.*, p. 61. Florovsky distinguishes the interiority of the divine thought-acts from their external manifestation in order to counter sophiological essentialism and rationalism which views history as a mere unravelling of an immanent idea manifesting God. In *Sophia*, p. 48, Bulgakov asserts that the Holy Spirit "transforms the world of ideas into a living and real essence, into a self-sufficient creation of God."

51. Florovskii, "Tvar' i tvarnost'," p. 60.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

experientially. Just as the creation is "determinate" and results in a beginning, so the human actions that contribute to fulfilling God's creative Idea comprise discrete historical "events" which are capable of bringing about something new (change).<sup>53</sup>

Florovsky emphasizes that Orthodox tradition invests humankind with the same freedom as the Creator. Accordingly, Adam's fall is evidence that humankind is not *necessarily* a likeness of God. The fall reveals that humankind is under no compulsion to fulfill its predestination, just as God was under none to create the world. The fall was an expression of the human person's first active manifestation of his freedom to choose and create a new reality. This concrete event initiated corruption and death. But, by giving the person knowledge of good and evil, it also opened up the possibility of self-consciously undoing sin and death and living in a different, transcendent dimension. By choosing the good, the person gives existential reality to the Proto-Image and becomes a word filled with Spirit, a place of in-dwelling Wisdom.

Florovsky's article shows that the capacity to manifest Wisdom implies an active moral awareness on the part of humankind: "... above the [created] image the [uncreated] Proto-Image always shines ... as a call and a norm ... a supra-natural challenging goal set above its own nature ... founded on freedom." Responding to this call, humankind creates the "rupture" which reveals God in history:

This challenging goal is an aim, an aim that can be realized only through the self-determination and efforts of the creature. ... In it is room for creation, construction, for re-construction – not only in the sense of recovering, but also in the sense of generating what is new. ... nevertheless this "I" which is realized and realizable through constructiveness is not the "natural" and empiric "I," inasmuch as any such realization of one's self is a rupture – a leap from the plane of nature onto the plane of grace, because this realization is the acquisition of the Spirit, is participation in God. ... Because the goal lies beyond nature, it is an invitation to a living and free encounter and union with God. ... The meaning of history consists in this – that the freedom of creation should respond by accepting the pre-temporal counsel of God.<sup>54</sup>

As we will see, the portrayal of John and Mary in the Novgorod Sophia icon precisely enacts this "living and free encounter with God" and presupposes history's existential openness.

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53. *Ibid.*, pp. 58 and 46.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 77.

An article that Florovsky produced later, "The Ever Virgin Mother of God," fills out the theological background we need to understand the Novgorod Sophia icon's imagery and place in Orthodox tradition.<sup>55</sup> This article is his implicit response to the essentialist view of virginity he finds in the Western idealistic tradition.<sup>56</sup> There he interprets Mary's virginity as a deliberate choice in "response" to the "call" of the Proto-image. Her consent "be the handmaiden of the Lord" and receive the Godhead in the flesh makes her a co-partner in the divine creative act, culminating in the incarnation, God's condescension into the human condition.<sup>57</sup> He cites Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow's "Sermon on the Annunciation" to bring his point home:

"During the days of the creation of the world, when God uttered his living and mighty words: 'let there be . . .' the Creator's words brought creatures into existence. But on the day, unique in the existence of the world, when Holy Mary uttered her humble and obedient 'Let it be . . .' the word of the creature caused the Creator to descend into the world. . . . Her humble 'Let it be' was necessary for the realization of God's mighty 'Let it be.' . . . This marvelous power is Mary's pure and perfect self-dedication to God, a dedication of her will . . . of her entire being. . . ."<sup>58</sup>

"Indeed," Florovsky concludes, "it was freedom of obedience, not of initiative – and yet a true freedom, freedom of love and adoration, of humility and trust – and freedom of co-operation."

Florovsky's presentation of virginity as a testimony to existential freedom draws on a tradition founded in Gregory of Nyssa's thought. In his discourse

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55. This article first appeared in 1949 in E. L. Mascall, ed., *The Mother of God: A symposium by members of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius* (London: Dacre Press), pp. 51-63. We are citing its abridged version that was reprinted in G. Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 3 (1976), pp. 171-88.

56. Florovsky, "The Ever Virgin Mother of God," pp. 177, 183, associated virginity with history by emphasizing that Mary was not above the human condition, a kind of ideal person as she is considered in Western tradition and in sophiological thought. To emphasize the Western view of her exceptional nature, Marina Warner entitles her study of the Western "Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary," *Alone of All Her Sex*.

57. Bulgakov in *Sophia*, pp. 117-20, distinguishes Mary from the rest of humankind as the one who gave human form to the Holy Spirit (enhypostasizing it). In opposition to this and the associated sophiological view that Mary "manifests" an eternal feminine and expresses cosmic harmony, Florovsky presents her acceptance of the Spirit at the Annunciation as a rupture not a "development" in the sophiological sense.

58. Quoted in G. Florovsky, "The Ever Virgin Mother of God," p. 180. For a fourteenth-century Byzantine statement of this same idea by Nicholas Cabasilas, see Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, p. 203.

"On Virginity," Gregory describes it as the sign of a conscious, willed participation in the creation's original newness.<sup>59</sup> Virginity implies a turning to God that mirrors God's own founding relation to the creation. It is a consequence of the resulting communion in energy and light, self-transcendence and freedom from necessity, including death. It signifies that the body and the world have been restored to their splendor before the fall but in a spiritual sense, and in history, pending the Second Coming. Therefore, virginity implies that its possessor participates in Adam's original royalty and reflects God's kingship like the incarnate Christ.<sup>60</sup>

The tradition to which Florovsky appeals sees virginity as a sign of "rupture" because it presumes a conscious choice to free oneself from the passions and become open to God. This self-emptying mirrors inversely God's self-emptying as Spirit into the flesh.<sup>61</sup> It thus denotes a spiritual marriage with the triune God.<sup>62</sup> In this marriage, "We know Christ no longer according to the flesh, but spiritually he dwells in us and brings his Father with him."<sup>63</sup> It thus manifests the Trinity, not essentially, but energetically by direct analogy to the incarnation. As we will see, this Orthodox conception of virginity directly informs the portrayal of the Novgorod Sophia Angel in relation to Mary and John.

Florovsky's article implies that virginity in Orthodox thought signifies the opposite of abstract "eternal" "disembodied" purity – an inner illumination of the flesh actively achieved in time. As in the West, Orthodox tradition associates it with "marriage," the "soul," and identifies it with the Mother of God. However, this tradition views all three concepts from a different angle, according to its existentialist, personalist, and providential orientation. We will

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59. See Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity," in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), Vol. 5, ch. 12, pp. 357-58.

60. Gregory, "On Virginity," p. 358, asserts, ". . . to those who can hear what Wisdom speaks . . . the Kingdom of God is within you."

61. See A. K. Squire, "The Idea of the Soul as Virgin and Mother in Maximus the Confessor," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 8 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966), pp. 456-61, esp. 458. "Maximus has explicitly pointed to the parallel between that voluntary kenosis of the Word of God in becoming truly man and that kenosis of the passions by which we may, under grace, become divinized. Our own self-emptying is the proper response to the divine self-emptying."

62. In the thought of Maximus the Confessor, the virgin soul is the attribute of a person ". . . set between good report and evil [who] remains 'apathis'. . . . Then his soul begins to know that freedom which belongs to its true nature. . . ." The virgin soul is fecund and creative in the same sense as Mary's marriage with God. ". . . without losing its own nature it [the soul] becomes, in its measure, godlike by a new kind of birth, whereby Christ is always mystically born as he makes it both virgin and mother, transcending male and female cooperation and the existence of things that come to be and pass away." See Squire, "The Idea of the Soul," pp. 457 and 459.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 460.

demonstrate that the Novgorod Sophia icon is designed from this angle, and that the virginity implied there contrasts sharply with the allegorized virginity of the Kievan Sophia icon. This contrast, I believe, marks a divide between the traditional mindset of sixteenth-century Muscovy and the modernizing worldview of the late seventeenth century. Florovsky did not notice it because on a deep level he was seeing Sophiology's etiology when he confronted himself with Muscovy.

Florovsky's writings between 1928 and 1932 provide an important context for understanding his negative interpretation of the Novgorod Sophia icon and of Muscovy. Without openly mentioning Sophiology, they illuminate the opposition between the "true" and "illusory" Sophia that he draws in his 1926 letter to Bulgakov. They indicate the key values at stake in this opposition – historical authenticity, freedom, existential openness, "otherness," divine-human partnership, the very values he believed the icon and Muscovy betrayed.

The following analysis will show that Florovsky overlooked rich evidence about the Novgorod Sophia icon when he evaluated it through an intellectual structure about the "illusory" Sophia. The icon's poetics suggest that it is a product of Orthodox hesychast tradition, mostly likely of the late fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>64</sup> As such it evinces the very Orthodox values that he was defending. It's innate meaning challenges Florovsky's view that Muscovite iconography reflects a state of intellectual and esthetic paralysis cut off from the living sources of Byzantine tradition.

#### **The Novgorod Sophia icon and the poetics of the hesychast age**

The Novgorod Sophia icon's symbolic nature is key evidence that it belongs to the hesychast age. In the fourteenth century, the hesychast Patriarch Filofei reinterpreted the Council of Trullo's 82<sup>nd</sup> canon to justify the symbol in Christian art. The canon read:

... having once "welcomed . . . ancient figures (types) and shadows as symbols of the truth transmitted to the Church, today we prefer grace and truth themselves, as a fulfillment of the Law . . . Christ our God [should] be presented in his human form."<sup>65</sup>

Filofei responded:

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64. This dating was suggested by the eminent scholar on Novgorod culture and art, Lev Livshitz in private conversation. Further analysis supports this dating. On hesychasm and Wisdom symbolism, see L. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. 2, pp. 231-85.

65. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 92-93.

And then in the age of the new covenant when the shadow of the Law has passed and all is fulfilled in grace and truth, then we find that the Lord himself speaks indirectly and through parables and teaches the apostle the divine mysterious things through sacred symbols.<sup>66</sup>

Filofei's "sacred" symbol differs from the Western cosmic allegory Florovsky saw in the Novgorod Sophia icon. It has a "dual" nature by analogy to the incarnate Christ. Just as Christ's flesh manifests the invisible divinity as Light visible to the inner eye so, so the symbol's carnal representational aspect leads the inner eye to the Proto-Image.

It is characteristic of the purified mind to be in communion with divine things. . . .and its passionate part in accordance with its nature makes use of the senses and the imagination and through symbols receives help and . . . is raised up to contemplation of beauty and knowledge of hidden things.<sup>67</sup>

The symbol empowers the reader to inwardly ascend a spiritual ladder of analogies between what he can perceive and experience and the unknown.<sup>68</sup> However it does not posit a monolithic identity between the opposite ends of this ladder.

The sacred symbol models the Orthodox concept of "otherness" by consisting of two "poles" which interact dialogically in the viewer's mind to create a transcendent meaning.<sup>69</sup> The "objective pole" takes the viewer beyond

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66. See Episkop Arsenii, *Filofeiia patriarkha Konstantinopol'skogo XIV veka. Tri Rechi k Episkopu Ignatiiu s ob'iasneniem izrecheniia pritchei: 'Premudrots' sozda sebe dom' i proch., Grecheski tekst i russkii perevod* (Novgorod: Parovaia tip. L. L. Ignatovskago, 1898), p. 13 [hereafter referred to as *Tri Rechi*]. The translations from the Russian are mine.

67. Filofei, *Tri Rechi*, p. 15.

68. On these analogies, see John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), pp. 19, 20: "How can the invisible be depicted? How does one picture the inconceivable? . . . How can you describe what is a mystery? Since the creation of the world the invisible things of God are clearly seen by means of images. . . . Anyone would say that our inability immediately to direct our thoughts to contemplation of higher things makes it necessary that familiar everyday media be utilized to give suitable form to what is formless, and make visible what cannot be depicted, *so that we are able to construct understandable analogies. . . .*" [My italics, P.H.]

69. See Sergei Averintsev, "Simvol," in *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow: "Sovetskaia entsiklopediia," 1971), pp. 828-31 [hereafter referred to as "Simvol."]. Distinguishing a sign with only a denotative function (for which he uses the term "image") from the symbolic sign, Averintsev writes: "If the image is characterized by self-identity, then the accent of the symbol is on its exceeding its own boundaries by the presence of a meaning intimately associated with the image but not identical to it. The objective image and deep meaning exist within the structure of the symbol as two poles, inconceivable one without the other. . . . [These two

its representational sense by evoking associative chains that open onto a spiritual dimension – an opposite symbolic “pole.”<sup>70</sup> The co-existence of the two “poles” expresses a dialogic wholeness that is transcendental, not fully available to the senses and the intellect.<sup>71</sup> Nor does it dominate over the concrete, historical meaning of the image. The sacred symbol’s dialectical nature expresses Orthodoxy’s experiential orientation and its apophaticism – its assertion of God’s ultimate unknowability by reason. By contrast, Western allegory is monologic because the sign’s representational function refers to an idea and does not validate empirical experience. Allegory implicitly identifies

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poles] are distinct and separate and generate between themselves a tension which is the essential quality of the symbol. The interrelationship between the signifier and the signified in the symbol is dialectical, an interrelationship of identity and non-identity.” All translations from this article are mine. Averintsev’s definition seems to be influenced by his own Sophiology since his language resonates closely with P. Florensky’s as presented in Zenkovsky’s *History*. His division of the “symbol” into two opposite poles may reflect the “exaggerated emphasis on the *antinomies* of thought” by which Florensky hoped to counter “theological rationalism,” according to Zenkovsky, *History*, p. 881. One wonders whether Averintsev’s idea of the “objective” pole is not analogous to Florensky’s “concrete universal,” “the countenance” of the “thing,” the “face” of “reality” described in Zenkovsky, p. 885. Regarding the symbol’s historical nature, Averintsev writes “The symbol is myth ‘undercut’ (in the Hegelian sense) by historical development, and therefore made to relinquish its self-identity and comprehended through its lack of correspondence with its own meaning.” He seems to be embracing Florensky’s Hegelian idea of history as “development” revealing the “metaphysical essence of created nature,” according to Zenkovsky, p. 887. Here I am adapting his dialogic definition to describe how the Orthodox “sacred symbol” models the “otherness” presupposed by Orthodox theology. On Averintsev’s debt to Florensky, see also Mitr. Antonii, “Iz istorii Novgorodskoi ikonografii,” p. 71.

70. “. . . the meaning of a symbol objectively realizes itself not as something obvious but as a dynamic tendency . . . this meaning, strictly speaking, cannot be explained or reduced to the single meaning of a logical formula, but can only be clarified by relating it to ensuing symbolic associations [*stsepleniiami*] which will lead to greater rational clarity but will not attain to a pure concept. . . . See Averintsev, “Simvol.” Averintsev’s idea of the limitations of rationality resonates with Florensky’s concept of “reasonable intuition” described by Zenkovsky, *History*, pp. 881-82.

71. See Averintsev, “Simvol:” “. . . in the final analysis, the content of a real symbol, by means of mediating chains of meaning, in every case relates to ‘what is most important’ – with the idea of ‘universal wholeness [*mirovoi tselokupnosti*], with the plenitude of the cosmos and the human ‘universal.’ . . . The very structure of the symbol is directed towards immersing every particular reality into the “ontological” matter of being [*v stikhiu ‘pervonachal’nogo bytiia*] and towards manifesting in this way a holistic [*tselostnyi*] image of the world. Here is found the similarity between a symbol and myth.” Averintsev’s idea corresponds to Florensky’s “metaphysics of total unity” defined in Zenkovsky, *History*, p. 873. Orthodox tradition would have amended Averintsev’s formulation to say that the structure of the sacred image is directed towards immersing every particular reality in the *uncreated existential energy* of God since the “ontological matter” is unknowable. In the mind of the Church, the image does not in fact “clarify” the mystery. It is both light and darkness, speech and silence.

God with reason, and presupposes His knowability. In Florovsky's mind it is analogous with the Sophiological symbol communicating "total-unity."<sup>72</sup>

In Patriarch Filofei's eyes, the need to dialogically convey inner mystery justified the symbolic representation of the incarnate, historical Christ despite the Council of Trullo's 82nd canon. Filofei's exegesis of "Wisdom builds her house" of Proverbs 9: 1-5 defends the use of prophecies (inner visions) to *symbolize* Christ's hidden divinity. He and his tradition understood Proverbs 9: 1-5 as a "parable" about Christ expressing the vision of King Solomon, a seer and a prophet, and type of Christ. For Filofei, this parable expresses in knowable images the light-energy illuminating Solomon's consciousness and taking him beyond himself to vision of God.

As Filofei himself attested, the Gospels themselves provided the model for the Christological interpretation of prophecy and parable as keys to the spiritual reality of Christ's historical existence. Not only does Christ speak in parables about everyday life to manifest His divinity. He also interprets Himself to his disciples through visions of the prophets. For example, in John 12, foreseeing His crucifixion, He speaks of Himself as Daniel's Son of Man. In the same way, Matthew (2: 22) and Luke (1: 30) reveal the incarnate Christ to be the Emmanuel-Messiah which the prophet Isaiah inwardly saw in the form of a child born to a virgin (7: 9).

Filofei's tradition saw prophetic visions as the relative, often anthropomorphic, manifestation of Christ's eternal mystery, revealed through the Incarnation, and remaining spiritually present through liturgy and prayer. Foretelling the hidden meaning of Christ's presence on earth, they allude to the unchanging ontological truth that is history's "aim" or higher "pattern." They implicitly associate His earthly works with the thought-will or Proto-Image of the Divine Counsel in Trinity.<sup>73</sup> Filling out the inner providential meaning of Christ's self-revelation in the Gospel, they do not diminish but enhance revelation through Christ's historical life and words.

By interpreting prophetic symbols and parables through their "other," Christ's historical existence, Orthodox tradition made them dialogic. From this angle of vision, they are uniquely suited to express the Wisdom of the Word. They serve as a poetic corollary to hesychast divine energies. They too

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72. Bulgakov's metaphysics of total unity denied the mystical nature of divine revelation in favor of rational clarity. For instance, in *Sophia*, p. 35, he asserts that God is knowable and that his definition of Sophia explains the "tri-hypostatic relation between God and his Ousia." On page 40, he notes that the "self revelation of the Father is absolutely complete in the Son and the Spirit. . . . Within the Holy Trinity itself there is no room for any undisclosed mystery: 'God is light and in him is no darkness at all'" (1 John 1.5)."

73. John Damascus in his "Treatise on the Images" refers to the image's capacity to reveal the Prototype, but with a certain "difference." See *On the Divine Images*, pp. 19, 75.



manifest transcendent truth in relative terms enabling us to inwardly "see" Christ's Light.

For Filofei and his tradition, the interior process joining the symbol's incarnational and prophetic meaning involves the whole self rather than just the mind.<sup>74</sup> It begins with inner work whereby the "eyes of the heart" use memory, mind, intuition, and conscience to evoke the chain of associations mediating between history and spirit.<sup>75</sup> A "difficult 'turning into' (*vkhozheniia*) oneself" (to use Averintsev's words) presupposes an inner self-purification enabling one to approach the whole. The rising that follows is a dialectical process analogous to hesychast mental prayer.<sup>76</sup> Reading in hesychast culture is thus a willed "event" endowing the image with its dialogic life and transformational power; it involves a "rupture," an arduous opening of the self – leading to self-transcendence by inverse analogy to the Word's condescension in the flesh.

Now that we have described the type of prophetic symbol dominating the hesychast age, its dialogic nature and its legitimization by the Patriarch Filofei against the Council of Trullo, we are prepared to turn again to the Novgorod Sophia icon. The following reading of the icon in light of hesychast poetics uncovers a rich theological content associated with the central theme of Wisdom.<sup>77</sup> This content carries forward into Muscovite Russia the values that Florovsky considered to be the best of Russia's Byzantine inheritance. Moreover, both this content and the manner of its communication con-

74. See Averintsev, "Simvol": "The structure of meaning of the symbol is many layered and presupposes the active inner work of the perceiver. . . ." Averintsev's notion of the perceiver's participation might derive from Florensky's understanding of seeing with the heart, described by Zenkovsky, *History*, p. 881.

75. On the mystical understanding of the heart as a center of conscience, will and knowledge, see Vasily Krivocheine, "The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas," *The Eastern Churches Quarterly*, No. 3 (1968), p. 71. Of the eyes of the heart he writes, pp. 73 and 80: "The Kingdom of light and Jesus Christ, the heavenly image, illuminates the soul already today in secret and reign in the souls of the saints; however, Christ is hidden from the eyes of men and manifested truly only to the eyes of the soul, until the day of the resurrection, when the body itself shall be restored and glorified by the light of the Lord which already now is present in the soul."

76. On the dialectical nature of mental prayer, see Krivocheine "The Ascetic and Theology Teaching of Gregory Palamas," pp. 26-33, 71-84, 193-214. See also, the late fifteenth-century Muscovite "Epistle to the Iconographer," in N. A. Kazakova and Ia. S. Lur'e, *Antifeodal'nye ereticheskie dvizheniia na Rusi XIV nachala XVI veka* (Moscow: Izd. Akademii nauk SSSR, 1955), source #17, p. 352.

77. On the icon's Orthodoxy, but without particular reference to hesychast poetics, see G. Filomono, "'Sofia Premudrost' Bozhia," p. 6; J. Meyendorff, "L'iconographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la tradition Byzantine," pp. 276-77; and I. A. Iakovleva, "'Obraz mira' v ikone 'Sofia Premudrost' Bozhia," in O. I. Podobedova, ed., *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo* (Moscow: "Nauka," 1977), pp. 388-404.

nects the icon with the ancient Wisdom cathedrals which Florovsky viewed as archetypal expressions of the "true Sophia" in his 1932 article "On the Worship of Sophia."

### The "true Sophia" in the Novgorod Sophia icon

The Wisdom cathedrals of Hagia Sophia and Kiev established both the dogmatic and poetic bases of Orthodox Wisdom iconography. The worshipper's inner eye derived the meaning of Wisdom by actualizing symmetries between different iconographic zones, relating part and whole, history and divine idea. The mind's eye engaged in an inner process of summary to elicit the viewer's part in a transcendent unity. The creator of the Novgorod Sophia icon, inspired by the enhanced dogmatic consciousness of the hesychast age, undertook to crystallize this meaning. He was a master of the poetics of synthesis necessary to transfer Wisdom iconography from church to icon. Combining motifs from various compositions, the icon exhibits the symbolic wholeness and dogmatic clarity of the Wisdom church. It sets a precedent for the poetic practice that apparently irritated Maksim Grek and confounded the *diak* Viskovatyi in later Muscovite Wisdom icons.

At the same time, the principle organizing metaphor of the Wisdom church – "Wisdom builds her house and offers her feast of knowledge" – is the icon's dominant source of meaning.<sup>78</sup> The icon draws from the ancient patristic tradition envisioning "Wisdom's house" and "Wisdom's feast" as prophecies of the Trinity's revelation in the world through the Word. It too identifies Wisdom's house with God's human body, and the Church's mystical body, and Wisdom's feast with Christ's spiritual self-offering during the liturgy.<sup>79</sup> In the spirit of hesychast mysticism, the icon interprets these metaphors through Trinitarian and light symbolism alluding to the doctrine of energies and a theology about transcendence and personal freedom.

In contrast to Florovsky's essentialist interpretation of the Wisdom Angel, Father John Meyendorff and I. A. Iakovleva emphasize that it alludes to Christ's Incarnation in history and symbolizes Wisdom in her house. For them, it embodies the patristic idea that Wisdom's "house" is first of all the "Word made flesh."<sup>80</sup> The Angel's place on an altar-like throne alludes to a

78. On the importance of this metaphor for St. Sophia of Kiev, see V. G. Briusova, "Tolkovanie na IX pritchtu Solomona v Izbornike 1073," in *Izbornik Svyatoslava, 1073* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), p. 306, *prilozhenie*.

79. On the patristic exegesis of Proverbs 9 in this light, see J. Meyendorff, "L'iconographie de la Sagesse Divine," pp. 260-61.

80. See *ibid.*, pp. 260, 276-77 and I. A., Iakovleva, "'Obraz mira'," p. 398.

fourteenth-century fresco interpretation of "Wisdom's house" and "feast."<sup>81</sup> In Balkan renditions, the angel is typically in front of an altar associated with the seven columns of Wisdom's house. The altar is Wisdom's feast table, and the feast is the spiritual knowledge that the Angel offers through the liturgy of the church. By contrast, the Novgorod Sophia Angel actually sits on the altar with seven columns, offering itself as Wisdom's feast. At the same time, its royal garb distinguishes it from the Balkan angels.

The icon's composition is unique in other ways. For the first time, the Angel offering its feast appears in a composite formation with the torso of Christ and with Mary and John the Baptist on either side. Intersecting circles of light join Christ and the Angel, while Mary and John describe an equilateral triangle with Christ contiguous with the Angel's circle of light. Above, an arc of heaven mirrors the circle's arc. There are three angels to a side, reproducing the right-left symmetry of John and Mary below. The *hetomasia* or Prepared Throne occupies the center directly above the Christ and Angel, mirroring the latter's throne.

The unusual association of the Angel and Christ reflects their derivation from the same subtextual source – Isaiah's prophecy about the birth of the Emmanuel, angel of great counsel. The Christ is implicitly the divine person of the Emmanuel, the Son-Creator sending His Spirit as messenger-angel into the Church. Christ appears again as the child-Emmanuel on the Virgin's breast according to the iconography called the Virgin of the Sign also derived from Isaiah's prophecy. The child identifies the Son's manifest divinity with the Incarnation. Thus, the icon offers three representations of Christ that together highlight His condescension into history rather than His a-historical eschatological reality as Florovsky argued.

The Christ-Creator wears a luminous cruciform halo that underscores that the creation continues in history. The cross in the halo implies that His human suffering, and crucifixion freed His Angel-Spirit to enter the liturgy of the Church after the incarnation. It thus indicates that His historical death was a rupture, initiating a new beginning. He and the Angel symbolize the creative act bringing about "Wisdom's feast" – spiritual knowledge of God.

The Son's triangular symmetry with John and Mary emphasizes the collaboration between Church and God in offering this feast.<sup>82</sup> The iconographer

81. Florovsky, in presenting Orthodox precedents for the Wisdom Angel overlooks these fourteenth-century compositions in order to demonstrate its "rarity" in the tradition. See J. Meyendorff, "L'iconographie de la Sagesse Divine," figs. 7 and 8.

82. They are on a horizontal axis with the altar because they mark pivotal moments in Christ's historical mission of making His Spirit present through the Church. Iakovleva, "Obraz mira," p. 395, notes that the Angel's throne, alluding to Wisdom's liturgical feast, is on a level with the womb of the Mother of God, itself a "throne" of the incarnate Christ. On page 398 she notes the Mother of God's association with the "throne" in the liturgical hymn "O tebe raduetsia

connects Mary and John to the inner Angel through the latter's glory or energy. This energetic connection makes room for their own inner life in historical time and presupposes a dialogic wholeness according to hesychast thought. John and Mary receive an inner illumination and wisdom, signifying the direct spiritual encounter that "raises" humankind to the divinity in the same way as the divinity condescends in the flesh. Their illumination is implicitly a rupture of the Godhead into time that the viewer shares.

Just as the God-Man offers up His inner Angel to them and the faithful, so Mary presents us with the God she freely accepted within. In the same way, John exhibits a scroll which refers to the words he spoke to his followers the moment he recognized that God had entered time. It reads: "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world."<sup>83</sup> Their dramatization of their encounter presages the faithful's own encounter with the Spirit during the liturgy. Thus John and Mary become vehicles of the Godhead's presence in a history initiated by the first Man's choice to sin, a history which now confronts humankind with the choice to accept redemption.

The icon interprets this personal dialogic manifestation of inner Light as an expression of the Godhead's creative thought-will. It embodies the patristic idea that Wisdom's house reveals the "mind of the Trinity."<sup>84</sup> At the same time, it reflects the hesychast emphasis on the theology of creation. The images in the upper zone embody the "thought-forms" the Christ shares in Divine Counsel. The analogy between them and the composite composition below symbolizes the relationship between the divine thought (Proto-Image) and its historical actualization. In this way, the icon evinces the theology which Florovsky expounds in "Creation and Creaturelines" as a counterpoint to Sophiology.

The central image, the *hetomasia* or "Prepared Throne" is a Proto-Image framing the meaning of the icon's vertical axis.<sup>85</sup> On its representational level, the *hetomasia* is the eucharistic table. Its position above Christ's head transforms it into an expression of God's eternal idea about His liturgical self-manifestation. The cross on the table embodies the higher idea of redemptive

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blagodatnaia": "Izhesna bo tvoia prestol sotvori i chrevo tvoe prostranee nebes sodela.'" See also the canon attributed to Cosmas of Maiuma, sung at the Matins of Holy Thursday. It compares the Mother of God as Wisdom's house with the eucharist as Wisdom's feast. See J. Meyendorff, "Wisdom-Sophia: Contrasting Approaches to a Complex Theme," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 41 (1987), 393.

83. Iakovleva, "Obraz mira," p. 395.

84. See V. G. Briusova, "Tolkovanie na IX pritchtu Solomona v Izbornike 1073," p. 306, *prilozhenie*.

85. G. Filomonov, "Sofia Premudrost' Bozhia," p. 3, notes the early association of the "Prepared Throne" with Wisdom iconography in Byzantine tradition.

sacrifice underlying the liturgy. It is the higher model for Christ's cruciform halo, and for the Angel's symbolism as liturgical sacrificial Lamb.

This hierarchy of analogies indicates that realization of God's creative idea is an on-going process associated with discrete personal acts. Thus the crosses refer to the moment when Christ "recreates" the world and fulfills the divine creative idea, setting an example for the liturgy. As Florovsky has noted: "The act of creation has been completed on the Cross . . . the death on the Cross was effective . . . primarily as the death of the Incarnate God, as a disclosure of Christ's Lordship . . . which makes it a resurrecting death, a disclosure of Life."<sup>86</sup>

The seated royal Angel, Lamb of God, "discloses" Christ's Lordship, and thus realizes the creation's ultimate goal.<sup>87</sup> The "Lamb" is enthroned to signify that the sacrifice of the cross has restored God's kingdom and undone sin and death. While this enthronement alludes to Isaiah's prophecy that the Emmanuel will inherit David's throne, the assimilation of throne to altar indicates that this inheritance is taking place in the Church. The seven columns under the throne associate the Church with the glory of the Seventh Day of rest, completing God's idea for the creation.<sup>88</sup>

John and Mary participate in the cross symbolism and implicitly play a role in completing the act of creation. They define the horizontal axis of a mystical cross whose vertical axis is the Angel and Christ. The intersection of both axes connects them to Christ's renewing power, completing the creation. It implies a mystical marriage wherein God's redemptive sacrifice evokes a corresponding virginity or self-emptying of humankind; a human "kenosis" responds to the divine kenosis into the flesh. This Orthodox understanding of virgin marriage is implicit in John's asceticism and in Mary's acceptance of God in her flesh and it denotes the Church's restoration of God's kingdom through the power of the cross.<sup>89</sup>

86. See G. Florovsky, "Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church," in *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (1975), p. 27.

87. I. A. Iakovleva, "Obraz mira," p. 398 interprets the Angel as the image of the inner creative power of the Christ abiding above its head. She notes that Christ's outstretched arms refer to the act of creation, and thus symbolize the cosmic significance of the incarnation as a fulfillment of the creative moment, a kind of recreation of the world.

88. Creation symbolism associated with the Sabbath and especially the Seventh Day of rest can be found in the Old Testament Wisdom literature – the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, and so on – which is the immediate context for interpreting Proverbs 9: 1-5.

89. A possible Orthodox model of the virgin marriage implicit here is the fourteenth-century composition, "Predsta tsaritsa" expressing the patristic exegesis of Psalm 45. Its striking similarity with the Novgorod Sophia icon, and its Novgorod provenance suggest some relationship between the two. See Elena Iakovlevna Ostashenko, "Ob ikonografii tipa ikony 'Predsta tsaritsa' Uspenskogo sobora Moskovskogo Kremli," in *Drevne-russkoe iskusstvo*, pp. 175-88.

Finally, the arc of the firmament in the upper zone signifies the Proto-Idea of the new creation realized below.<sup>90</sup> The Stars symbolize the Light illuminating the new creation from within while the six Angels refer to the Six Days in which God created the world. Below, the Wisdom Angel's fiery face and its circle of light manifests the uncreated Light who was "in the beginning" (John 1). Implicitly, the Angel continues the original work of creation symbolized by the Stars. In the same way, the Book on the *hetomasia* refers to the Word-Creator of the beginning, who appears immediately below and above the Angel.<sup>91</sup> Mary and John participate in this ontological power as well through their communion in the Angel's light. In some renditions of the icon they appear with wings as human angels of creation.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Mary has stars on her garment reflecting the Light above. John's role in Christ's baptism also further associates him with the Light according to an ancient patristic tradition informing the iconography of Christ's baptism.

The icon's creation imagery implies a notion of virginity based on the discourse by Gregory of Nyssa described earlier. The Wisdom Angel embodies the attributes of the virginity inherent to John and Mary – royalty, creative power, wisdom, inner union with Christ. The Angel is thus the image of the new body of humankind transfigured by the Spirit in the likeness of Christ. It manifests this body's inner form or spiritual shape (*logos*) as Christ communicates it to the saints of the Church. Without being the same as Mary and John, the Angel embodies the attributes making them the New Adam in their own right. It reveals the Word (*Logos*) within them to be a transcendent and personal reality achieved in a communion between humankind and God realized by a mutual sacrifice, and accomplished in history.

So far we have shown how the icon manifests some of the key concepts which Florovsky outlined in "Creation and Creatureliness" to distinguish Orthodoxy from Sophiology. The icon embodies Orthodoxy's dialogic conception of wholeness through imagery interpreting the metaphor "Wisdom builds her House" in light of hesychast theology. The icon also has deeper levels of

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90. Iakovleva, "Obraz mira," p. 399, asserts that the banner refers to the ideal universe full of Wisdom. I see it as a symbol of the creation's eternal newness as "Wisdom's house."

91. See Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon* (Torrance, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1990), p. 352.

92. Wings do not project them onto an eschatological plan as Florovsky argues. An iconographic composition exists which portrays the historical John as an angel when he is mortifying his flesh in the desert, purifying himself and gathering spiritual power. His portrayal with wings in the Novgorod Sophia composition could again be alluding to a purity associated with his historical lifetime, testifying to the Wisdom's Angel's energy within. The presence of wings on the Mother of God could express the iconographer's desire to make her symmetrical with John and to make explicit Mary and John's roles as "messengers" of Christ. The figures also do not represent a deisis, as Florovsky argues, in order to interpret them as an eschatological composition. See Iakovleva, "Obraz mira," p. 395.

meaning that penetrate the mystery at the heart of hesychast spirituality, the Trinity's relationship with the creation. An investigation of this meaning gives us material for hypothesizing about how the iconographer created the innovative composition at the icon's center.

The icon introduces the idea of the Trinity symbolically by virtue of the Father's unknowability outside of Christ and the Spirit. The *hetomasia* implies the Trinity's action in its interpretation as Prepared Throne. According to this interpretation, the eucharistic altar in the *hetomasia* stands for a throne prepared from before the beginning described in *Revelation*. There the Father dwells eternally with the Lamb (the resurrected Son) and the saved, standing before it, contemplate the Trinity's self-manifestation (Rev. 5: 6-14, 7: 9). Below, the Angel's throne mirrors the Prepared Throne, and the Angel mirrors the Lamb upon the throne, implicitly manifesting the Father. Seated on the altar, it provides John and Mary (and the viewer) with the opportunity to stand before God's heavenly throne and thus before the Trinity. In this context of meaning, John and Mary experience Wisdom's "feast" as the Church's mystical vision of the Trinity (accomplished by the priest before the altar).<sup>93</sup> In this way, the Angel represents what Florovsky would call the "deed" corresponding to the divine "thought" about the "Prepared Throne."

Thus, the iconographer approaches the Trinity's mystery through an implicit hidden correspondence between the icon's upper and lower zones. He also approaches it through the icon's correspondences with compositions beyond its boundaries. For instance, the Christ and Angel exhibit marked analogies with an iconographic composition called the "Fatherhood" (*otechestvo*). Known since the eleventh century, this Trinitarian composition became popular in the fourteenth century.<sup>94</sup> These "external" analogies reinforce meanings already established by "internal" analogies to the Prepared Throne above.

The "Fatherhood" is a composite image stressing the unity of the Father, Son and Spirit as it is communicated to the Church. In a famous fourteenth-century Novgorod Fatherhood icon, all three share one throne (See figure

93. See St. Germanus, *On the Divine Liturgy*, trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), p. 89. "... the priest approaches ... attending at the heavenly altar, before the altar of the throne of God, and he contemplates the great, ineffable, and unsearchable mystery of God. ... He is learned in the divine knowledge of the Holy Trinity; ... announcing in mystery the mysteries hidden before the ages ... now revealed to us through the manifestation of the Son of God. ..."

94. On the iconography of the "Fatherhood" and its scriptural sources, see K. Onasch, "Identity Models of Old Russian Sacred Art," in H. Birnbaum and M. Flier, eds., *Medieval Russian Culture* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984), pp. 191-94. See also L. S. Retkovskaia, "O poiavlenii i razvitiu kompozitsii 'otechestvo' v Russkom iskusstve XIV-XVI vekov," in *Drevnerusskoe iskusstvo* (Moscow: Nauka, 1963), pp. 235-62.

2).<sup>95</sup> The image of the Father appears above and the Son below with the Spirit typically in front of the Son as a dove (although it can also appear above His head). The Father is symbolized as He was revealed in anthropomorphic form to the prophet Daniel, i.e., as "Ancient of Days" (7: 9). The Son appears as foreseen by Isaiah, i.e., as the child-Emmanuel. His Spirit is present as It appeared at Christ's baptism, according to the Gospel accounts. The dove's wings and its position in front of the Emmanuel symbolize the Child's function as "messenger," and implies the Spirit's role to continue this function beyond Christ's historical life.

In the Novgorod Sophia icon, the Christ and the Angel are analogous to the Ancient, Emmanuel and dove. In the Fatherhood composition, the Ancient and Emmanuel represent Christ twice. The "Ancient" signifies not the Father in and of Himself, but as revealed to Daniel through His Wisdom/Logos. Thus, by symbolizing the Father's Wisdom, the Ancient represents Christ's "fatherhood," His nature as the "precise image of the Father" communicating energetically the unity of the Father's essence.<sup>96</sup> The Emmanuel symbolizes Christ's Sonhood as it took on the form of a man. Christ's doubling and hierarchical representation implies the personal distinction between Father and Son that enables the Son to manifest the Father as "other," i.e., to the prophets as vision and to the Church through His incarnation and Spirit.

Christ in the Novgorod Sophia icon combines the functions of the Ancient and the Emmanuel. On the one hand He is the Creator-God like the Ancient. Participating in the thought of the Divine Counsel, He expresses the Father's will. On the other hand, he alludes to the Incarnation through His cruciform halo and association with the Child-Emmanuel on the Virgin's breast. The

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95. Figure 2 is from Onasch, "Identity Models," p. 190, from a Novgorod icon of the fourteenth century in the Tret'iakov Gallery.

96. Building on Viskovatyi's and Florovsky's repudiation of symbolic icons, a tradition of scholarship considers "Fatherhood" iconography as marginally Orthodox, if not uncanonical. See Bigham, *The Image of God the Father*, p. 3: "Church tradition clearly states that the Incarnation is the only basis on which a portrait of the invisible God can be painted, and yet 'icons' of the Father and the Trinity abound in Orthodox Church, along with elaborate theological justifications." See also Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. 2, p. 305. Ouspensky notes that the Metropolitan Macarius and the council "... began explicitly to defend images of God the Father on the basis of their antiquity and of the claim that they 'do not represent the invisible Godhead according to His essence, but they portray and represent it according to the prophetic visions and the ancient Greek models'." Ouspensky sees Macarius' willingness to place Christ's self-manifestation through the incarnation on the same level as the prophetic visions as a "complete break with the patristic underpinnings of the image." Macarius however, was likely aware that in the controversial icons, these visions served as *symbols* of the Incarnation's Wisdom or providence.



Angel, like the dove communicates the Son's power to manifest the Father to the Church.<sup>97</sup>

There are other similarities in meaning and structure. Like the Emmanuel and the dove in the "Fatherhood," the Christ and the Angel are represented hierarchically and share a throne. Like the dove, the Wisdom Angel has wings, and is also associated with Christ's baptism as a type of the Spirit's descent into the Church. These analogies imply that the Christ and the Angel are manifesting the Trinity on the throne as in the "Fatherhood." They thus reinforce the symbolism derived from the internal analogy between the Prepared Throne and the Angel's throne. These two overlapping contexts of interpretation motivate the unique portrayal of the enthroned Wisdom Angel with Christ above. They imply that Christ and the Angel are a composite symbol of the Trinity's manifestation in the Church, an innovative representation of the traditional meaning of "Wisdom's house."<sup>98</sup>

Scholars have pointed out yet another frame of reference that deepens the icon's Trinitarian symbolism – the Old Testament Trinity composition, also called the Hospitality of Abraham.<sup>99</sup> It portrays three angels around a feast table. On the table rests a bowl, holding the head of a sacrificed calf, while typically, small figures of Abraham and Sarah serve the angels a meal from the sides. Tradition interpreted these angels as manifestations in human terms of God's threefold action.<sup>100</sup> Andrei Rublev's authoritative rendition of this composition foregrounds its ontological symbolism (See figure 3).<sup>101</sup> In Rublev's icon, the absence of Abraham and Sarah and the subtle silent communication between the three angels transfers the composition from a histori-

97. See Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, p. 351 for an interpretation of the Angel as an "icon of the Holy Spirit." See Petr Balcárek, "The Image of Sophia in Medieval Russian Iconography and Its Sources," *Byzantino-Slavica*, 40, no. 2 (1999), fig. 12 for a seventeenth-century version of this icon placing the Ancient of Days above the head of Christ.

98. This composition's emergence under contemporary influences seems more likely than its descent from a composition found in a twelfth-century manuscript of St. John of the Ladder preserved in St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai. There, a middle angel, standing for *Agape*, is enthroned in an oval mandorla and flanked by two winged figures standing for Faith and Hope. Above Christ lowers his hand towards the middle angel. See Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon*, p. 347.

99. See, for example, A. I. Iakovleva, "Obráz mira," p. 395 and J. Meyendorff, "L'iconographie," p. 276.

100. The fifteenth-century "Epistle to an Iconographer," in N. A. Kazakova i Ia. S. Lur'e, *Antifeoldal'nye ereticheskie dvizheniia na Rusi*, p. 373, stresses that this icon manifests the Trinity through God's energetic condescension into the limitations of time and space rather than in its essence.

101. Figure 3 is from L. Ouspensky and V. Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), p. 198.

cal to an ontological plane that reveals the mystery of the Trinity in Divine Counsel.

The composition has direct analogies with the Novgorod Sophia icon. The middle angel has a cruciform halo marking it as Christ-the Word manifesting the Godhead's future redemptive sacrifice to Abraham. Analogously, the central Christ figure in the Novgorod Sophia icon has a cruciform halo. The middle Angel is on a vertical axis with the bowl with the calf's head, which prefigures the crucifixion and eucharistic offering. Analogously, the Novgorod Sophia's Christ is on a vertical axis with the Angel, the sacrificial Lamb offering himself during the Eucharist. Just as the bowl rests on an altar-like table, so the Angel rests on an altar-like throne. In Rublev's deeper ontological rendition, the central bowl, the object of the angel's shared thought, is a prophetic symbol of the expiatory sacrifice which will fill the creation with grace and restore it to its original goodness.<sup>102</sup> The Wisdom Angel as Lamb realizes this sacrifice while its Light embodies the grace giving the Church the image of the original creation.

John and Mary are analogous to the two other angels in their own role of manifesting the Trinity's action in the Church. Together with Christ, they allude to Rublev's rendition of the Trinity in Divine Counsel. As a kind of New Testament Trinity, they implicitly actualize the divine creative ideas embodied in the icon's upper zone. Signifying Wisdom's presence in the Church and the offering of Wisdom's "feast," they fulfill the providence of Abraham's feast.

Thus, the Novgorod Sophia icon alludes to three prophetic interpretations of the Trinity's manifestation in the Church, the Prepared Throne, the Fatherhood and the Old Testament Trinity. These allusions reveal possible deep structural motivations for the icon's unique central composition. They imply that the Angel's innovative portrayal is the product of creative synthesis of Orthodox themes and conventions rather than Western influence.

The iconographer enriches the traditional paradigm of "Wisdom building her house" by combining conventional prophetic images in new ways. His innovative composition expresses the Wisdom of Christ's incarnation as it relates to history and the Church. Summarizing the import of the Wisdom church, the icon expresses the heightened dogmatic and ontological consciousness of the hesychast age.

The icon's interpretation of "Wisdom's house" remains faithful to the dialogic principle that Florovsky confirmed in his article "Creation and Creature-

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102. The cup in Rublev's icon bears an ontological meaning deriving from Dionysios the Areopagite's interpretation of Wisdom's chalice of Proverbs 9. See "Poslanie Titu-ierarkhu Dionisiia Areopagita v slavianskom perevode i ikonografiia 'Premudrost' sozda sebe dom," *Trudy otdela drevne-russkoi literatury*, Akademii nauk SSSR, 38 (1985), 33-35.

liness." The icon is about God's energetic self-revelation as "other" through the creative act. Its division into a higher and lower zone distinguishes between the founding Ideas of the creation and the "ruptures" in historical time actualizing these Ideas. This division also alludes to the theological distinction between essence and energies that is implicit in the light symbolism as well.

The central composite composition of four figures is a "dialogic" sacred symbol par excellence: It signifies a continuing shared ontological creative act by the divine Son and Angel and human persons that is being fulfilled in history. Its archetypal debt to Trinitarian compositions implies that this act energetically manifests a hidden essential oneness. Without violating the Trinity's mystery, and without reducing history to a cipher of the divine thought, the icon shows history to be the arena of the Trinity's manifestation.

The icon's sacred symbols involve the reader in a spiritual ascent. Spatial symmetries teach the inner eye to discover and knit together a nexus of relations signifying transcendent wholeness. In the process the reader moves deeper and deeper to the original Trinitarian archetypes of unity in distinction, climbing the mystical ladder to hidden truth. He receives a "feast of wisdom" which opens him to offering this feast himself, like Mary and John, his models.

Our analysis has shown that, drawing on the symbolic poetics of hesychast and Wisdom tradition, the Novgorod Sophia icon epitomizes Florovsky's "true Sophia" of the Church. It celebrates an energetic unity that is respectful of "otherness" in contrast to the authoritarian concept of absolute unity that Florovsky found in medieval Western cosmic allegory, in German Idealism and Sophiology. When read in its own light rather than through the "Narration," the icon is not a direct precursor to the Kiev Sophia icon, except in the most superficial sense. Its evocation of Wisdom through virginity is not Mary-centered, essentialist or abstract, nor focussed on eschatological reality. The Angel's implicit virginity signifies that an original illumination of body and soul is now present in the Church that has become Christ's deified mystical body. The Novgorod Sophia icon's symbolic language does not negate the experiential, historical, personal and apophatic nature of revelation, nor does it undermine the notions of creativity and autonomy implicit in Byzantine humanism.

Yet George Florovsky viewed the icon as a symptom of Muscovy's severance from living Byzantine tradition. Compelled by his need to find the "illusive Sophia" in the icon, he developed an implicitly anti-sophiological language of analysis to separate it from Orthodox Wisdom. He later used the same language to interpret Muscovy through iconographic and other evidence. Florovsky attributed to Muscovy and the icon the striving for an ideal harmony at the expense of existential freedom for which he critiques German

Idealism (and implicitly Sophiology). The spiritual emptiness Florovsky attributed to Muscovy – a willingness to interpret herself through external patterns – implies an openness to Western influence. He intuited that the “Narration” set a trend for Muscovy by interpreting the Novgorod Sophia icon through the prism of Western religious experience. This alleged “external” approach, together with Muscovy’s synthesizing and systematizing tendencies amounted to its “decline.”

The effect of Florovsky’s hidden agenda on his analysis of the icon and Muscovy is clear. It caused him to mirror the very tendencies he was repudiating in Sophiology and Idealism. A man who made brilliant distinctions in his explication of Orthodox theology assimilated all symbolic images to idealist poetics. To discredit the icon’s symbolic language, he chose to use the Trullo Council’s narrow pronouncements about Orthodox poetics rather than investigate the later Byzantine tradition of interpreting the Council. He subjected the Novgorod Sophia icon and Muscovy to monologic readings. For instance, by isolating virginity as an “essentialist” concept in the icon, Florovsky overlooked its place in a dynamic system of interrelationships embodying the Trinity’s economic activity. In a similar way, he failed to interpret the icon’s eschatological dimensions relative to its overriding ontological orientation, signifying God’s eternal manifestation “in” and after history, without distinction between time and its end.

Blinded by his anti-sophiological agenda, Florovsky ignored the icon’s Orthodoxy and theological depth, and the possibility that Muscovite Wisdom icons are in the same vein.<sup>103</sup> Because of his erudition and authority, Florovsky’s reading of the Novgorod Sophia icon has set a standard for approaching the “new” Muscovite icons.<sup>104</sup> Scholars still turn to Western influence rather than native Orthodox creativity to explain innovative iconographic schemes. This leads them to argue that the secularizing cultural changes, which brought

103. V. Bychkov, *2000 let khristianskoi kul'tury sub specie aesthetica* (Moscow: Universitetskaya kniga, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 99-116, esp. 108, addresses the split “Mezhdú ‘realizmom’ i ‘simvolizmom’,” in the sixteenth century, affirming the Orthodoxy of the symbolic icons of the age of the Metropolitan Macarius.

104. Ouspensky, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. 2, pp. 317, 302, quotes directly from Florovsky’s remarks in *Puti russkogo bogoslovía*, 30, that the new trend in iconography “constituted a break with hieratic realism and its replacement by decorative symbolism, allegorism. . . . The decisive dominance of ‘symbolism’ signified the decline of iconography. These fantasies were based not only on Byzantine models, but also on direct borrowing from Roman Catholicism.” D. S. Likhachev in *Razvitie russkoi literatury*, p. 92, placed the “Tale of Peter and Fevronia” in the fifteenth rather than the sixteenth century because he believed its spirituality did not conform to the hypothesis about Muscovite aridity. On the relation of this work to the iconographic corpus sponsored by the Metropolitan Macarius, see P. Hunt, “The Tale of Peter and Fevronia: Icon and Text,” *Elementa*, 3 (1997), 291-308.

about the modern age, began in the sixteenth rather than the seventeenth century.<sup>105</sup>

The "harmony" in Florovsky's thought inspires us to escape its spell and seek to understand the language in which sixteenth-century Muscovy viewed itself. Florovsky hypothesized but did not prove Western influence on the actual Novgorod Sophia icon or the "Narration." There is also no evidence that the ambiguous interpretation of Sophia in Gennadii's service befuddled the Muscovite clerical elite.<sup>106</sup> Nor has anyone shown that the iconographers whom Macarius imported from Pskov and Novgorod interpreted Wisdom in Westernizing ideal terms. The icon gives no evidence that Russia's cultural turn to the West began earlier than the seventeenth century, nor does it exemplify cultural decline. The Novgorod Sophia icon suggests that the innovative Muscovite compositions reflect the poetics of late Byzantine hesychast culture. These poetics imply that the "problem of Old Russian culture" is not an absence of theological depth and native creativity. Rather, the "problem" lies in appreciating the symbols that convey their presence in silence and differently from Western tradition. When examined outside Florovsky's system, the icon inspires us to look to Orthodox tradition rather than Sophiology to approach the "problem" of Muscovy.<sup>107</sup>

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105. In *The Image of God the Father*, Steven Bigham defends Florovsky's and Ouspensky's idea of the "correctness" of the Council of Trullo and the corruption of Russian iconography by the "western captivity of Orthodoxy." David Miller, "The Viskovatyi Affair," p. 317, sees the new Muscovite iconography as "an eclectic mix of revisionist forms within Orthodoxy and Western European models. . . ." He concludes that "the beginning of the crisis in the medieval world view in Russia is better dated to the mid-sixteenth than, as has been generally held, to the seventeenth century." In contrast to Florovsky, he argues that a new secularizing historicism was one of the Muscovite icons' innovative features, citing O. I. Podobedova, *Moskovskaia shkola zhivopisi pri Ivane IV: Raboty v Moskovskom kremle 40-kh-70-kh godov XVI v.* (Moscow: "Nauka," 1972).

106. Filomonov and others have amply documented that the mainstream tradition deriving from this icon, such as the Wisdom composition on the outside of the Uspensky Cathedral, explicitly associates the Wisdom Angel with the Savior. See G. Filomonov, "Sofia Premudrost' Bozhiia," pp. 6,10. See also T. A. Sidorova, "Volotovskaia freska 'Premudrost' sozda sebe dom," in *Trudy otdela Drevnerusskoi literatury*, 26 (1971), 221-22, and Mitro. Antonii, "Iz istorii Novgorodskoi ikonopisi," pp. 72-77. For a discussion of the symbolism of Wisdom in the authoritative Muscovite Four Part Icon, see P. Hunt, "Ivan IV's Personal Mythology of Kingship," pp. 779-82.

107. Recent studies of the concepts of free will and history in Muscovite culture include A. I. Klivanov, *Dukhovnaia kul'tura srednevekovoi Rusi* (Moscow: Aspekt Press, 1996), especially pp. 109-205, and A. L. Iurganov, *Kategorii russkoi srednevekovoi kul'tury* (Moscow: Miros, 1998). See also P. Hunt, "Ivan IV's Personal Mythology of Kingship," for a case study in the Tsar's creative transformation of Orthodox Wisdom symbolism into a personal mythology. This article is due to appear in Russian as P. Khant, "Lichnaia mifologii Ivana IV o sobstvennoi kharizme," in *Novgorodskii istoricheskii sbornik*, vyp. 9 (19) (SPb, 2002).



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