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Russian Religious Philosophy

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K. M. Antonov, gen. ed. *Russkaia religioznaia filosofiia*. Moscow: Uchebnyi komitet Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, 2024. 616 pp.

The volume at hand is an introductory survey of Russian religious philosophy designed for students of theology at the baccalaureate level. The authors are a team of eleven scholars, including the general editor, Konstantin M. Antonov, head of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at St. Tikhon's Orthodox University for the Humanities in Moscow. Most of the contributors are professionally trained philosophers, and all but one are laypersons. The sections of the text for which each contributor was responsible are identified in an appendix.

In keeping with what Antonov calls "settled tradition" (14) in the study of Russian religious philosophy, the subject matter is presented historically rather than thematically. Chapter One describes the "prehistory" of religious-philosophical ideas in Russia during the period stretching from the eleventh through the eighteenth century. Chapter Two deals with the gestation of a distinctive religious-philosophical tradition in Russia from the 1820s through the 1870s. Chapter Three addresses the last quarter of the nineteenth century, "the period of philosophical systems," when Russian philosophy, including religious philosophy, declared its (relative) independence from the literary and journalistic contexts with which it was tightly interwoven during the preceding period. The longest section in this chapter—indeed, the longest section devoted to an individual thinker in the entire volume—deals with Vladimir Soloviev (175–208). This section was written by A. P. Kozyrev (Moscow State University).

Chapter Four presents the "religious-philosophical renaissance" of the Russian Silver Age, a story that (in this volume) begins with the Religious-Philosophical Meetings of 1901–1903 and ends with *Iz glubiny* (1918), the last of the three most important religious-philosophical and socio-political *sborniki* of the Silver Age, the other two being *Problemy idealizma* (1902) and *Vekhi* (1909). In this period, as our authors put it, "religious-philosophical thought, extending its influence to [Russian] culture as a whole, became a powerful instrument of desecularization, of the return of religion to the public square, and of the return of a part of the intelligentsia to the Church" (486).

Like V. V. Zenkovsky before them, the authors of this volume do not neglect to discuss the study of philosophy in the theological academies of the Russian Orthodox Church during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While "Russian religious philosophy" in the first instance refers to pursuits that developed in the Russian intelligentsia apart from ecclesiastical institutions, philosophers and other critical thinkers

were not lacking among the faculty of the Church's four graduate theological academies (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kyiv, and Kazan). The representatives of theological-academic thought discussed in this volume are Fr. I. M. Skvortsov, Fr. F. A. Golubinskii, A. M. Bukharev, Fr. F. F. Sidonskii, V. N. Karpov, Archbishop Nikanor (Brovkovich), V. A. Snegirev, V. D. Kudriavtsev-Platonov, M. I. Karinskii, A. I. Vvedenskii, S. S. Glagolev, M. M. Tareev, and V. I. Nesmelov.

The longest chapter in the volume is the fifth and last: "Main Tendencies and Leading Representatives of Twentieth Century Russian Philosophy: Russian Religious Thought in the Emigration and in Soviet Russia." The unnatural division of Russian religious philosophy into émigré and Soviet streams resulted, of course, from the tragedy of Russian civilization in the twentieth century.

Among the thinkers who remained or came of age in Soviet Russia, *Russian Religious Philosophy* presents detailed portraits of only two: Father Pavel Florensky and A. F. Losev. But our authors provide a list of many other philosophers, scholars, and artists who managed, under extremely difficult conditions, to engage with religious questions in one way or another during the Soviet period (315–317). Some of these figures are well known in the West (e.g., Bakhtin, Lotman, Averintsev), but others are not (e.g., A. A. Meier, P. P. Pertsov, S. N. Durylin, M. M. Prishvin). For Western scholars of Russian religious thought, the roster of names on these pages serves as a kind of syllabus that can lead us to a broader view of Russian religious thought as it pertains to the Soviet period. Mikhail Epstein has already set a high standard for work along these lines, but there is room for more.

Turning to the emigration, our authors classify the "greats" of religious philosophy into three main schools of thought: the philosophy of all-unity (S. N. Bulgakov, S. L. Frank, L. P. Karsavin); existential personalism (N. A. Berdiaev, L. I. Shestov); and metaphysical personalism (N. O. Losskii, S. A. Levitskii). Most of these figures had achieved eminence already during the Silver Age. But a holistic assessment of their accomplishments must include an account of the works they produced in the emigration, works that were by no means a mere coda to what came before. In addition to the "greats," our authors treat a number of younger émigré philosophers who do not fit into one of the three main schools: B. P. Vysheslavtsev, V. V. Zenkovsky, I. A. Il'in, G. P. Fedotov, and V. N. Il'in.

Almost all of the émigré religious philosophers showed a heightened interest in Orthodox theology, even if most of them did not follow Bulgakov's lead and become Orthodox theologians. There were practical as well as psychological and intellectual factors involved in this shift. Theological schools, ecclesiastical fellowships, engagement with the Ecumenical Movement, and (in some cases) clerical vocations took the place of the higher educational institutions and civil society networks that supported Russian religious philosophy before the revolution. As one would expect, the new context had the greatest impact on younger émigrés who were still fashioning their careers. For the younger generation, the options for professional development included: further elaboration of ideas inherited from Silver Age thinkers (e.g., the continuation of Novgorodtsev's legal-philosophical thought by I. A. Il'in, N. N. Alekseev, and Vysheslavtsev); new departures in socio-political thought (e.g., *novogradstvo*, Eurasianism); inter-

preting Russian culture to Western audiences; more or less complete assimilation into the Western philosophical tradition (e.g., Alexandre Kojève, Alexandre Koyré, Isaiah Berlin), and finally, "switching over wholly to theology ('neopatristic synthesis,' personalism, eucharistic ecclesiology, liturgical theology)—theology that for the most part presented itself as opposed to the traditions of the 'older' generation (Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky, Fr. Alexander Schmemann, Fr. John Meyendorff)" (315).

The last of the options just named—"switching over wholly to theology"—refers to the rise of what is usually called "Neopatristic" theology. A survey of the Neopatristic thinkers does not form part of *Russian Religious Philosophy*. From time to time, the authors draw on some of Florovsky's inimitable characterizations of Russian thinkers and cultural periods in *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* (1937), but Florovsky's theological ideas and those of his successors in the Neopatristic movement fall outside the boundaries of this volume. The reason is that our authors make a firm distinction between religious philosophy and theology, enterprises that they hold to be mutually relevant, but methodologically, conceptually, and professionally independent (see pp. 17–19). In the Russian emigration, as our authors believe, the pursuit of religious philosophy eventually came to an end: "To sum up, we have to say that all the conditions [of émigré existence] we have described produced a state of affairs in which *the continuation and further development of the tradition of religious philosophizing in the emigration proved to be impossible. The death of the leading representatives of this tradition brought it to a halt*" (315, emphasis in the original). The Neopatristic movement, on the other hand, set the course of Orthodox theology for the rest of the twentieth century. Our authors do not argue that Russian religious philosophy came to a halt *because* of the Neopatristic movement. It died out, in their view, because the "conditions" that supported it ceased to exist. This reviewer would like to hear more about those conditions, since it is certainly possible to imagine the religious-philosophical tradition continuing and even flourishing in changed circumstances, even if that outcome did not in fact materialize.

One way of construing the fate of Russian religious philosophy in the emigration is to argue that the tradition found an afterlife in Neopatristic theology. That is to say, the Neopatristic theologians, despite their trenchant criticism of the Russian religious-philosophical tradition, were more deeply indebted to it than they (and others) realized. The best recent case for this view has been made by Paul L. Gavrilyuk in *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (2014). Although Gavrilyuk's work is not referenced in *Russian Religious Philosophy*, the authors clearly agree with him that the influence of Russian religious philosophy on modern Orthodox theology has been enormous. In our volume's conclusion, we are presented with a list of the religious philosophers' contributions to theology:

> The reinterpretation of ecclesiology and the emergence of personalism in anthropology initiated by Chaadaev and the Slavophiles; the "confessionalization" of theological discourse and the idea of "the Western captivity of Orthodox theology," ideas that go back, again, to the Slavophiles, and, closely associated with the idea of Western captivity, the methodological rethinking of the foundations of dogmatics; the emergence, beginning with Soloviev, of

> ecumenical thought; beginning with Soloviev again, the emergence of the sophiological project—controversial, yet attracting fresh attention in our own day as a new way of thinking about the relationship between the Creator and the creature, the Absolute and the relative; new forms of eschatology and soteriology; the emergence, on the basis of the Symbolist paradigm, of a theology of culture and a theology of the icon; the impetus to the development of a theology of history, and more. From the same perspective, we should examine the influence of religious philosophy on the emergence of new theological movements: the neopatristic synthesis, personalism, eucharistic ecclesiology, liturgical theology, and more. Not one of these developments could have taken place without the rethinking of foundations that we have pointed out (490–491).

This long roster of contributions to theology leads to a conclusion with which this reviewer and many other scholars of Russian thought will heartily agree: "It is not surprising that the resonance of Russian religious thought in the chorus of intellectual traditions throughout the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is not weakening but growing. Not only Russian researchers but Western scholars too are paying attention to the work of these religious thinkers, not just as an object of study but as a source of inspiration" (491).

Throughout the book, our authors set a salutary example of evenhandedness in the presentation of their material. They stick to their primary mission, which is to tell the story of Russian religious philosophy without telling readers what they should make of it. They let the philosophers speak for themselves.

The scholarly apparatus is also exemplary. Eighty-five bibliographical "commentaries" comprising almost forty pages of text (495–533) provide an excellent guide for readers who wish to learn more about the thinkers and topics surveyed. More specific documentation is supplied by no fewer than 1110 footnotes—a large number for a volume of this kind, but brevity and the absence of pedantry keep the notes from being burdensome. A detailed table of contents and an index of names make for easy navigation. Finally, the volume contains numerous illustrations, including photographs and artist's sketches of the religious philosophers and reproductions of masterpieces of modern Russian art at the chapter divisions.

Konstantin Antonov and his team of authors are to be congratulated for writing an excellent survey of the history of Russian religious philosophy. Anyone who is looking for a comprehensive and reliable introduction to the subject should begin with this book. Language is a barrier, of course, but for scholars of Russia—in any discipline, not just philosophy and religion—*Russian Religious Philosophy* is a gift that should not be overlooked.

Paul Valliere is Emeritus Professor of Religion at Butler University in Indianapolis. He is the author of *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (T&T Clark, 2000), *Conciliarism: A History of Decision-Making in the Church* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), editor, with Randall A. Poole, of *Law and the Christian Tradition in Modern Russia* (Routledge, 2022), and author of many articles and book chapters on Russian Orthodoxy and Russian religious thought. He has presented his work at the Moscow Patriarchate, and from 2004 to 2016 he taught regularly at the Kyiv Summer Theological Institute. He holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in religion from Columbia University and a B.A. in English from Williams College.