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## Georgii Fedotov as a Theologian of Culture

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the notion of culture as it appears and is conceptualized in the works of G.P. Fedotov. The analysis focuses on two articles by Fedotov published in Russian émigré journals, "The Holy Spirit in Nature and Culture" of 1932 and "Eschatology and culture" of 1938, and in his magnum opus in a Western context, *The Russian Religious Mind* of 1946. The author proposes to analyze Fedotov's ideas as a theology of culture due to the profoundly religious meaning the Russian émigré thinker attributed to cultural products and production, regardless of their religious intention. By implication, Fedotov understood culture in a religious framework as the human experience of and response to the divine, though not necessarily as dependent on firm belief. Viewing Fedotov as a theologian of culture enables us, furthermore, to compare him with other thinkers across the West-East cultural gradient, most notably Paul Tillich. This approach contextualizes Fedotov in a post-Schellingian pan-European idealist tradition, to which Russian thinkers' analyses of religious experience and imagination have made seminal contributions, in particular from Vladimir Solov'ev on. The article discusses these issues within the framework of the perspectives of global intellectual history, entangled history (*histoire croisée*), and transnationalized Russian studies.

**Keywords:** G.P. Fedotov, Russian thought, global intellectual history, Paul Tillich, theology of culture, philosophy of culture, idealism

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Georgii Petrovich Fedotov was in many ways an emblematic representative of the post-revolutionary émigré community of Russia Abroad. In his émigré publications and activities, we distinctly discern the intention to preserve and transmit knowledge of pre-revolutionary Russia and, more specifically, a particular interpretation of Russian religious spirituality—which was not necessarily accepted

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by other émigrés, however much they agreed on the centrality of Orthodoxy to Russia. Furthermore, the transmission of knowledge was intended to serve as a preparation for the return to and reestablishment of a new, post-Bolshevik Russia. Finally, an active engagement with the past was a means to making exile meaningful. All these features can be found in Fedotov's émigré oeuvre and placed him firmly within the imaginary community of Russia Abroad.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the focus of this article is a different one. It argues that Fedotov belongs not only to a Russian émigré context but also to a pan-European context. One thing that warrants to broaden the perspective on Fedotov is the huge impact he has had on Russian studies and, more generally, on the Western perception of Russia, due first and foremost to his two-volume classic *The Russian Religious Mind* (1946, 1966). Fedotov's authority stems, I would suggest, not only from the perception of him as an authoritative voice speaking from the other side of cultural barriers but also from the approach he developed. This approach resonated with an understanding of religion and culture broadly shared in Western Europe.

Even though Russians in exile created vital émigré communities, many of them interacted extensively with Western thinkers and gave important input to the history of Western thought and history. For instance, Samuel Moyn has emphasized Nikolai Berdiaev's contribution to a personalist discourse that was instrumental concerning the notion and eventual declaration of human rights in 1948 [2. P. 68—69]. Lev Shestov became even more integrated into Western (French) academic life and interacted comparatively less with the émigré community, although he did publish extensively in their venues [3. P. 157]. Fedotov, meanwhile, engaged different audiences during his exile in Paris (1925—1939) and in the United States (1939—1951), both that of Russian émigrés with their quests for meaning in Russian history and that of Western readers fascinated with the "Russian religious mind."

However, I argue that Fedotov's thinking was part of a broader European movement regardless of his Western residence and audience, although this may have acquainted him with perspectives that accentuated this orientation further. In this article, I propose to view Fedotov as a theologian of culture. "Theology of Culture" is a concept associated with the German liberal protestant thinker Paul Tillich, but recent research has shown that Russia too has had their "theologians of culture" who developed their projects in parallel to the German theologian [4; 5]. One thing that unites these seemingly different traditions—German Protestant theology and Russian religious philosophy—is their Schellingian frame of reference. Although you find few discussions of Schelling or other German idealists in Fedotov's writings—his horizon remained that of a historian, which he was trained as—he participated in circles where this legacy remained vital, if also disputed, not least thanks to Sergei Bulgakov<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I have analyzed Fedotov's historiography from this perspective in my book *Reformulating Russia* [1. P. 91—151].

<sup>2</sup> We actually encounter a reference to Hegel in the material examined below, but as Aleksandr Antoshchenko has convincingly argued, this is not to read as a reflection of a strong Hegelianism in

Several scholars have already observed that the notion of "culture" plays a seminal role in Fedotov's thought. Viacheslav Serbinenko has discussed Fedotov's thought under the heading of a "justification of culture" (*opravdanie kul'tury*), but Serbinenko focuses mainly on his justification of Russian culture, that is, his endeavors to show its inherent value and meaning [7]<sup>3</sup>. Igor Smirnov, too, has applied the concept of "justification" to capture Fedotov's understanding of culture. He regards Fedotov's main contribution in seeing a nation as justified by its cultural achievements, but again with reference to Russia specifically, and justifiably so: For Fedotov, Russia was first and foremost defined through culture [8. P. 66]. One of Fedotov's main achievements, according to Smirnov, was to transfer the speculations on the "Russian idea" that began with the Slavophiles to a set of concrete cultural studies [8. P. 70], while remaining in the context of Russian speculative thought. However, I would claim he was not only a mediator of Russian history to a Western audience but a mediator of common ideas in that he understood culture as a religiously informed response, as I will show below.

An alternative term that applies to Fedotov is "philosophy of culture," since he in his texts set out to explicate the *meaning* of (Russian) culture. The belief in an inherent meaning united him on the one hand with several Russian thinkers of his generation and earlier ones all the way back to the Slavophiles, who wrote about Russia in a philosophical idealist language. On the other hand, this was equally characteristic of Western thought, and German in particular, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where culture became a theme of urgent concern for intellectual elites in response to industrialization, modernization, and even democratization [9].

Yet the notion of theology of culture goes one step further in that it suggests seeing culture and cultural production as possessing a *religious meaning*. I will explain this more in detail below before discussing examples from Fedotov's writings that portray him as a theologian of culture. This is not a study of reception—there are few indications that Fedotov actively appropriated Tillich's ideas. The aim is to suggest complementary developments among Russian and West-European thinkers and use Tillich to better understand Fedotov.

### Local and global contexts

Contemporary intellectual history has become strongly committed to the so-called "Cambridge School," above all Quentin Skinner's contextualism and its emphasis on intentions [10]. According to Richard Whatmore, this tradition first and foremost understands contexts as *local*. By contrast, "the notion of the global is an idea at odds with intellectual historical research" [11. P. 99]. However, Whatmore also admits that the methods of contextualism are not so applicable to the study of the reception of ideas [11. P. 55, 99]. In acknowledging this, Whatmore

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Fedotov [6. P. 11—12]. I do believe, however, that there is a significant element of Schellingianism in Fedotov, which may be understood in broader terms as a worldview, for instance, of human creativity, rather than a philosophical position as such.

<sup>3</sup> In this article, all sources in the Russian language are cited in my translation into English. KJM.

responds to the call for global perspectives in intellectual history that has recently been raised by several scholars, who hereby challenge the hegemonic contextualism of the discipline [12]. Scholars of Russian intellectual history, on their part, have for decades studied reception as a constitutive part of their field, the interaction with German idealism by Russian thinkers being one illustrative case in point. Russian intellectual history was in this sense "global" long before the topic became fashionable [see, e.g., 13; 14; 15]. However, the dispersion of Schellingianism across what Martin Malia called the "West-East cultural gradient" [16. P. 13], stretching in this case from Protestant theology to Russian religious idealism, seems to be an illustrative case not merely of reception but a history characterized by entanglements and intercrossings [17].

The importance of (German) idealism to Russian thought suggests that we need to differentiate our understanding of context. We have not only local or situational contexts, such as pre-revolutionary learned societies in Russia or the Russian émigré community. There are also broader, cultural contexts, such as an epoch and its contested issues [18. P. 95]. And the two are not necessarily overlapping: The cultural context of Russian intellectual history makes it inevitably transcultural in that it exemplifies the "flows of signification across boundaries" [19. P. 6], which in fact helped to serve the kind of boundary-making that a thinker like Fedotov was engaged in—in his attempts to define Russian spirituality.

This article defines its close-reading as contextual, but it expands the notion of context beyond the local one and instead examines how the texts under analysis interact with *multiple* contexts. In keeping with another "founding father" of the Cambridge School, J.G.A. Pocock, I understand contexts also as languages, i.e., "specialized idioms" or "rhetorics" [20. P. 110–113]. From such a point of view, Fedotov's writings blend several languages: historiographical traditions of East and West, philosophical idealism, and religious discourses. And a crucial point here is that the interaction of texts with context(s) does not merely reduplicate inherited meanings but rather produces new meanings through their modification [20. P. 114]. As Dominick LaCapra argued, texts are not transparent windows on the world but refractions of reality, the implication being that they add something new [21. P. 55; see also 18. P. 101]. By implication, Fedotov's writings were not merely a local conversation on the meaning of the Orthodox tradition or other "indigenous issues," but a reformulation of that tradition in modern concepts. Fedotov does not give us direct access to the "Russian religious mind" but forges a new version and even vision of it.

### Theology of Culture

As noted, "theology of culture" is associated with Paul Tillich. It was the title of a paper he presented to the Kant Society in Berlin in 1919 [22]. Later, it became the title of a monograph published by Oxford University Press in 1959 [23]. According to the foreword, the book aimed to "show the religious dimension in many special spheres of man's cultural activity" [23. P. V]. The "religious dimension" implies a particular point of view for Tillich, a certain perspective on

this activity. And the object of this approach is the "dimension of depth" in human activities. This raises, in turn, the question as to what "depth"—a metaphor indeed, as Tillich underlines—means, and Tillich's answer is "that which is ultimate, infinite, unconditional in man's spiritual life. In the largest and most basic sense of the word, religion is ultimate concern" [23. P. 7—8]. This "ultimate concern," according to Tillich, can be observed in a whole range of cultural efforts, products, or even more generally in human creativity. In the moral sphere, for instance, we may observe it as a firm ethical stance, regardless of whether it expresses a belief or not. In this author's view, an illustration of Tillich's point would be Ivan Karamazov's famous "return of the ticket," that is, his rejection of God's world order on an ethical basis (children's sufferings). As an early interpreter of Ivan Karamazov, Vasilii Rozanov, observed, Ivan's rejection of religion had a decisive religious basis [24]. Or, in Tillich's words, "you cannot reject religion with ultimate seriousness because ultimate seriousness, or the state of being ultimately concerned, is itself religion" [23. P. 8].

For Tillich, religion is not transcendental in the sense that it comes from "above" or "beyond"; it is a human response to Being in human language. It is an awareness of the unconditional [23. P. 22], to which human beings respond with an ultimate concern. This becomes an existential concept of religion, which relates to our entire life, not merely to (un-)belief. It concerns not least everyday work [23. P. 41]. To return to the question of "culture," the theology of culture focuses on expressions of ultimate concern, or their "meaning-giving substance" [23. P. 42], which Tillich believed was to be found in every cultural creation. In secularized modernity, where God has been increasingly experienced as superfluous, the human being has taken over the role of creator, Tillich claims, making creativity a "human quality" [23. P. 44]. This viewpoint resonates broadly with Russian religious thought of the early twentieth century—most famously with the ideas of Berdiaev, but also of Fedotov.

Tillich was actively read by exiled Russians. The first issue of the émigré journal *The Way* (1925) contained a translation of Tillich's "Dialectical Theology," which was a critical discussion of Karl Barth (to whom I return below) [25]. Meanwhile, Tillich showed a marked interest in thinkers such as Berdiaev and Frank in the 1920s [26. P. 664—665]. Let it be noted in this connection that we encounter the term "theology of culture" (*bogoslovie kul'tury*) in another classic work of Russian émigré historiography: Vasilii Zenkovskii's *History of Russian Philosophy*, in which Petr Chaadaev was described as a "builder of a theology of culture" [27. P. 164]. According to Zenkovskii, Chaadaev wanted to develop his philosophy by leaning on that which Christianity had brought into the world. He offered a "theological construction in accordance with the questions of a philosophy of history, a philosophy of culture" [27. P. 163]. Zenkovskii was, it must be admitted, rather short on this point. He did not develop this concept, nor did he reference it, but given the interest in Tillich in Russian émigré circles, we cannot exclude that it came to Zenkovskii via this acquaintance.

## Towards a Concept of Culture

As noted above, most of Fedotov's writings are historical analyses of topics from Russian cultural history. He left us rather few texts that address philosophical problems as such, although he was never afraid of drawing abstract, generalizing conclusions from his discussions, a tendency that made his oeuvre, after all, quite philosophical and theological. As for the theme of culture, two articles stand out due to their theoretical approach, and these are "The Holy Spirit in Nature and Culture" (1932, in the journal *The Way*) and "Eschatology and culture" (1938, in *The New City*). The editors of Fedotov's collected works describe the former as "one of his key culturological articles" and the latter even more strongly as "one of the foundational ones in the field of Christian culturology" [28. P. 364; 29. P. 448].

As the title "The Holy Spirit in Nature and Culture" indicates, Fedotov sees the Holy Spirit manifesting itself in both domains. Since the focus of this article is on the notion of culture, I will leave his discussion of nature out, just remark that although Fedotov rarely referred to the philosophical classics of German idealism, his speculations must be understood in the context of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, which figured so prominently in Russian religious idealism, in particular in the works of Solov'ev and Bulgakov. Like the two latter, Fedotov rejects the view of nature as dead matter; for the religious (but also aesthetic) gaze, nature is free [28. P. 233], and hence productive, as Schelling would have put it. Like Bulgakov, Fedotov, at least implicitly through how he develops his argument, detects a common ground between modern *Naturphilosophie* and the Orthodox Tradition [30].

Fedotov opens his article by observing that the topic of "nature and culture" lies outside what normally preoccupies theologians—although when taking into account modern protestant movements, this is not quite the case, not to mention Russian religious idealism. Meanwhile, Fedotov's discussion comes down to us quite theological in that it draws heavily on Biblical formulations and Christianity imagery. In addition, Fedotov subscribes to what he calls the "Hellenistic myth" about culture's "sacred origin." But this is only one—significant—side of the case. Fedotov goes on to claim that "Culture is first and foremost the activity of the human being—a human being placed between God and cosmos, but inspired by God to creative activity (*tvorchestvo*)" [28. P. 235]. Culture thus represents the human encounter with the divine, but in a particular fashion—as a responsive activity. According to Fedotov, culture is not to be understood in radical terms as the experience of revelations but as *inspired work*. Inspired work means not mechanical work, which seems to lie outside the domain of culture, as Fedotov conceives it—culture is always the result of inspiration. And as inspired, it bears the imprint of a divine spirit that is active outside the church, however defined.

In the Russian Orthodox tradition, several approaches to the relationship between religion and culture/art exist.<sup>4</sup> We find fundamentalist currents that see

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<sup>4</sup> I rely here on Mikhail Suslov's account [31. P. 43—45].

culture as "corrupt" and as "temptations," which derive *iskusstvo*, art, from *iskus*, temptation. Here, culture is connected to the demonic. More moderate currents would argue that religion (Orthodoxy) forms the center of culture (Russian culture) and, therefore, also informs secular expressions. The Hesychast doctrine of divine energies serves as an explanation for such expressions. Moreover, they manifest themselves regardless of the artist or cultural worker's personal beliefs. Furthermore, whether a piece of art is truly "in line with God" is not for human beings to decide. Finally, some models see "culture" as deriving from the religious "cult." An exponent of this view in modern times was Pavel Florenskii, and it also surfaces in Fedotov's text [28. P. 236], though it does not play a central role for him. Florenskii was critical of modern, secularized art from the Renaissance onwards, whereas Fedotov's approach was broader and more inclusive. For instance, he opens up the possibility that it is not necessarily God who inspires creative work, but someone or something imitating him (Fedotov's example is the Devil [28. P. 237]). In more general terms, we might say with Paul Valliere that "human creativity responds to the divine ground of being" [4. P. 379] and that Fedotov's idea is a case in point. The modernity of Fedotov also comes to expression in that he acknowledges that art may benefit from violating inherited norms.

As noted, inspiration is one of two "principles" (*nachala*) of culture, and the other is work. Seeing culture in terms of work does connect it to sin; according to the biblical account of Genesis, work was God's punishment for the Fall. And as Fedotov notes elsewhere, culture is not part of "the Kingdom of God" [28. P. 238], it belongs to the earthly sphere. However, while work connects human beings to the earth, inspiration draws it towards the divine, and culture as the sum of the two represents their encounter.

By adding work to inspiration in the definition of culture, Fedotov achieves several things. First, it reads as an attempt to include socialist ideas into a Christian discourse, which was something that Fedotov pursued in several writings. Second, the notion of work makes cultural production more concrete but also more valuable as compared to how it appears in the thought of Nikolai Berdiaev. For Berdiaev, it is the creative act that matters, not cultural products. The latter become objectified and representations of failure. For Fedotov, cultural products are values and should be preserved.

Is nevertheless culture, as Fedotov understands it, a Christian phenomenon? As noted, the aspect of inspiration connects the earthly activity to the divine, but which divinity? He points out that there is no "formal" difference between the "structure" (*stroenie*) of Christian and heathen cultures, and he admits, moreover, that inspiration need not come from God. Culture has an ecclesiastical (or cultic) origin, but "in our secular age significant, creative work takes place outside the church" [28. P. 241]. Fedotov seems to regard Christian art "inside the church" as paradigmatic, yet, as the latter, it also serves as a *model* for all cultural creativity.

Towards the end of the article, Fedotov introduces a model of degrees or "steps of God-inspired human creativity." On the top, we find the kind of creativity

represented by saints, directly addressing the Holy Spirit. Next follows cultural forms developed inside the church (liturgy, church art, speculation (*umozrenie*)), which are accomplished by those taking an active part in the church, that is not only saints but more generally devoted Christians. One step further down, we encounter works of art that can be considered Christian but not expressions of firm belief or revelations; rather, they often describe moments of sin and fall. Fedotov does not provide examples at this point, but earlier in the article, he mentioned the poetry of Dante and Rainer Maria Rilke as experiences of death, the horror of life but also of complementary compassion, and thus Christian in that it has the Holy Spirit as its "muse" [28. P. 240]. According to Fedotov, what is at work here is the "criterion of the cross," which may be understood, I would suggest, in existential terms as seriousness and care.

However, Fedotov proceeds even one step further down, to "secular creative work, cut off from the church." In contrast to explicitly Christian creative work, it has "no criteria" or canon, and, as already noted, it is free to violate canonic norms. "It may be sinful and pure, subversive and life-creating—not rarely at the same time, in the same creation" [28. P. 243]. At the lowest level, we finally find the creative work of the heathen human being, who does not know Christ, but even this work may result from divine inspiration. As a general conclusion, Fedotov metaphorically maintains that even at the very bottom of the hierarchy, the "road to Calvary" may be discernible. And most importantly, no steps are void of divine inspiration. For all forms holds that creative work "preserves its religious meaning in the fate of the creative personality itself" [28. P. 243]. As we can see, Fedotov does indeed distinguish—the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not distributed regardless of their reception. And yet where is creative work, there is also an inspiration of divine origins and hence religiosity.

In "The Holy Spirit in Nature and Culture," we see that Fedotov is inclined to perceive a religious meaning in all forms that can be regarded as "inspired work." Although he seems to be more sympathetic to the art of Dante and Rilke than to purely secular art, he is open to transgressive and subversive forms as well. Culture is creativity, and as long as creativity is present, it is an expression of divine inspiration. This seems to be the main premise for Fedotov's reasoning, and to see human creativity and activity in terms of religiosity connects him with broader tendencies in modern Russian religious thought [32]—but also in West-European thought.

Fedotov's 1938 article "Eschatology and Culture" raises the question as to what the meaning might be of our earthly strivings in light of the Christian doctrine of the end of the world and the Second Coming. Russian religious thought of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century generally held that the Christian conception of history preserved the meaning of individual lives and efforts, in contrast to the utopian ideology of "progressivism."<sup>5</sup> Fedotov maintains that production, creation,

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<sup>5</sup> For examples of this view, see my *Reformulating Russia* [1. P. 172, 230].

and creativity contribute to life here and now. They might also be contributing to the "heavenly Jerusalem," but this lies beyond our capacity to recognize. The building of the earthly "new city"—which was also the title of Fedotov's journal (*Novyi grad*)—is in any case legitimate provided that it bears the sign of religious inspiration. For Fedotov, the distinction between the earthly and heavenly spheres was essential, quite in line with Evgenii Trubetskoi's critique of his utopian contemporaries Bulgakov and Berdiaev [33]. The heavenly Jerusalem, Fedotov claims, "is discernible for us beyond the boundaries of history as the completion of all human culture" [29. P. 217]. In keeping with Berdiaev, still, Fedotov too, held that "God's Kingdom will not come without human efforts, feats, struggle. God's Kingdom is a divine-human task" [29. P. 219]. Employing Solov'ev's concept of *bogochelovechestvo*, Fedotov sees salvation as a divine-human collaboration, and the human contribution is cultural work.

Human beings should work seriously—they should be "on the post," be it in schools, libraries, or monasteries.<sup>6</sup> These would all be examples of a "religious attitude to serving" [29. P. 222]. Fedotov stresses that we should work as if the current day was the final day of our lives, and at the same time, as if we had eternal life. What Fedotov seems to suggest here is that we should continually and eagerly work and create and that all our efforts remain meaningful in a world-historical perspective. The purpose, so it seems, is to warn against indifference, which would be something of a cardinal sin in this regard. Fedotov calls for an attitude to a life resembling what Tillich called "ultimate concern," or in Fedotov's own words: a "spiritual orientation (*ustanovka*)" [29. P. 223]. This spirituality may be read out of human cultural expressions, but for Fedotov, it is also a choice that humans are free to perform.

### The Russian Religious Mind

A significant part of *The Russian Religious Mind* is an English translation of the *Saints of Ancient Russia*. The latter came out on YMCA Press in Paris in 1931, whereas the English version came in two volumes on Harvard University Press, the first in 1946 and the second posthumously in 1966. The first volume bears the subtitle *Kievan Christianity*, but it was only after the second volume, *The Middle Ages*, had been issued that "volume 1" was added to the first. In addition, new subtitles specified the centuries dealt with in both volumes.

*The Saints of Ancient Russia* was a relatively short book, *The Russian Religious Mind* — a two-volume edition, so it goes without saying that the latter is significantly expanded. Both works are centered on a story of Old-Russian saints from the princes Boris and Gleb plus Feodosii of the Caves Monastery up to Nil of Sora and Iosif of Volokolamsk. They end with the emergence of the Russian Empire and summarize tendencies in Russian spirituality well into the nineteenth century. One major difference between the two editions is that the English-language version

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<sup>6</sup> Knowledge-production and science are an essential part of a culture, as Fedotov also stressed in "The Holy Spirit in Nature and Culture" [28. P. 236].

contains far more context and background, segments that draw, for instance, on Fedotov's 1935 book *Spiritual Verses*. It also includes far more figures, for example, the "Russian Byzantinists" Klim Smoliatich, Kirill of Turov, and Ilarion of Kiev. In the introduction to *The Russian Religious Mind*, Fedotov describes both *Saints of Ancient Russia* and *Spiritual Verses* as "preliminaries to the present work." However, in my view, the English version remains, after all, closer to *Saints of Ancient Russia* in that it is structured according to the same narrative, whose core is the saints and the development of sainthood in Medieval Russia.

Also, new conceptual perspectives were included in the English version, first and foremost that of "kenoticism," which is the title of the section on Boris and Gleb and Feodosii. Although we find one occurrence of "kenosis" in the *Saints of Ancient Russia* as well, Fedotov did not use it there as a framework for the description of the first Russian saints. The English version serves to accentuate more strongly his interpretation of the new, "evangelical" attitude to the Christian message that he detected in the lives of the saints: their humanization of Christ's divine figure and their imitation of it. Jostein Børtnes has suggested that Fedotov's use of "kenoticism" in *The Russian Religious Mind* draws on Western sources, more specifically on a liberal theology that was very far indeed from the medieval religious mind [34]. Although kenosis was used by other modern Orthodox theologians too, most notably Mikhail Tareev, the source of inspiration was German protestant theology here as well [35]. This serves as another indicator of the proximity between the approaches of Fedotov and Western protestant thinkers.

However, a major difference between the Russian and English versions of the study of early Russian sainthood is the audience they targeted. *Saints of Ancient Russia* opens with the following proclamation: "To study the history and religious phenomenology of Russian holiness (*sviatost'*) is one of the most urgent tasks of our Christian and national revival today" [36. P. 5]. In the situation in which it was written, with increasing persecutions of believers in the homeland, it was the Russian émigré community that became the main addressee of this task: to understand the full meaning of the Russian-Orthodox heritage and be prepared to implement it for the sake of a future post-Bolshevik Russia<sup>7</sup>.

*The Russian Religious Mind*, quite naturally, does not open in this way but introduces itself as a scholarly work on the "history of Russian religious consciousness" or "mind" [37. P. IX], and, towards the end of the Introduction, as a book addressed to "American readers" [37. P. XV]<sup>8</sup>. Fedotov emphasizes that he studies the "subjective side of religion," that is, the human attitude to God, in the fullest possible sense and with a focus on what is meaningful. Or, to use Clifford Geertz's term, he provides a thick description of it [38]. Fedotov's starting point is that we must understand the religious personality (most notably the saints) to understand cultural life more generally, that is, the religious human being's

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<sup>7</sup> I develop this argument in my *Reformulating Russia* [1], which analyses the 1931 version of Fedotov's work.

<sup>8</sup> In addition, Fedotov continues his scholarly polemics with fellow emigres and former colleagues at the St Sergius Institute in Paris [6. P. 10].

encounter with the divine.<sup>9</sup> This response involves ethics, experience, action. These aspects may be discernible also in dogmas, liturgy, sacraments, and church regulations, which nevertheless form the "objective side of religion." Fedotov's chief interest lies in the "subjective side." An additional aim of this work was to make what appears as objective subjective again, to explicate the experience that once stimulated what has been handed down to us by tradition. For Fedotov, this involved looking behind the forms Ancient Russia took over from Byzantium. Fedotov's attitude to "Byzantinism" was quite negative.

In the introduction, Fedotov puts his approach into perspective. He contrasts it to that of Karl Barth, who "breaks sharply with the humanism of the nineteenth century." Barth's approach starts with God, with God's call to the human being, and thus not with the human being itself. Fedotov's focus, by contrast, is on "man's response to God" in shifting contexts. In an important passage, Fedotov juxtaposes his approach to that of Barth: "I do not deny the supernatural, divine character of Christianity as a religion of revelation. But I believe that its realization begins with human response to Grace. The history of Christianity is the history of this response; its culture is the culture of this experience. History and culture are, in essence, human" [37. P. X—XI]. What Fedotov does here, in my view, is to present his project as a theology of culture, without applying that concept or referring to Tillich, but partly by polemicizing with Tillich's main opponent, Barth. Interestingly, Fedotov himself suggests that his approach "may appear not sufficiently up-to-date," whereas I would argue that he rather sides with the liberal side in a major theological debate of the first half of the twentieth century, which was still active by the time Fedotov wrote his work, although Barth by the middle of the century had gained hegemony in the Protestant world.

In general, Fedotov makes few references to Tillich in his writings. Those we come across deal mainly with Tillich's socialist ideas, to which Fedotov was sympathetic. References to Barth are more frequent, and they are, as indicated above, mostly critical. As for *The Russian Religious Mind*, Fedotov cites as an inspiration a representative of the modernist movement in Catholicism that was "strangled" but nevertheless survived as a scholarly approach, namely Abbé Brémond's *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*. In addition, he maintains his admiration for Arsenii Kadlubovskii's *Essays on the History of Ancient Russian Lives of the Saints*, whom Fedotov argued had succeeded in overcoming the source-critical approach of Vasilii Kliuchevskii's doctoral thesis *Old Russian Lives of the Saints as a Historical Source*. Kadlubovskii's main achievement was his focus on *ideas* and hence spiritual life [1. P. 108—113].

As for his source criticism, Fedotov appears rather naïve to the reader when he writes, "I let the sources speak for themselves, with unexpected and overwhelming results" [37. P. XIII]. One thing that Fedotov has been criticized for is that he insufficiently acknowledged the Orthodox, Byzantine heritage in his sources, most

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<sup>9</sup> This source-based study of religious mentality was the legacy of Fedotov's teacher, Ivan Grevs [39. P. 52].

notably in the lives of the saints. He read them too literally or even realistically. What was thereby lost was the complementary dimension to kenosis: glorification. To detect the glorification dimension in the sources requires knowledge of genre and rhetoric [34]. In any case, as Fedotov goes on, he proceeds from this seemingly naïve position. First, he distances himself from most studies written by Russians; he characterizes them as suffering "from partiality and preconceptions" and as making judgments according to their "own religious and political standards." Foreign observers, in turn, have often been, to use a more recent characterization, *orientalizing* in their exaggeration of "a few striking features" [37. P. XIV]. Fedotov's approach aims at a synthetic interpretation of the given culture. This synthesis acknowledges "unity in multiformity." It is based on a series of selected individual manifestations, but the final portrait must account for diverging tendencies, or "duality,"<sup>10</sup> and thus for the full complexity and contradictions of the history of the given object (Russian spirituality). This procedure enables the final goal of "synthesis" [37. P. XV], which must be understood not in a Hegelian sense as sublation [6. P. 11—12] but as the interpreter's final portrait of a culture, clearly advancing beyond individual sources.

### Conclusions

Fedotov regards his project as it appears in *The Russian Religious Mind* as an attempt to proceed from a preparatory stage of collecting and studying sources to "the problem of the history of spiritual life," which would also be the "analytical stage" that culminates in the above-mentioned "synthesis." At the same time, this synthesis is envisioned as a new starting point, which is "preliminary, clearcut, provocative" [37. P. XV]. Thus, this synthetic effort represents the beginning of a new area in the comprehension of spiritual life, which I propose to view in terms of a "theology of culture," though in a historiographical form. A new *Kulturwissenschaft*, theology of culture constructs its object and makes it meaningful by focusing on what Tillich would call "substance" or *Gehalt*. For Tillich, this was not limited to expressions of belief or quests for belief. It also included secular expressions, but they were approached from a religious point of view. Fedotov's study of the Russian religious mind is indeed about expressions of firm belief (in the lives of the saints). However, it also contains a more general program for studying religion as a response to the experience of grace, which resonates with Tillich's theology of culture as the interpretation of the experience of the absolute. And as we have seen above, neither Fedotov was alien to apply a religious perspective to secular expressions. For both, finally, this type of analysis had synthetic ambitions and was a program for a new approach to culture [22. P. 22, 28]. The horizon of their interpretations of the past was the future.

The analysis pursued in this article supports, moreover, studying Russian thought from a pan-European perspective. Not only because of the obvious Western

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<sup>10</sup> In his "Letters on Russian Culture" of 1938, Fedotov similarly proposed "polarity" as the appropriate analytical perspective for analyzing Russian culture. [40. P. 363].

impact on Fedotov at various stages of his professional life and because of the huge impact Fedotov himself has had on understanding the Russian religious mind. Above all, the development of his thought suggests that he was part of a broader idealist approach to culture, religion, and cultural creativity and that he, therefore, should not be studied within local "Russian" contexts only, which would easily lead to "methodological nationalism," i.e., "the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world" [41. P. 302]. By contrast, Fedotov's thought and Russian religious idealism more generally defy regarding the nation as the natural unit for analysis since they are part of developments that have a truly transnational character.

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## Георгий Федотов как теолог культуры

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается понятие культуры в работах Георгия Петровича Федотова. Анализ сосредоточен на двух статьях Федотова, опубликованных в русских эмигрантских журналах, — «Святой дух в природе и культуре» (1932) и «Эсхатология и культура» (1938), а также в его magnum opus «Русская религиозная мысль» (1946). Автор статьи предлагает рассматривать идеи Федотова как теологию культуры, поскольку сам ученый приписывал религиозный смысл культурным продуктам и их производству. Таким образом, Федотов понимал культуру в религиозной структуре как человеческие переживание и реакцию на божественное, хотя и не обязательно находящиеся в зависимости от твердой веры. Восприятие Федотова как теолога культуры позволяет сравнить его с другими мыслителями на культурном градиенте Запад-Восток, например, с Паулем Тиллихом, и вписать его в контекст пост-шеллингианской общеевропейской идеалистической традиции, в которую анализ религиозного опыта и воображения русских мыслителей (начиная с Вл. Соловьева и далее) внес существенный вклад. Автор статьи обсуждает поднятые вопросы с точки зрения глобальной интеллектуальной истории, *histoire croisée*, и транснационализированных российских исследований.

**Ключевые слова:** Г.П. Федотов, русская мысль, всемирная интеллектуальная история, Пауль Тиллих, теология культуры, философия культуры, идеализм

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