

ORIGEN IN RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY: FROM GREGORY SKOVORODA TO NIKOLAI BERDYAEV

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ABSTRACT. Observing the history of reception of Origen’s intellectual heritage by Russian theologians and philosophers of the past few centuries, some key moments and figures are discernible. Those figures are *Grigory Skovoroda* (1722–1794), *Vladimir Solovyov* (1853–1900), *Sergei Bulgakov* (1871–1944), *Nicolay Berdyaev* (1874–1948) and *George Florovsky* (1893–1979). Surely, the history of Origen’s reception in Russia cannot be reduced to them alone: translations were made of Origen’s works¹ and special investigations were conducted into some aspects of his theology.² But those authors’ significance for our outline is determined by (1) their key role in the evolution of Russian theological and philosophical thought and – at the same time – (2) by the fact that those authors’ own intellectual evolution and/or (3) their ideas’ reception by their contemporaries proceeded in close connection with *the problem of Origen*. So the process of reception of Origen’s intellectual heritage in Russia was substantially conditioned by the controversies raging around the key representatives of the so-called “Russian religious philosophy.”

KEYWORDS: Origen of Alexandria, apocatastasis, Biblical allegorism, Russian religious philosophy, Grigory Skovoroda, Vladimir Solovyov, Sergei Bulgakov, Nicolay Berdyaev, George Florovsky.

I. ORIGEN AND GRIGORY SKOVORODA

Leaving aside the indirect Origenian influence on medieval Russian thought – particularly on its exegetical aspects – the first point of contact of Russian thought with Origen’s heritage is noticeable in the importance of the Origenian exegetical method, or one at least very similar to it, for the ontological constructions of *Grigory Skovoroda* – an Ukrainian and a Russian Christian Platonist, often considered as one of the first original thinkers in Russia.³ Accord-

¹ *De principiis*, translated into Russian for the first time by Petrov (1899).

² See, for example, a brilliant work by Vasiliy Bolotov (1879) on the Trinitarian doctrine in Origen’s writings.

³ I would not like to be drawn here into a discussion on Skovoroda’s relation to the spaces of the Russian and/or the Ukrainian cultures: in recent years, this question has been unrea-

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ing to Skovoroda, the Bible's symbolic nature allows it to be "a third world" or "a sea" that mediates between two "shores" – this immanent world, and God. Although one does not find the name of Origen, or direct quotations from his writings, in Skovoroda's texts,⁴ the question of Origen's influence on his theological and philosophical views has a long history.

As early as 1895, the Church historian Amphian Lebedev pointed out that Skovoroda's thought developed in the problematic and conceptual field common to both the Hellenistic philosophers of Late Antiquity and the Eastern fathers. Examining Skovoroda's Biblical symbolism in the context of the exegetical principles of Philo, Clement and Origen, Lebedev emphasizes the extremely stringent criticism of literal interpretations of the Bible that is notable in Origen's *De Princip. IV, 15-18* as well as in Skovoroda's writings.⁵ In fact, in *De Princip. IV, 16.2-16*, for example, we read: "What man of intelligence ... will consider it a reasonable statement that the first and the second and the third day, in which there are said to be both morning and evening, existed without sun and moon and stars, while the first day was even without a heaven? And who could be found so silly as to believe that God, after the manner of a farmer, 'planted trees in a paradise eastward in Eden', and set therein a 'tree of life', that is, a visible and palpable tree of wood ... And further, when God is said to 'walk in the paradise in the evening' and Adam to hide himself behind a tree, I do not think anyone will doubt that these statements are made by scripture in a figurative manner".⁶ Skovoroda seems to echo Origen: "They speak to a superstitionist: 'Look, friend! This is impossible, this is against nature... Something is hidden here...' But he cries with anger, that Elijah was really taken up to heaven in a chariot, iron floated in the time of Elisha, the waters of Jordan 'returned unto their place,' the sun 'stood still, and the moon stayed' for Joshua, and in Adam's time serpents spoke as humans do."⁷ In all the tradition of Biblical symbolism perhaps no one except Origen and Skovoroda spoke so critically about literal interpretation of the Scriptures.

Both authors find the same results of literal interpretations of the Biblical text. Origen describes in *De Princ. IV.8* the two groups of literal interpreters of the Scriptures: the first, the heretics, who – confused by the absurdities and cruelty of some literally interpreted biblical texts – reject God the Creator; and the second group – some narrow-minded Christians who receive the literal meaning of the biblical text and impute to God "such things... as would not

sonably politicized. The author considers Skovoroda's belonging to the intellectual history of Ukraine as indisputable. But the importance of Skovoroda for "the self-recognition" of the Russian intellectual tradition is also obvious: all the systematic works on the history of Russian philosophy include outlines devoted to "the steppe Socrates." See: Shpet 2008, 104-118, 430-439; Zen'kovskiy 2001, 57-79; Florovsky 2009, 159-161, 231; and Lossky 1952, 10.

⁴ Here I must indicate that, nevertheless, we can affirm that Grigory Skovoroda not only read Origen's writings, but also appreciated them. The point is that, when Mikhail Kovalinsky, a pupil of Skovoroda, enumerates the books most significant for Skovoroda in the biography of his teacher, he includes in that list the writings of Origen, along with the works of Philo Judaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor and a number of Greek and Roman classical authors – Plutarch, Cicero, Horace, and Lucian. See: Kovalinsky 1894, 14.

⁵ Lebedev 1895, 170-177.

⁶ Translation of G. W. Butterworth. See: Lubac, Butterworth 1973, 288.

⁷ See: G. Skovoroda, *A Book, named Silenus Alcibiadis, that is Icon of Alcibiades (The Israeli Serpent)* – Skovoroda 1973, II, 9. Quotations from Russian here and below are given in the translation by this paper's author.

be believed of the most savage and unjust of men” (τοιαῦτα δὲ ὑπολαμβάνουσι περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὅποια οὐδὲ περὶ τοῦ ὠμοτάτου καὶ ἀδικωτάτου ἀνθρώπου). Equally, Skovoroda sees in literal interpretation of the Bible first the reason why so many reject God, and second, the source of numerous superstitions, all forms of intolerance, religious conflicts, and schisms (here he lists several catastrophes produced by religious conflicts: the destruction of Jerusalem and Constantinople, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew’s Day and so on) – “as if God is a barbarian who feuds for trifles.”⁸

After Lebedev’s article, an assertion about the crucial importance of Origen’s exegetical method for Skovoroda is frequently repeated in works devoted to the Ukrainian philosopher.⁹ However, I think, a scrupulous analysis of Origen’s and Skovoroda’s approaches to the Bible allows us to notice some points on which they differ, and forces us to dispute this statement. The first point is the *ontologization of the Bible* that Skovoroda proposed. For Origen, the Bible is only a text – sacred, inspired by God in all its parts, but no more than a text, in which the Holy Spirit in symbolic form has imprinted for the sake of initiates the mysterious teaching of theology and sacred history – the *description* of events past and future (the creation of rational beings, their falling away, future universal salvation, and so on).¹⁰ But Skovoroda regards the Scriptures as the *especial eternal world*; events of sacred history, according to him, are not merely *described* in the Bible, they *happen* to whoever enters that world. Moreover, sometimes Skovoroda *deifies* the Bible, identifying it with the Word of *John* 1.1-4.¹¹

Accordingly, we can point out differences between the exegetical methods of Origen and Skovoroda. Origen’s interpretation of the Scriptures is predominantly *allegorical*: the elements of scriptural “historical” narration correspond to the elements of another – inner, “spiritual” narration. So, for example, in the guise of Nebuchadnezzar’s fall, Isaiah, according to Origen, is describing the fall of the Devil.¹² Thus, behind the description of one accomplished event Origen sees the description of another, also accomplished event. That “real” event indeed happened on the spiritual level of being, hidden from terrestrial eyes, but it was just an event, that had a place in a concrete moment of universal history. Unlike Origen, Skovoroda finds in the Bible’s “spiritual” level not *descriptions* or *signs* of some events or beings, but rather *the spiritual beings themselves* – not signs, but essences. The interpreter discovers this eternal unchangeable world of spiritual essences in the process of exegesis. Skovoroda’s exegetical method is therefore not allegorical, but a *symbolic* one.

Ultimately, the main moment that differentiates Origen’s and Skovoroda’s approaches to the Scriptures is connected to Skovoroda’s *fundamental ahistoricism*. Like many early Christian authors, starting with the authors of *The Epistle to the Corinthians* and *The Epistle of Barnabas*, Origen considers the relation between the Old and New Testaments “typologically,” seeing the events described in the books of the New Testament as realizations of Old Testament prophecies, and explanations of Old Testament parables. The Old Testament appears to be an image and a shadow of the New one.¹³ Analogically, such typological relation be-

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 12.

⁹ See, for example: Ern 1912, 64; Men’ 2002, III, 125; Shpet 2008, I, 115; recently – Malinov 2013, 297-320.

¹⁰ Cf. *De Princ.* IV. 14.

¹¹ Cf.: “As it is made to God and for God, this God-inspired book has become God itself” (Skovoroda 1973, II, 18).

¹² *De Principiis*, IV.22, 231-235.

¹³ *De principiis* IV, 13.

tween the Testaments may be projected onto the future. The parables and prophecies of the New Testament must be explained and realized in the epoch of a third testament – the eternal Gospel.¹⁴ Thus, the whole exegetical procedure is set in the framework of the history of universal salvation.

But we find no evidence in the exegetical texts of Skovoroda for such “spiritual historicism.” Here, the ontological horizon of the exegetical procedure is purely ahistorical. All the aspects of reality given to a human have a symbolic nature. Constantly changing phenomena of the perceived world are not self-sufficient: this world has its roots in the eternal divine realm; that’s why the phenomenal plan of reality must be considered as symbolic (“a figure,” “a robe,” “a chariot”) for the higher one.¹⁵ Similarly, the literal plan of the Biblical text is only “a robe” for the eternal divine reality that is hidden under the veil of “figures” and signs. This Platonic scheme does not concede any universal history of salvation; the only form of history that may be represented here is the potential multitude of individual “histories,” each of which begins when a person plunges into the Biblical text. Either that person will drown, like Pharaoh, in the baneful waters of the literal sense of the Bible, or will reach the desert where he will wander until he ascends Mount Sinai together with Moses, to receive the stone tablets of the Covenant. So, as well as Origen, Skovoroda supposes that each person has his (or her) individual history, but (1) that history is not necessary one of salvation, and (2) the multitude of such histories cannot be summarized in the total, universal history.

On the other hand, the ontological horizon of Skovoroda’s exegesis almost completely coincides with the metaphysical framework of another Alexandrian “Biblical Platonist,” mentioned in the “list of Kovalinsky:” I refer to Philo of Alexandria. The main reason for comparing Skovoroda and Philo is not the abundance of quotations and paraphrases from Philo’s works found in Skovoroda’s writings,¹⁶ not even the strict resemblance of Skovoroda’s exegetical method to that of Philo – but simply both authors’ convergence in perfect *ahistoricism*.

George Florovsky noted in his brilliant essay “*The Contradictions of Origenism*,” that “Origen tries, and cannot, and fears to think historically,” and the main contradiction of Origenism, if one considers it in the perspective of future development of Christian thought, is connected with the tragic lack of a sense of history. Origen, according to Florovsky, does not reject the reality of time and history, but negates their sense.¹⁷ If however we consider Origen’s exegetical texts in comparison with Philo’s and Skovoroda’s, the historical intention of the great Alexandrian’s thought becomes clear.

So, to summarize “the case of Skovoroda,” we can assume that the old and widespread perception of Skovoroda as “an Origenist” is not correct: the similarity of the exegetical methods applied by Origen and Skovoroda, and their keen criticism of literal interpretations of the Bible, are insufficient to justify the statement of Skovoroda’s dependency. More con-

¹⁴ *De principiis* III, 8, 255-265.

¹⁵ On the symbolic nature of the world in Skovoroda’s system, see: Ern 1912, 222-233.

¹⁶ See, for example, a paraphrase from Philo’s *De congressu eruditionis gratia*, 1-21 in Skovoroda 1894, II, 92.

¹⁷ Cf. the thesis postulated by George Florovsky in his review of De Faye’s *Origene. Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensee*: “The root of Origenism is in unfeelingness and unacceptance of history” (Florovsky 1929, 113). Florovsky later repeated the main ideas of this review in Florovsky 1950, 77-96. Inter alia, he argues there that Origen’s “ahistoricism” might have contributed – through Eusebius of Caesarea – to the genesis and development of iconoclastic thought.

vincing is the hypothesis about Philo's allegorism as the common source of both Origen's and Skovoroda's exegesis.

II. ORIGEN AND VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV

Another point of comparison with Origen is found in the writings and personality of *Vladimir Solovyov*, who can be placed among the most significant figures in the history of Russian religious philosophy – the “Russian Origen of the nineteenth century,” as he was described by one of the first to study him, Alexander Nikolsky.¹⁸ Since statements about “Solovyov's Origenism” would become almost a cliché in works devoted to the history of Russian philosophy, I'd like to distinguish between (1) Solovyov's reception “through the prism of Origenism,” and (2) the real textual evidence for Origen's influence on Solovyov's writings.

1. *Solovyov - “an Origenist” or a “Russian Origen?”*

The closest and, simultaneously, the least accurate convergence of Solovyov and Origen was undertaken by Alexander Nikolsky in his previously mentioned monograph of 1902. After a circumstantial exposition of Solovyov's biography and main works, he concludes his book with a list of characteristics that he considers were shared by Solovyov and Origen. Accordingly to Nikolsky, that evidence is: (1) both Origen and Solovyov were committed Christians, and both aspired not only to believe in, but also to understand Christianity and its mysteries;¹⁹ (2) both were apologists of Christianity and defended it against heretics and pagan philosophers;²⁰ (3) both explored rationalistic methodology in their philosophic studies; (4) both had made dogmatic errors and were criticized by the Church;²¹ (5) both practiced asceticism of the same type;²² and (6) both were characterized by “burning” and “ardent” advocacies and so on. It is evident that the framework created by such comparisons is an extremely wide one.²³

George Florovsky, a famous Russian emigrant theologian and historian of the Church, offers a more subtle and keen comparison of Solovyov and Origen in his *The Ways of Russian Theology* (1937). Florovsky uses “the figure of Origen” as a kind of background for evaluating Solovyov's philosophy. He thus affirms that Solovyov remained a Christian “in the Ante-Nicene epoch, in Ante-Nicene theology, with its propaedeutic problematique,”²⁴ and “did not go [in reception of the patristic heritage] further than Origen.”²⁵ He notes that Solovyov rejected Origen's “universalism” before throwing himself with tremendous ardor into his universalistic projects. Florovsky maintains that Solovyov's Christology is similar to that of Origen, but is “paler,” and “lacks that personal feeling, which so warms the whole construct of

¹⁸ Nikolsky's book was published in installments in the Kharkov Orthodox magazine *Vera i Razum* (*Bepa u pазум / Faith and Reason*): Nikolsky 1902.

¹⁹ Nikolsky A. Ibid., in *Vera i Razum* (1902), no. 24, p. 480.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 481.

²¹ Ibid., p. 482-483.

²² Ibid., p. 483. If the previous points of the comparison are simply too general, this point is erroneous: Solovyov was not an ascetic.

²³ See also a critical analysis of Nikolsky's comparison in Losev 1990, 171-178. Losev devotes to the question “Solovyov and Origen” a chapter in his book.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Florovsky 2009, 402.

Origen.”²⁶ The “symbolic illusionism” of Solovyov is the same as the “symbolism or allegorism of Philo and Origen;” the source of all Solovyov’s failures – “the source of all his personal disappointments and renunciations” – is rooted in this “illusionism.”²⁷ Many of Florovsky’s observations are perspicacious, but his approach is not free of excessive generalization: so, for example, the identification of Solovyov’s symbolism with that of Origen does not take into account Solovyov’s keen criticism of Origen’s symbolism and spiritualism in the entry *Origen* that he wrote for *The Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary*.²⁸

Other researchers of Solovyov – such as Sergei M. Solovyov, Eugene N. Trubetskoy, and Nikolay O. Lossky – display a more thorough approach to the problem of Solovyov’s relation to Origen. Sergei Solovyov – a nephew, biographer, and publisher of the philosopher – identifies here a kind of evolution. In 1875–1878 (the period of the manuscript *Sophie* and *Lectures on God-manhood*) young Solovyov was spellbound by Origen, and Origen’s subordinationism is appreciable in his Trinitarian schemes; Origen’s authority is recognized as unconditional.²⁹ But by the end of the 1880s (the period of *Russia and the Universal Church*) Solovyov’s attitude to Origen has changed. He estimates as superficial Origen’s treatment of the key ethical questions: “this, so exalted spiritually and so gifted mind had, nevertheless, only an extremely insufficient idea about the essence of moral evil.”³⁰ And ultimately, with the article *Origen* (1893), Solovyov renounces “the infatuation” of his youth.³¹

2. Direct citations of Origen or use of “specifically Origenian” terminology in the works of Vladimir Solovyov

Contrary to the tendency of considering Vladimir Solovyov as an Origenist, direct quotations from Origen’s writings or use of Origen’s concepts are infrequent in the texts of the Russian philosopher. Even in early works like *The Lectures on the God-manhood* (1878), which contain abundant Origenist material, one can identify ideas incompatible with the doctrine of the great Alexandrian. *The Lectures* indeed include a series of conceptions that can be characterized as “specifically Origenistic” – such as the doctrine of actual eternity of each created rational being (lecture 8),³² the universal Fall (lecture 9),³³ and the coming universal salvation (lectures 5 and 10-12) – “the universal testament, restoring all humankind and

²⁶ Ibid., 404.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Solovyov 1911-1914, X, 447.

²⁹ Solovyov S. M. 1997, 138, 262.

³⁰ Solovyov V. S. 1911, 349: “...этот столь возвышенный духовно и столь богато одарённый ум имел, тем не менее, лишь очень недостаточную идею о сущности нравственного зла, что он, впрочем, и доказал при других обстоятельствах, прибегнув к чисто материальному и внешнему средству для избавления себя от дурных страстей”.

³¹ Solovyov S. M. 1997, 346. Cf. a similar statement by Prince Eugene Trubetskoy, a friend and a follower of Solovyov: “...in his late work *The Theoretical Philosophy* (1899), Solovyov rejects the idea of the soul’s substantiality and thus freed himself from ‘the error of his youth, inspired by Origen’” (Trubetskoy 1913, 252); cf. also Lossky 1952, 129.

³² Solovyov V. S. 1911-1914, III, 126-127.

³³ Ibid., pp. 129-142.

through it – all of nature,³⁴ may be considered as interpretations of the themes that Origen discusses in *De principiis*.³⁵ But in Solovyov's interpretation, the doctrine of pre-existence of rational souls has a feature rendering that conception radically different from Origen's: whereas Origen strictly distinguishes created rational beings from God himself, Solovyov affirms that before the universal Fall, rational beings dwelt in the divine Logos as its own noetic content (lectures 8-9). This pantheistic detail, impossible for an Origenian text, prevents us from following Florovsky, Trubetskoy, Lossky and others, and accepting unreservedly the hypothesis of early Solovyov's Origenism.

Solovyov's entry on *Origen* written for the *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary* in 1893³⁶ is the most informative about Origen, but at the same time, the most critical of him. Here he presents a detailed and academically deliberated exposition of Origen's teachings (on the basis of *De principiis*, first of all), and a history of Origenian controversy, then offers his own assessment of Origen and Origenism. The chief points of Solovyov's criticism towards Origen in this paper are typical of a nineteenth-century Christian scholar and philosopher: according to Solovyov, Origen was unable to overcome the Hellenistic dualism between spirit and matter and could not accept the Christian teaching of saved and spiritualized matter. The incarnation of Christ thus had only pedagogic meaning and, strictly speaking, was necessary only for the ungodly. Solovyov reproaches Origen for neglecting the historical meaning of the Biblical texts and for underestimating death; he also criticizes Origen's doctrine of universal salvation. Solovyov's general conclusion about Origen is that "...Although Origen was a committed Christian and a philosophically educated thinker, he was not a Christian thinker or a philosopher of Christianity; his faith and thought were connected, to a large degree, only externally and did not merge with one another."³⁷ At the same time, the specific discussion on a series of Origen's conceptions resembling Solovyov's ones – first of all, the doctrine of τὸ εἶδος τὸ χαρακτηρίζον – does not show the reader a philosopher's simple renunciation of "the infatuation" of his youth. In one of the thinker's last works – the ethical treatise *The Justification of the Truth* (1897) – we find evidence that this article was not a farewell to the Origenian problematic for Solovyov, and that the relevant complex of ideas and terminology remained crucial for the Russian philosopher in his final years. In this work, Solovyov directly explores the Origenian terminology of universal salvation for a definition of the coming Kingdom of God as "the total resurrection and restoration of the all (ἀποκατάστασις τῶν πάντων)."³⁸

Vladimir Solovyov was thus neither an Origenist nor, a fortiori, "the Russian Origen." In his early works, Solovyov gives a pantheistic interpretation of (quasi-) Origenistic teaching about the precosmic existence of rational beings, while in the later ones he criticizes all aspects of Origen's system. However, it is undeniable that a series of Origen's conceptions (es-

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁵ It is interesting that Origen's name is mentioned only once in *The Lectures*, in passing. In the sixth lecture, addressing the Trinitarian theology, Solovyov affirms that the first speculations on God and on His inner life in the writings of the early Christian teachers – Justine the Philosopher, Clement of Alexandria, and especially Origen – reproduce the essential truth of Philo's and the Neoplatonic doctrine, as variants of the same speculative theme (*Ibid.*, pp. 81-82).

³⁶ Solovyov V. S. 1911-1914, X, 439-449.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 447-448.

³⁸ Solovyov V. S. 1911-1914, VIII, 220.

pecially the eschatological ones) exerted a strong influence on the Russian philosopher until his last days. It is also notable that irrespective of the real measure of Solovyov's dependence on Origen, critics and researchers of Solovyov's writings used "the figure of Origen" – once it was reduced to a set of recognizable features, both doctrinal and biographical – as a kind of "interpretive model" for understanding his philosophy and biography.

III. ORIGEN AND "THE PHILOSOPHERS OF THE SILVER AGE"

I'd like to end this paper with a short survey devoted to stories about Origen's reception by two Russian philosophers – Sergei Bulgakov and Nicolay Berdyaev – of the so-called "Silver Age" – the period of an intensive movement that integrated art, philosophy, and religion, in the first decades of the twentieth century in Russia.

1. Origen and Sergei Bulgakov

Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944) was among the most interesting figures in that movement. In his youth Bulgakov belonged to the Legal Marxism movement; Georgi Plekhanov called him "a hope of Russian Marxism." In the early twentieth-century, he became a religious philosopher, combining philosophical idealism with political economy, and a leader of the so-called "sophiological movement" in Russian religious philosophy. In 1918 Bulgakov became an Orthodox priest, and in January 1923 he was deported from Soviet Russia on a charge of counterrevolutionary activity; after spending two years living in Constantinople and then in Prague, Sergei Bulgakov became a professor at St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, which he headed since 1940.

The name of Origen, and Origenistic *tropoi*, are not frequent in Bulgakov's early writings. We may note some parenthetical mentions of Origen in the context of the problem of pre-existence of souls in *Philosophy of Economy* (1912),³⁹ a consideration of Origen's *theologia negativa*, and a discussion of some conceptual problems of Origenism in *The Light Unfading* (1916).⁴⁰ His discussion on the problem of the universal cosmogonic fall in the *Philosophy of Economy*⁴¹ contains obvious allusions to the works of Schelling and Solovyov, but not to Origen.

There is however a series of works that he wrote in 1939–1944, some of whose key themes can only be interpreted in a specifically Origenian context. These are *The Bride of the Lamb* (1939-42, and, especially, the Addenda to this book – three outlines on the problem of the apocatastasis: *On the Question of the Apocatastasis of the Fallen Spirits (in connection with the doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa)*, *The Apocatastasis and the Theodicy*, and *The Atonement and the Apocatastasis*),⁴² *The Orthodoxy. Outlines of the Teaching of the Orthodox Church* (first published in 1965),⁴³ and *The Apocalypse of John (An Experience of Dogmatic Interpretation)* (1943–44),⁴⁴ thought to be last book that Bulgakov completed before his death.

³⁹ Bulgakov 1993, I, 139.

⁴⁰ Bulgakov 1995. Here Bulgakov condemns Origen's disregard of the body and – in the wake of it – the "inefficiency" of Origen's *apocatastasis* (pp. 57-58), but supports Origen's negation of the substantiality of evil (p. 66).

⁴¹ Bulgakov 1993, I, 163-166.

⁴² Bulgakov 1945; for an English translation by Boris Jakim see: Bulgakov 2002.

⁴³ Bulgakov 1965.

⁴⁴ Bulgakov 1948.

In all these texts the idea of the “sophianicity” and the wholeness of Creation, central to Bulgakov, received the form of the doctrine of universal salvation – the *apocatastasis*, in its eschatological perspective. Bulgakov engages with the pedagogical meaning of time, the eons divided by the interim judgments, the future repentance of the fallen spirits and the Devil himself, and with universal salvation.

For example, in the work *The Atonement and “the Apocatastasis”* Bulgakov poses the question: how can one combine the two contradictory eschatological perspectives to be derived from the New Testament texts? There is a group of texts about universal redemption and future universal salvation, but there are also texts about the judgments, division of the sheep from the goats, the salvation of the select few, and eternal suffering for many. The author answers: “If one sees some insufficiency... of the two interpretations, then only one inescapable solution remains: to attribute statements seeming as contradictory to the various eons, which leave the possibility of transition from death to life, from destruction to salvation, even by means of ‘eternal suffering,’ a gradual ‘*apocatastasis*,’ that is achieved by means of universal salvation, without any restrictions or exclusions, but with its diversity and multi-staged character.”⁴⁵ A solution that completely matches Origen’s solution for the same problem!⁴⁶

The doctrine of *apocatastasis*, as one of two main interpretations of the eschatological problem in the history of Christianity, became a subject of discussion in another text by Bulgakov – in the “Orthodox Eschatology” chapter of his work *The Orthodoxy*. Bulgakov contrasts the tradition of *apocatastasis* – that rejects the eternity of torment and the insistence of evil in humans, and places its hopes on universal salvation, when “God will be all in all” – with the tradition of “rigorous eschatology” affirming the eternity of infernal suffering and marked by the name of Augustine. The first tradition is connected not only with Origen of Alexandria, but also with Gregory of Nyssa. Bulgakov emphasizes that the doctrine of *apocatastasis* cannot be considered as having been condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council because the teachings of Gregory of Nyssa, an ecclesiastical teacher, were never condemned. That’s why, Bulgakov argues, *apocatastasis* retains “citizenship rights” in the Church, at least as an authoritative theologian opinion. So, “this question is not closed for future discussion and for future illuminations sent by the Holy Spirit to the Church.”⁴⁷

At least, *apocatastasis* becomes the pivotal theme in Bulgakov’s commentary on the Apocalypse of John. One finds here the whole complex of ideas traditionally associated with Origen’s eschatology. Thus, commenting on the scene of the universal laud to God, in Apoc. 5.13, Bulgakov writes: “It ought to be noted that this doxology... includes... the universal *apocatastasis*: no one in God’s creation ‘in heaven, on ground and *under ground*’ (*Bulgakov’s italics* – A.K.) is excluded from participation in it. This is a highly important dogmatic

⁴⁵ Bulgakov 1945, 583. Cf. in *The Question of the Apocatastasis of the Fallen Spirits (in connection with the doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa)*: “...That’s why the immeasurable load of this sin weighs on the repenting Satan... This pain of repentance endured by the incorporeal spirits fulfills “ages of ages,” a time immeasurable for humankind. Surely, this time is not, so to speak, chronologically steady; we can say here about the totality of times, which differ in quality, duration, and content... However these ages of ages are nothing more than time... Its duration is, nevertheless, limited, that time is finite and will end with the sufferings of the repenting Satan, who returns during those ‘ages’ to the purpose for which he was created” (Bulgakov 1945, 568-569).

⁴⁶ Cf. Seregin 2005, 35, 148-150.

⁴⁷ Bulgakov 1964, 107-108.

thought.”⁴⁸ In the commentary on Chapters XX and XXI we find the discourse on future repentance of the Devil (ch. 20 of Bulgakov’s book): “But what one ought to say about the devil himself, who ‘fascinated them’? Surely, his inspiration and his deeds are to be destroyed... But indeed the statement that the devil ... is plunged into the lake of flame indicates that this [event] has no definitive eschatological meaning.”⁴⁹

The frequency of “specifically Origenian” terminology is striking: in chapter 21 alone (“*The Descent of Jerusalem from Heaven*”), the terms “*apocatastasis*,” “universal *apocatastasis*” occur 24 times. In this chapter one can find all the specific elements of Origen’s doctrine of the universal salvation: its totality⁵⁰, multiplicity of the eons, which are needed to fulfill that salvation, the Devil’s future repentance, the analogy between creation and *apocatastasis*;⁵¹ final theosis; criticism of the eternity of Hell, etc.

And so we find in Bulgakov’s texts the entire complex of Origen’s ideas concerning eschatology. But the name of Origen is only very infrequently mentioned here: in the ‘most Origenian’ work, the commentary on the Apocalypse, Origen is mentioned only once, in passing;⁵² in the series of outlooks on the *apokatastasis* Bulgakov refers to Origen twice, also parenthetically. Two questions must be asked here: firstly, why does Sergius Bulgakov refrain from referring to Origen? And secondly: can we be sure at all that the basis of Bulgakov’s conception of *apokatastasis* is only the teaching of Origen, but not that of some Origenist – for example, Gregory of Nyssa? The answer to the first question seems obvious: for Bulgakov, an Orthodox priest and a professor at the St. Sergius Institute, the value of the doctrine of universal salvation was too high to be prejudiced by an excessively close connection with a Church writer condemned by the Fifth Council. For that very reason Bulgakov emphasizes this doctrine’s presence in texts by Gregory of Nyssa.⁵³ But why cannot we reduce all the complex of eschatological conceptions in Bulgakov’s later works to Gregory of Nyssa as the only source? The fact is, that although Gregory denies the substantiality of evil, and claims

⁴⁸ Bulgakov 1948, 54: “Обращает внимание, что это славословие... включает в себя... всеобщий *апокатастасис*: именно из участия в нем не исключается никакое создание Божие ‘на небе, на земле и под землю’. Это есть в высшей степени важная догматическая мысль...”

⁴⁹ Bulgakov 1948, 199: “Но что же следует сказать о самом диаволе, ‘прельщавшем их’? Конечно, его вдохновение и дела также подлежат уничтожению... Но именно то, что диавол... ввергается в озеро огненное, свидетельствует о том, что это не имеет окончательного эсхатологического значения”.

⁵⁰ Cf. Bulgakov 1948, 212: “A new heaven and a new earth mean the total renovation of *the whole* creation (Bulgakov’s italics – A. K.) ... Is it possible to say this in relation to holy angels, as incorporeal beings? It is possible and necessary.”

⁵¹ Bulgakov 1948, 211-212.

⁵² Bulgakov 1948, 190.

⁵³ I offer only two examples of that emphasis: 1) Bulgakov includes the name of Gregory (not of Origen!) in the title of a survey of the *apocatastasis* – *On the Question of the Apocatastasis of the Fallen Spirits (in connection with the doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa)*, while in the text of the survey, Origen and Gregory are only mentioned together, as “the two theologian of the *apocatastasis*” (Bulgakov 1945, 569); 2) in *The Orthodoxy* Bulgakov emphasizes that the teaching of Gregory is “much more decisive and consistent, ...free of any shade of Origen’s doctrine about the pre-existence of souls” (Bulgakov 1964, 388-389).

that the universal power of the Atonement covers the demons also,⁵⁴ (as Origen and Bulgakov equally do), there is a detail which is pivotal in Origen's system, and observed in Bulgakov's texts, but is lacking in the writings of Gregory. That detail is the conception of the successive eons, which are necessary for universal salvation on the assumption of creaturely freedom.

2. Origen and Nicolay Berdyaev

If in the works of Sergius Bulgakov we find plentiful traces of Origen's ideas, but feel the lack of references to Origen, in the writings of Nicolay Berdyaev (1874–1948), a famous Christian existentialist philosopher and a friend of Bulgakov, we encounter numerous mentions of Origen.⁵⁵ It is hard to say however that this author had a solid knowledge of Origen's texts. Analyzing the bulk of Berdyaev's statements about Origen, one notices two main semantic moments, that are the most characteristic for Berdyaev's "image of Origen."

First of all, for Berdyaev. Origen presents the paradigmatic figure of a Christian thinker (a true Christian theosopher or a true Christian Gnostic, in his terminology), a person who combines sincere faith with brilliant research skills. For example, as early as 1906 Berdyaev wrote in a letter to a poetess Zinaida Gippius: "The individual task of my life is to construct a system of religious and philosophical Gnosis ... I'm close to Origen and the like."⁵⁶ Berdyaev repeats that evaluation of Origen in a great number of texts. So, in twenty two years after his letter to Gippius, Berdyaev writes in *The Philosophy of the Free Spirit* (1928): "The first Christian theosopher in the deepest sense, the first representative of the true Christian Gnosis, was the Apostle Paul. Clement of Alexandria and Origen were Christian theosophers and Gnostics."⁵⁷

The second aspect of "Origen's image," also reflected in many of Berdyaev's texts, is connected with the conception of universal apocatastasis. Berdyaev experiences the eschatological idea in its antinomian inconsistency. He wrote to Leo Shestov in 1924: "By my consciousness I reject the eternal infernal sufferings and my conscience resists this terrible idea. In my consciousness I'm an Origenist ... But in my experience I intimately know what I reject in my Christian consciousness... I am afraid about my sinfulness."⁵⁸ In this antinomian feeling, one can identify the reason for contradictory estimations of Origen's idea of *apocatastasis* in various works by Berdyaev of 20s and 30s. But in his later writings this contradiction does not appear; Berdyaev receives the idea of *apocatastasis* as the only acceptable variant of the eschatological dilemma and considers Origen one of the few religious thinkers whose eschatology lacked any "sadistic element:" "I see history in the eschatological perspective ... Though, I ought to say, that ... the apocalyptic literature, beginning from The *Book of Enoch*, put me off by its vindictive eschatology, by the clear separation of people into good and evil, and savage reprisals against the evil and unfaithful. This element of vindictive eschatology is very marked in The *Book of Enoch*, it is also present in the Christian *Apocalypses*, it is found in the writings of St. Augustine, and of Calvin etc. The element of sadism has a great presence in the history of religion, it is strong in the history of Christianity too... Only Ori-

⁵⁴ See Srawley 1903, 99-101.

⁵⁵ Berdyaev claims that Origen, along with Gregory of Nyssa, is the closest to him and Church authors (Berdyaev 1994, I, 23-28).

⁵⁶ Berdyaev 1992.

⁵⁷ Berdyaev 1994, 175.

⁵⁸ Baranova-Shestova, ed. 1981, 304.

gen was quite free of the sadistic element; for this he was condemned by representatives of orthodox sadism" ("Self-Knowledge," 1940).⁵⁹

IV. CONCLUSION

Since the 1880s, the image of Origen, in its reception by Russian philosophical circles, assumed a series of "emblematic" features. First of all, Origen appeared to be a paradigmatic figure of "believing reason," a symbol of free philosophical investigation in Christianity – an attitude reflected in the title of Alexandr Nikolsky's book on Vladimir Solovyov; it formed one of the main aspects of the "image of Origen" in Berdyaev's works (Origen as a Christian Gnostic), and so on. The reception of Origen as "a theologian of universal salvation" became the second of those emblematic features. Possibly the doctrine of *apocatastasis* was the feature that principally attracted Russian intellectuals in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century to Origen's teaching. It may be supposed that a main reason for that attraction was the doctrine's consonance with the philosophy of wholeness ("vseedinstvo"), whose most prominent representatives were Vladimir Solovyov, Serius Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky, Semyon Frank and other religious philosophers, who aspired to combine their Christian convictions with Platonic philosophy. For a Russian intellectual at the start of the twentieth century, to advocate for the doctrine of universal salvation implied being an Origenist in the eyes of his followers and opponents.⁶⁰

In that way, the "figure of Origen" became one of the factors that helped form the identity of Russian philosophers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. At the same time, it is undeniable that such "emblematic" substituted, to a considerable degree, for a scrupulous academic study of Origen's texts.

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⁵⁹ Berdyaev 1990, 283.

⁶⁰ See, in this connection, a recent work by Anna Reznichenko, a historian of Russian philosophy, who titled her survey of two adherents of the doctrine of universal salvation, Sergius Bulgakov and Sergey Durylin, "Two Origenes on Russian manner," Reznichenko 2013, 264-279.

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