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## Palamas and Florensky: The Metaphysics of the Heart in Patristic and Russian Philosophical Tradition

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Justyna Kroczak (Zielona Góra)

## PALAMAS AND FLORENSKY THE METAPHYSICS OF THE HEART IN PATRISTIC AND RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION<sup>1</sup>

The metaphysics of the heart can be thought of as the religious concept. In fact, this metaphysics is implicitly based upon a Biblical understanding of heart, while one may speak of the heart in a physical or in a spiritual sense, a religious person considers it the center of their being. To such a believer the heart is the mystery above all mysteries<sup>2</sup>. While this metaphysics was first articulated by the Eastern Church Fathers, it was subsequently elaborated upon by Russian religious philosophers. However, Byzantine theology, in particular Palamism, had dealt with this concept long before it became an inspiration for Russian religious philosophers. Consequently, there are wholly legitimate grounds for a comparison of the conception present in the work of Gregory Palamas with that present in the later work of Pavel Florensky. The latter – a theologian, mathematician, philosopher, scientist and ultimately martyr – was one of the most visible personalities of the twentieth-century Russian religious renaissance. Palamas, on the other hand, inscribed himself in the pages of Byzantine history both for his theological work (his having formulated a theory which distinguished the divine essence from its energies) and for his apologetic work (his having been a staunch defender of the Hesychastic monks). As scholars have noted, the influence of Palamas' philosophy on that of Florensky is evident, above all, in those deliberations concerning the nature of the heart and its role and meaning in mystic experience<sup>3</sup>. As for Florensky, while the metaphysic of the heart features most prominently in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (*Столп*

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<sup>1</sup> Polish version of this article can be found: J. KROCZAK, *Palamas i Florenski. Metafizyka serca w patrystycznej i rosyjskiej tradycji filozoficznej i literackiej*, [in:] *Metafizyka a literatura w kulturze rosyjskiej (Метафизика и литература в русской культуре)*, red. T. OBOLEVIТCH, Kraków 2012, p. 311–326. The article is part of the research project financed by National Science Centre Poland, decision number: DEC-2012/05/N/HS1/03256.

<sup>2</sup> В.Н. ТОПОРОВ, *О сердце в ранних произведениях Достоевского*, RLit 54, 2003, p. 311–313. All the translations are mine, unless I have noted different.

<sup>3</sup> Е.В. МОЧАЛОВ, *Антропологические темы в философии всеединства в России XIX–XX в.*, Нижний Новгород 2002, p. 206.

и утверждение Истины, 1914)<sup>4</sup>, it also figures in the *Iconostasis* (*Иконостас*, 1922)<sup>5</sup> and the Mariological period of his work. In Palamas' writings, on the other hand, the problematic of the heart is nearly ubiquitous. This paper, however, proposes to limit itself to relevant fragments of two of Palamas' works: *In Defense of Those who Devoutly Practise a Life of Stillness* ('Υπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων, 1338)<sup>6</sup> and *On Prayer and Purity of Heart* (Περὶ προσευχῆς καὶ καθαρότητος καρδίας, 1333)<sup>7</sup>. Examples will be cited, and commentary will be provided.

## 1. The Metaphysics of the Heart: an Introduction

In Greek patristic theological texts, the metaphysics of the heart is particularly prominent in fourteenth century Hesychasm and in the Jesus Prayer. When considered in its wider context, Hesychasm appears less as a new phenomenon and rather as a continuation of an Orthodox form of religious experience dating to the very roots of Christianity<sup>8</sup>. Nonetheless, over the course of the past three centuries, scholars have above all been interested in the problematic of the heart in connection with Hesychasm and Palamism<sup>9</sup>.

The spirituality of Orthodox Christianity can be characterized by a contemplative attitude, mediated through the symbolism of the liturgy or of the cult of icons<sup>10</sup>. Polish researcher writes that: *Russian Orthodox thought places a special emphasis on cultivation of the spiritual sphere, the center of which is the heart*<sup>11</sup>. We can find a similar remark in Florensky's *Iconostasis*:

the spiritual world, invisible, is not found somewhere distant from us, but rather it surrounds us [...]. However, be it due to a lack of experience or be it due to the imperfection of our spiritual eyes, we do not perceive this light-giving realm and often fail to suspect its existence. Only by the heart do we indistinctly intuit the general nature of the spiritual currents flowing around us.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>4</sup> P. FLORENSKY, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trans. B. JAKIM, Princeton 2004; П.А. ФЛОРЕНСКИЙ, *Столп и утверждение истины*, Москва 1990.

<sup>5</sup> P. FLORENSKY, *Iconostasis*, trans. D. SHEEHAN, O. ANDREJEV, New York 1996; П.А. ФЛОРЕНСКИЙ, *Иконостас*, [in:] IDEM, *Имена*, Москва 2008.

<sup>6</sup> ST. GREGORY PALAMAS, *In defense of those who devoutly Practice a Life at Stillness*, [in:] *The Philokalia. The complete text*, trans. G.E.H. PALMER, P. SHERRARD, K. WARE, vol. IV, London 1995, p. 331–342; *Gregorii Palamae De Hesychastis*, [in:] PG, vol. CL (cetera: PALAMAS, *De Hesychastis*), col. 1101B–1116B.

<sup>7</sup> ST. GREGORY PALAMAS, *On Prayer and Purity of Heart*, [in:] *The Philokalia...*, p. 343–345; *Gregorii Palamae De oratione et puritate cordis*, [in:] PG, vol. CL, col. 1117D–1122B.

<sup>8</sup> L. OUSPENSKY, *La Théologie de l'icône*, Paris 1980, p. 183–185; V. LOSSKY, *Vision de Dieu*, Neuchâtel 1962, p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> В.Н. ТОПОРОВ, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. E. BEHR-SIGEL, *The Place of the Heart: An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality*, trans. S. BIGHAM, Torrance 1992, p. 80–85.

<sup>11</sup> J. KAPUŚCIK, *Sens życia. Antropologiczne aspekty rosyjskiego renesansu duchowego XX wieku w świetle prawosławia*, Kraków 2000, p. 157.

<sup>12</sup> П.А. ФЛОРЕНСКИЙ, *Иконостас...*, p. 349.

Therefore, a pure heart which directs the course of one's life is the most precious possession a person may have. In the ascetic tradition of the Orthodox Church, the heart represents the center of the human being, it is the source of abilities, intellect and the will. It is the point from which all spiritual life issues and to which all spiritual life returns<sup>13</sup>. The ascetic desires to close his heart to sin (Gr. ἀπάθεια) and to constantly hold vigil over it<sup>14</sup>. Such a goal presupposes a constant struggle to maintain the heart's purity<sup>15</sup>, the defense of the heart (Gr. φυλακή καρδίας).

The concept of heart was used in the Bible to designate the psychophysical center of a person's life. It was the seat of all the vital energies. As Mikhail Meslin has pointed out, because in general the Hebrews were not completely aware of its function, the heart in any literal or scientific sense of the word rarely appears in the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, they seemed to be cognizant of the importance of the organ<sup>16</sup>. Might be said that for the Jews, the heart was rather the intellectual center, where were seated all the faculties of the human spirit. The heart represented one's essence and core; it was the spiritual center of the person and, therefore, the real, essential person (Prv 4, 23). Heart is the center from which the entire person radiates and emanates, but it itself remains hidden in the deepest recesses<sup>17</sup> – Jesus is described as having been gentle and humble of heart (Mt 11, 29). Saint Peter (1 Pe 1, 3-4) himself spoke of the heart's being hidden to the person, (Gr. ὁ κρυπτός τῆς καρδίας ἀνθρώπου): by which he may wished to express that a person's real essence is hidden in the depths of the heart.

This is the biblical foundation from which Hesychasm and the Prayer of the Mind arose. The unbroken imprecation, *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner*, is derived from Jesus' mysterious invocation in the Gospel of Luke: one must always pray and not give up (Lc 18, 1)<sup>18</sup>. Saint Paul reiterated this in his admonition to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thess 5, 17). In mystical and ascetic literature, the Jesus Prayer is also referred to as the Prayer of the Heart. This follows from the fact that heart is the primary human organ, the conjunction of the spirit and matter, which unites the physical and psychological construction with the spiritual. For this reason, prayers ought to be accompanied by alertness and attention (Mt 26, 41). It is considered that Saint Macarius of Egypt<sup>19</sup> was the first teacher of

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J.-Y. LELOUP, *Being Still: A Forgotten Mystical Tradition*, trans. M. LAIRD, Mahwah 2003, p. 136–140.

<sup>14</sup> T. ŠPIDLÍK, *The Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook*, trans. A.P. GYTHIEL, Kalamazoo 1986, p. 433–436.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 432–434.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. M. MASLIN, *Heart*, trans. K. ANDERSON, [in:] *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. ELIADE, vol. V, New York 1993, p. 236–237.

<sup>17</sup> Π. Α. ΦΛΟΡΕΝΣΚΙЙ, *Στολν...*, p. 351–352. Cf. also P. ΕΥΔΟΚΙΜΟΝ, *L'Orthodoxie*, Neuchâtel 1959, p. 73–77.

<sup>18</sup> All citations from the Bible come from: *World English Bible*, published by Rainbow Missions.

<sup>19</sup> Saint Macarius of Egypt (300–390), also Macarius the Great was the famous ascetic and hermit. He is thought to have been the author of *Spiritual Homilies*. Cf. *An Athonite Gerontikon: Sayings of the Holy Fathers of Mount Athos*, ed. I. KOTSONIS, Thessaloniki 1997.

pure prayer, this consisted of the continual repetition of short sentences, the most important element of which was the name of God, Jesus Christ. With the aid of his disciple, Evagrius Ponticus<sup>20</sup>, Saint Macarius articulated all the key elements which would recurrently characterize later Eastern monastic traditions. Saint Macarius identified the Evagrian intellect, the so-called νοῦς, with the heart<sup>21</sup>. In so doing, he affected a certain transformation: in the Orthodox context, the Prayer of the Mind was reconceptualized as the Prayer of the Heart. This was to be a personal prayer addressed to the incarnate Word, conspicuously characterized by a ceaseless recourse to the name of Jesus<sup>22</sup>. Palamas was one of the foremost theoreticians of such prayerfulness, and it is to him we shall now turn our attentions.

## 2. Gregory Palamas and Hesychastic Spirituality

Palamas was a well-educated monk. However, as he himself did not aspire to the title of a great thinker, coherent theological system is presented in his work<sup>23</sup>. Palamas' writings are topical treatises on Orthodox mysticism, prompted by the accusations of the anti-Hesychasts<sup>24</sup> (Hesychastic controversy).

Hesychastic controversy (also known as: Palamite controversy) erupted in Byzantium during the first half of the fourteenth-century. In brief, it was a struggle between Palamas, a monk from Athos, and the Calabrian theologian Barlaam (1290–1384). The initial dispute concerned the doctrine of God's knowability to the person as well as other essential theological issues. Palamas, for his part, believed that a person could attain to immediate knowledge of God and, for him, this was the goal and primary criterium of all theology. His doctrine held that, while a sincere mystic could not perceive the essence of God (Gr. οὐσία), it was possible to perceive His energies (Gr. ἐνέργειαι). In other words, the mystic could experience the eternal divine light. Barlaam, for his part, maintained that God was ultimately unknowable. He consequently criticized the devotional practice of

<sup>20</sup> Evagrius Ponticus (345–399) was one from the most famous Desert Fathers. He is the author of many ascetic writings. Cf. EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS, *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. R. SINKEWICZ, Oxford–New York 2003.

<sup>21</sup> S. Macarii *Ægyptii Homiliae*, hom. XV, [in:] PG, vol. XXXIV (cetera: MACARIUS), col. 589B.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. И. МЕЙЕНДОРФ, *Жизнь и труды святителя Григория Паламы*, trans. Г.Н. НАЧИНИН, Санкт-Петербург 1997, p. 193.

<sup>23</sup> A. TORRANCE, *Precedents for Palamas' Essence-Energies Theology in the Cappadocian Fathers*, VC 63, 2009, p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> The term "Hesychasts" (Gr. ἡσυχῆτοι) was employed by the Eastern Church to designate those monks who led a peaceful, ascetic life contemplation, directed towards the achievement of personal holiness and complete union with God. In other words, the Hesychast is a person maintaining silence and giving themselves fully over to a life of prayer. The forty-first canon of the Council in Trullo (692) treats such forms of attaining holiness. Palamas' own work represented an apologetic on behalf of the monks who practiced this devotional method.

the Hesychastic monks, which was supposed to lead to deification. More specifically, Barlaam discerned in this practice a variant of Messalian materialism, and he therefore accused Palamas of heresy when the latter maintained the absolute reality of the deification.

Monk from Calabria also joined the attack on the Hesychastic spirituality and Palamas, their most prominent apologist. Hesychasm, as practiced in the fourteenth-century, made use of a psychosomatic method of contemplation. This was intended to involve the entire body in the act of prayer, and it was a direct consequence of the Hesychasts' philosophical position. With relations to practice, for the Byzantine Hesychasts this prayer was a passionate imprecation accompanied by rhythmic breathing<sup>25</sup>. In the late Byzantine era, there arose a marked tendency to coordinate the two halves of the prayer with the process of inhalation and exhalation. The first part: *Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God*, was pronounced with the intake of breath, the second part: *have mercy on me, a sinner* was pronounced when the adept exhaled<sup>26</sup>. When praying, one was to sit on a twenty-centimeter table, one was to relax one's head and arms, and one was to direct one's attention inward toward the heart. As mentioned, the rhythm of the prayer was to be matched to the rhythm of the breath. A spiritual guide was essential, as was maintaining constant vigil and discipline and directing all attention toward the depths

<sup>25</sup> *Mnisi Góry Atos o duchowości prawosławnej*, ed. G. KRAŃCZUK, Hajnówka 1995, p. 113; J. TOFILUK, *Hezychazm i jego wpływ na rozwój duchowości*, *Elp* 6, 2002, p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> J. NAUMOWICZ, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Filokalia. Teksty o modlitwie serca*, ed. IDEM, Tyniec 1998, p. 39–40. An additional technique, testified to by the heartfelt writings of an anonymous nineteenth-century Russian pilgrim, appeared later. In addition to the rhythm of the breath, the prayer was to be synchronized to the beating of the heart, each successive word was uttered to a corresponding heartbeat (cf. *The Way of a Pilgrim: and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, trans. R.M. FRENCH, Pasadena 1993, p. 38–37). This variant of prayer was not yet known in *Philokalia*. Laypeople first became acquainted with the Jesus Prayer through the writings of a pilgrim, first published in Kazan' in 1870. Contemporarily, the Jesus Prayer is known by the term onomatodoxy (Russian: имяславие). Its twentieth-century history can be traced to the appearance of a book *On the Caucasus mountains (На горах Кавказа)*, 1907 (cf. ИЛАРИОН (АЛФЕЕВ), *Священная тайна церкви. Введение в историю и проблематику имяславских споров*, vol. I, Санкт-Петербург 2002, p. 291–341) by an author whose identity remains unknown, but who was most probably the monk Illarion. This book contained, besides a description of the anchoritic life, the traditional Orthodox doctrines concerning the Jesus Prayer. Particularly stressed is that neither for the monk nor for the lay believer can there be salvation without the name of Jesus (Russian: мирянин; Gr. κοσμικός). In the twentieth century, practitioners of the Jesus Prayer included, along with Florensky, Sergei Bulgakov and Aleksei Losev (П.А. ФЛОРЕНСКИЙ, *Имяславие как философская предпосылка*, [in:] IDEM, *Сочинения в четырех томах*, vol. III, pars 1, Москва 1999, p. 252–287; IDEM, *Об имени Божиим*, [in:] IDEM, *Сочинения...*, p. 352–362; IDEM, *Отрывок письма, написанного П.А. Флоренским по просьбе о. Архимандрита Давида в ответ на письмо Афонских имяславцев с Кавказа*, [in:] IDEM, *Сочинения...*, p. 362–363; IDEM, *Общечеловеческие корни идеализма*, БВе 1.2, 1909, p. 284–297; С.Н. БУЛГАКОВ, *Философия Имени*, Санкт-Петербург 1999; А.Ф. ЛОСЕВ, *Имяславие*, [in:] IDEM, *Имя*, Санкт-Петербург 1997, p. 7–17; IDEM, *11 тезисов о Софии, церкви, имени*, [in:] IDEM, *Имя...*, p. 23)

of the heart<sup>27</sup>. In contrast to both Platonism and prevailing Orthodox traditions, Palamas viewed the body as naturally good and for him, heart represented depth of the body and its primary intellectual organ<sup>28</sup>. It is worth remembering that earlier, during the Middle Ages, thanks to Nicephorus the Monk<sup>29</sup>, there had emerged in Byzantium a distinction between intellectual mysticism and the mysticism of heart. Whereas the first was derived from Neoplatonist anthropological dualism, the second was more akin to Biblical sources and the Stoic tradition. For their part, Palamas and the Hesychasts advocated the mysticism of heart.

It was in conjunction with the practice of controlled breathing that the Jesus Prayer attained its privileged status on Mount Athos. For his part, Barlaam derisively referred to his opponents as *navel-psychics* (Gr. ὀμφαλοψύχοι), or those who would locate their soul in their navels<sup>30</sup>. Such a slur irritated the Hesychasts to no end, seeing as they were fully convinced of the validity of their psychosomatic practice. Hesychastic prayer was to involve the entire person, soul and body, in prayer and had been developed with such a purpose in mind<sup>31</sup>.

Here we will focus upon a fragment of *In Defense of Those who Devoutly Practise a Life of Stillness*, a treatise extracted from the larger work generally referred to as *The Triads*. *The Triads* derives its name from its tripartite structure, consisting of three parts each containing three treatises. The title *Triads* was first used by Philotheus Coccinus<sup>32</sup> in his *Encomium Palamae*<sup>33</sup>. Yet for our purposes let us turn directly to Palamas:

Therefore the soul possesses multiple faculties, and by virtue of our nature, it is one of the bodily organs and lives being generated by the body. Which organ(s) make use of the faculties for the soul? We term this organ the intellect. At any rate, while no one has suggested that the intellect is situated in the fingernails, eyelashes, nostrils or lips, all agree that the intellect is seated somewhere inside us. Disagreement arises as to precisely where. Some locate the intellect, so to speak, *on the acropolis* (that is, in the head). Others prefer that most central location, the heart, that part which has been purified from natural life and serves as

<sup>27</sup> SAWA (HRYCUNIAK), *Modlitwa Jezusowa*, [in:] *Prawosławie. Światło ze Wschodu*, red. K. LEŚNIEWSKI, Lublin 2009, p. 470–471.

<sup>28</sup> PALAMAS, *De Hesychastis*, col. 1108A.

<sup>29</sup> Nicephorus the Monk lived in the second half of the thirteenth century. His major work is *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*. The edition: PG, vol. CXLVII, col. 945–996; English translation: *The Philokalia...*, p. 194–206.

<sup>30</sup> PALAMAS, *De Hesychastis*, col. 1116A.

<sup>31</sup> On Palamas and Hesychasm vide also e.g. J. MEYENDORFF, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems – collected Studies*, London 1974; IDEM, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, New York 1974; R.E. SINKEWICZ, *The 'Solutions' Addressed to George Lapithes by Barlaam the Calabrian and Their Philosophical Context*, MS 43, 1981, p. 151–217; IDEM, *Saint Gregory Palamas, The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, Toronto 1988; Y. SPITERIS, *Ostatni Ojcowie Kościoła. Kabisilas. Palamas*, trans. B. WIDŁA, Warszawa 2006, p. 151–356.

<sup>32</sup> Philoteus Coccinus (1300–1379) was a patriarch of Thessaloniki. He was also a disciple of Palamas and author of his biography.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. PG, vol. CLI, col. 551–656.

its support. For our part, we know that the intellect, being incorporeal, exists neither precisely inside nor outside us; however we hold that it is joined to us via the organ of the heart. We derive this not from any human doctrine, but from the Creator of humanity, who states in the Gospel: *That which enters into the mouth doesn't defile the man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man* (Mt 15, 11). He adds: *For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts [...]* (Mt 15, 19). Saint Macarius of Egypt echoes this: *The heart governs the entire human organism and, when grace takes possession of the heart with its laws, it thereby takes possession of all the thoughts and elements of that person. This is why the intellect and thoughts are seated there [in the heart – J.K.]*<sup>34</sup>. Therefore it follows that the heart is the treasury of reason and the primary intellectual organ of the body. Hence, were we to investigate and analyze in detail our intelligence, how else was one to treat the myriad of thoughts scattered and distracted by the senses, save by tracing them back to the depths of that selfsame sacred organ, the heart? It was fully consistent with what we have cited for Saint Macarius of Egypt to state: *it is there [in the heart – J.K.] one must look to see whether grace has written provided us with spiritual laws*. Where else but in the governing organ and the seat of grace, where the intellect and all thoughts are housed? Having comprehended this, one is in a better state to understand how crucial it was for those who had elected the quietist tenants of Hesychasm that they circumscribe and locate the intellect in the body, and especially in that most profound and intimate place, the heart.<sup>35</sup>

The fragment cited above is an extract from Palamas' response to the question of an anonymous monk. In his question (col. 1101B–1104A), the monk had expressed concerns as to the orthodoxy of Hesychasm, particularly the practice whereby controlled breathing was to direct the attention inward. To Hesychasts, after all, the intellect was situated inside and not outside the individual. For their part, the anti-Hesychasts ridiculed those monks who believed disciplining the breath was any pathway towards being granted God's grace (col. 1104A). This accusation was at any rate unfair, as the controlled breathing was only considered a means of concentrating the attention, and not any method of achieving salvation in and of itself. Having expressed these doubts, the monk deferred to Palamas, who he hoped could resolve them and thereby strengthen his resolve in the Hesychastic practice.

According to Palamas, the *law of sin* dominates the body. It is therefore necessary to negate it and institute the *law of mind* (Rom 7, 23). When this is accomplished, the body can become rather an asset and a guard for the intellect. This transformation is only possible through love. Through love, the body purifies itself and desire becomes a stimulus to virtue (col. 1105A). The glory and light of God arises in the heart. In Palamas' conception, the spirit is one of the organs of the body and loves being generated thereby (col. 1105B). However, all the faculties of the spirit are utilized by a different organ, the intellect (col. 1105B). The intellect is one of the organs located within the body. As cited above, some associate it with the head and others with the heart. In reality, Palamas states, the intellect is seated in the heart, which, enjoying a certain primacy, thereby governs all the subordinate

<sup>34</sup> MACARIUS, col. 589B.

<sup>35</sup> PALAMAS, *De Hesychastis*, col. 1105B–1108A.



faculties of soul<sup>36</sup>. While it would be ridiculous to locate the intellect in the fingernails, eyelashes, nostrils or lips, it is certainly somewhere within us (col. 1105C). Since the Holy Scriptures (as cited above) establish the primacy of the heart, for Palamas it is certain as well. Furthermore, Saint Macarius of Egypt, a significant authority for Palamas and one whom he repeatedly cites, along with other Holy Fathers had maintained as much<sup>37</sup>. Thus, the heart was the treasure-house of reason and the chief intellectual organ (col. 1105D). It was there one was to turn one's spiritual eyes to discover spiritual laws. Locating the intellect in the heart, the most central organ (col. 1108A), was fully justifiable: by means of the heart, the entire person could dwell in the Holy Spirit both in intellect and in body.

The identification of the intellect with the heart is so crucial for Palamas that it is worth citing yet another fragment, this one being from the *On Prayer and Purity of Heart*. This short ascetic treatise, which dates from Palamas' earliest activity as a writer, states:

By intellect we designate the activity of the intellect, consisting of reasoning and thoughts. The intellect is also that active force which the Holy Scriptures describe as the heart. Secondary to that, above all the powers extant in us, the spirit is intellectual. The activity of the intellect can be easily purified and tamed through prayer exercises and, above all, by contemplating one thing [that is, God] Our soul, which is the cause of this, is only purified if all our other powers and faculties are simultaneously purified as well. The soul is after all a unity consisting of multiple powers. When any of its faculties are tainted by sin, it becomes impure seeing as all those faculties form a community. If these faculties occasionally appear distinct, this is only due to the zealotry with which specific faculties are occasionally purified. The act of purification does not necessarily insinuate a faculty has become pure, as they form a union: in conjunction, a particular faculty may still be more impure than pure. Yet in this manner, in the moment of fervent prayer the intellect becomes pure and progressively purifies, either through the light of reason or through the reasonable light. Yet, if by this one consider oneself cleansed one has fallen into error and opened the door to temptation. Nonetheless, when the intellect, cognizant of the heart's impurity, does not become arrogant and remains humble through the aid of the spirit, it will more easily discover the impurity of its various faculties. Through progressing in humility and sadness, the intellect simultaneously discovers the remedy for all the various faculties and powers. By activity, it purifies the active faculties; by knowledge, it purifies the cognitive faculties; by prayer, it purifies the apprehensive faculties and thereby it may attain a lasting purity of heart and mind. Yet no one can attain this save through perfection in action and ceaseless vigilance against sin: constant observation guided by prayer.<sup>38</sup>

According to Palamas, the most precious gift God has given humanity is intellect. It is, of course, worth remembering that he does not conflate intellect with reason. Rather, he firmly distinguishes the two concepts. In his conception, intellect is the means of immediate knowledge of the fundamental truths of existence (and above all of moral behavior), whereas reason is the discursive organ (that

<sup>36</sup> Cf. G. MANTZARIDIS, *The Deification of Man*, trans. L. SHERRARD, New York 1984, p. 90–94.

<sup>37</sup> MACARIUS, col. 589B.

<sup>38</sup> *Gregorii Palamae De oratione et puritate cordis*, [in:] PG, vol. CL, col. 1120C–1121A.

is, the organ of reasoning). Reason quite often succors the intelligence, but it is impotent without it. The intelligence itself is not ideal and often falls into error when it becomes engrossed in worldly matters. When, however, the intelligence is focused on itself and the higher intelligence (of God), then that intelligence becomes centered in the heart<sup>39</sup>. Polish researcher Józef Naumowicz writes that the *νοῦς* refers to a dual human faculty: secular comprehension and the contemplation of God. In contrast to the intellect and reason, it does not operate by means of discursive apprehension, but through the intuitive apprehension of divine truths thanks to the light of grace<sup>40</sup>.

It is often considered that Palamas was a precursor of Blaise Pascal. Indeed, when Pascal states that we know God through the heart, he was close to the Eastern conception of the cognition of God. As does Palamas, Pascal views the heart not as the seat of mere emotions but rather of emotions bound to intuition, a faculty which he distinguishes from the discursive and the rational faculty<sup>41</sup>. It was thanks to his logic of the heart, *ordre du coeur* that Pascal found a way out of his radical, universal doubt. Pascal saw the source of understanding in the heart and in faith: not, as did the Cartesian formulation, in reason. Yet an even more fitting analogy to that of the author of *The Triads* presents itself in Florensky's conception of the heart.

### 3. The metaphysics of heart in Russian philosophy and literature

In Russian culture, the heart has long been a symbol invoked by writers, poets, philosophers and theologians. In Russian thought, the metaphysics of the heart was subsequently a preoccupation of Gregory Skovoroda (1722–1794)<sup>42</sup>, as is evident in his statement that *heart is the real person*<sup>43</sup>. This problematic was then an interest for the elder Slavophiles Ivan Kireevsky (1806–1856) and Aleksey Khomyakov (1804–1860). Kireevsky contrasted the Western metaphysics of reason with the Eastern metaphysic of the heart<sup>44</sup>. Khomyakov expressed a similar view and criticized the West's rationalist approach to philosophy, theology, culture and life. For Khomyakov, the heart was the life-giving source of faith<sup>45</sup>. Evgeny Trubetsky (1863–1920), who wrote that a person achieves the spiritual experiences which

<sup>39</sup> A. SIEMIANOWSKI, *Tomizm a palamizm. Wokół kontrowersji doktrynalnych chrześcijańskiego Wschodu i Zachodu w średniowieczu*, Poznań 1998, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> *Filokalia...*, p. 327.

<sup>41</sup> B. ТАТАКИС, *La philosophie byzantine*, Paris 1959, p. 273.

<sup>42</sup> Г.С. СКОВОРОДА, *Начальная дверь к христианскому добронравию*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Собрание Сочинений в 12 томах*, vol. I, Москва 1973, p. 111; ИДЕМ, *Разговор пяти путников об истинное счастье*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Собрание...*, vol. I, p. 341.

<sup>43</sup> В.В. ЗЕНЬКОВСКИЙ, *История русской философии*, vol. I, Paris 1948, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup> Zob. М.А. МАСЛИН, *Сердца метафизика*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Русская философия. Словарь*, Москва 1999, p. 435–436.

<sup>45</sup> А.С. ХОМЯКОВ, *Церковь одна*, Москва 1991, p. 24–33.

make revelation possible by means of the heart<sup>46</sup>, is also worth a mention. Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) touched similar issues when considering love, mainly in *The Meaning of Love*<sup>47</sup>.

Earlier Pamphil Yurkevič (1826–1874) presented the heart as a fundamental philosophical concept<sup>48</sup>. Yurkevič was highly esteemed both by Vassily Zenkovsky, the historian of Russian philosophy<sup>49</sup>, and by Solovyov, who consider Yurkevič his teacher. Yurkevič considered the heart to be fundamental ontological and anthropological category, and by it he also referred to the whole of a person's spiritual life. In his work, the heart was the deciding factor in moral valuations and crucial to any apprehension of God<sup>50</sup>. In his primary treatise regarding the heart, *Сердце и его значение в духовной жизни человека по учению Слова Божия*, Yurkevič writes:

Anyone who reads the Word of God attentively will easily notice that, in all the holy books and by all the inspired writers, the heart is seen as the spiritual center of the person. It is presented as being the primary organ and the focus of all the motor, volitional, sensual and intellectual faculties of the person.<sup>51</sup>

In the first part of this work he analyzes the Biblical concept of the heart and synthesizes the doctrine of the Church Fathers concerning this question. He asserts that the heart is the moral center of the person<sup>52</sup>. The heart binds together all the bodily faculties and serves as the organ of spiritual life<sup>53</sup>. It can express and reveal spiritual states too delicate to be apprehended by the rational intellect<sup>54</sup>. Yurkevič's work sought to defend the role of the heart and *the formation of the internal person* against contemplatory science, specifically against its tendency to explain the heart in biological, medical and chemical terminology. As is well-known, in Yurkevič's day materialism and positivism were at the height of their influence<sup>55</sup>.

In the twentieth-century, the heart would appear in the work of Boris Vyšeslavcev, Semyon Frank, Vasily Rozanov and Ivan Ilyin<sup>56</sup>. Having concluded

<sup>46</sup> Е.Н. ТРУБЕЦКОЙ, *Смысл жизни*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Избранное*, Москва 1995, p. 240. See also chapters 6 and 7 from this book: *Религиозный смысл человеческой мысли* and *Всемирная катастрофа и всемирный смысл*.

<sup>47</sup> V. SOLOVYOV, *The Meaning of Love*, New York 1947.

<sup>48</sup> П.Д. ЮРКЕВИЧ, *Сердце и его значение в духовной жизни человека по учению Слова Божия*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Философские произведения*, Москва 1990, p. 69–103.

<sup>49</sup> В.В. ЗЕНЬКОВСКИЙ, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>50</sup> Т. ОВОЛЕВИТШ, *Wiara jako locus philosophicus myśli rosyjskiej*, [in:] *Rosyjska metafizyka religijna*, red. ЕАДЕМ, W. KOWALSKI, Tarnów 2009, p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> П.Д. ЮРКЕВИЧ, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 71.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 73–74.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 85.

<sup>55</sup> J. КАРУŚЦИК, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>56</sup> М.А. МАСЛИН, *op. cit.*, p. 435.

this brief survey of examples, one would emphasize what is common to all these Russian thinkers – the notion that the heart somehow represents the fundamental unity of the person.

#### 4. Pavel Florensky and the mysticism of the heart

At the outset, it is worth noting that Florensky is one of the main representatives of this trend in Russian philosophy. While Yurkevič and the Church Fathers were influences on him, Florensky's own perspective was unique by virtue of its generality. His metaphysics of heart corresponds to and is completed by his metaphysics of light. For Florensky light was the light of the spirit of the godfearing person, a higher type of personality. The Orthodox temple was a symbol of this light to him, the heart of the believer was also such<sup>57</sup>.

Florensky's metaphysics of heart is primarily developed in *The Pillar and the Ground of the Truth*. This work opens with a discussion of the phenomenon of the body, he writes that the body is not substance, in the sense of physical matter, but rather form, in the sense not of external contours but rather of substantial structure. The etymology of the word *body* suggests its connection with *wholeness*, a body is a certain unity, individual and exceptional<sup>58</sup>. When speaking of the body, it is important to stress that the body itself and worldly corporeality are two different things. Certainly a person exists as a being connected to the world of matter via the body, and, in Florensky's view, this connection is so close... that *the fate of a person and of the whole of creation are inseparable. Hence the fall of humanity led to the fall of all creation*<sup>59</sup>. Yet the body is a necessary liability, for according to the Eastern tradition the union of body and soul is integral. One should not therefore ascribe to these thinkers a dualistic perspective.

With respects to the body, Florensky's thought partitioned the human being into three parts: the abdomen, chest and head. Each region of the body could give rise to its own respective mysticism; taken as a whole, the specific goal of mysticism was the proper development of the three bodily partitions, under the government of the chest (it being *above all connected with the human essence*). Progressing in a mystic understanding of each respective partition, be it the abdomen, chest or head, was conducive to the overall goal of bringing harmony to the individual. That is:

each particular mysticism necessarily increases the vital balance, and therefore ameliorates the sinful nature of man. However, it is only the mysticism of the human center, that particular mysticism which the person eminently capable of attaining grace practices, which revitalizes the interior, rectifies the person and favours their gradual growth. Monastic

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 436.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. П.А. ФЛЮРЕНСКИЙ, *Столп...*, p. 263–264.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 268–270.

mysticism is therefore naturally that of the chest, and of the heart: seeing as the heart has been considered the center of the chest for longer than we can remember. It is specifically to the heart than monastic mystic practice directs the attention.<sup>60</sup>

So says Florensky. The heart is the center of psychological and spiritual life. In the heart originate decisions concerning better or worse behavior. Desires and intentions are born there. It is the seat of the will and the nexus of all its activities (Prv 23, 26; Phil 1, 7). Furthermore, it is also the seat of all the spirit's apprehensive faculties (Prv 16, 1). According to scripture usage, to perceive something in the heart is synonymous with comprehending it (Dt 8, 5)<sup>61</sup>. As a rule, thoughts are of the heart. In addition, as language is the expression or manifestation of thought, and seeing that thought occurs in the heart, it follows that words also uttered from this organ (Iob 1, 5).

The heart is the center of the myriad spiritual feelings, desires and passions. For example, the heart attests to the various degrees of joy, which range from mere carefreeness to supernal delight in the face of God (Act 2, 46–47). The other side of the coin is that the heart experiences the various stages of suffering, which range from a mere melancholic depression to overpowering misery, when the person cries out from sorrow in the heart (Is 65, 14)<sup>62</sup>. The many functions ascribed to the heart include that of being the locus of a person's moral life. Similarly, the heart is where all the various moral states to which a person is subject occur; these range from the highest, mystic love of God (Ps 73, 26) to the pride, which idolizing oneself takes one's own heart for the heart of God (Ez 28, 2). In brief, it is the heart which is the root of everything good or evil in word, thought or deed which emanates from the person, and it is the treasury where a person's virtue or wickedness is stored (Lc 6, 45).

It follows from this that one ought to give their heart to God, that they might be faithful in word, thought and deed (Prv 23, 26)<sup>63</sup>. The goal of an ascetic's life is purity of a specific kind: the purity of the heart (Ps 51, 12). When the heart is cleansed, the believer begins to merge with God. This progressive union rectifies and regulates the ascetic's entire being. Spiritualization denotes the process of cleansing the heart, and the heart is the fiery focus of spiritual life. The very word heart in Indo-European languages has connotations of *core* or *center*<sup>64</sup>. In terms of usage it is frequently employed to express such meanings as *interior*, *bosom*, *center* or *core*<sup>65</sup>. As the heart is the essential 'core' of a person, the possession of a clean heart opens vistas of a higher, spiritual world and thereby transforms the entire

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 264–265.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 535.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 536.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 538.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 267–268.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 269–270.

person. According to Florensky, *through possession of a pure heart, a person comes to understand that all being is continuous negation: one great refusal, 'No', and, above all, 'Not-I'*<sup>66</sup>. Yet, this rift between that which is and which is not the ego can be bridged through love. Love is understood as a substantial act, emanating from the subject to the object yet having its support in the object. Through love, the soul and body are sanctified. The chapter about body, heart and mind referenced above leads into a chapter concerning Wisdom-Sophia. This concerns *in what manner creation is thought, or in what manner it thinks itself, or in what manner it exists as itself*<sup>67</sup>. This wisdom is the mysterious mediate essence which renders possible to the believer a perception of God in their innermost *core*<sup>68</sup>.

Mariology presents one final field where the significance of heart has been analyzed. In this tradition, the greatness and wealth of Mary was the purity of her heart and her heart's purity implied its transparency. Bulgakov, one of the Russian Sophiologists, even went so far as to claim that the incarnation of Christ was realized not merely in one person, but in two: both in Jesus Christ himself and in the Virgin Mary<sup>69</sup>. There is no contradiction involved in seeing the Mother of God as the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit and in there simultaneously being an exteriorization of the cult of the nature of Christ in her own. Mary was the person who first and most perfectly realized what a gift had been received from God, quite possibly this was due to the purity of her heart, where were concealed her wealth and greatness<sup>70</sup>. In the opinion of Florensky, because of her unsurpassed virginity and purity, Mary appeared as the entity most similar to Sophia and was characterized by total transparency. Mary received the eternal spark of the life of the Trinity. Moreover she accepted the love of the Father, who personally gave himself through His Son<sup>71</sup>. She was the Mother of God, beauty incarnate, the glory of the world and the ornament of all Creation<sup>72</sup>.

## 5. Summary

It would be interesting to situate the work of Dostoyevsky – the main Russian metaphysician – among the various metaphysics of the heart which have been mentioned above. Dostoyevsky was not really an academic philosopher and

<sup>66</sup> Г.Ф. ГАРАЕВА, *Павел Александрович Флоренский*, Краснодар 2007, p. 35.

<sup>67</sup> П.А. ФЛОЛЕНСКИЙ, *Столп...*, p. 318.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Z. KIJAS, *Maryja w tajemnicy wcielenia w świetle antropologii trynitarnej Pawła Florenskiego*, SMat 2.1, 2000, p. 147.

<sup>69</sup> J. KLINGER, *Zarys prawosławnej mariologii*, [in:] IDEM, *O istocie prawosławia. Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1983, p. 225.

<sup>70</sup> Z. KIJAS, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>71</sup> V. СИО, *Wziąć Maryję do siebie*, Kraków 1993, p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> More on that issue: J. MEYENDORFF, *Wisdom-Sophia: Contrasting approaches to a complex theme*, DOP 41, 1987, p. 398–400.

considered himself rather an artist, particularly in that his notion of philosophy would not have been in any way scientific. He distrusted Reason and believed that the heart and faith served as better guides. In various contexts, the problematic of the heart appears throughout his work, and several publications have already broached this subject<sup>73</sup>.

Dostoyevsky's entire oeuvre could essentially be characterized as an exploration of Pascal's basic idea of the *greatness and the poverty of man*. It is an idea also forcefully expressed in the well-known poem by Gavriła Deržavin (1743–1816): *I the master, I the slave, I the insect, I God*. To paraphrase Dostoyevsky, God and the devil battle within the human heart<sup>74</sup>, and his conception of the organ and its meaning in the works from 1860 to 1870 shows a clear affinity to the biblical understanding. The heroine of the short story *The Meek One* provides an example of a positive figure characterized by humility and a pure heart (Russian: смирение)<sup>75</sup>. On the contrary, a negative character dominated by an empty and callous heart is portrayed in Stavrogin from *The Demons*.

The above analysis suggests that the problematic of the heart, particularly in the metaphysical sense, permeates some aspects of Russian Orthodox culture. The Russian concept of heart is by equal parts philosophical, theological and mystic, but one should remember the assertion of Vladimir Lossky that Russian Orthodox is the mystical theology *par excellence*<sup>76</sup>. At any rate, for Russian theologians, philosophers or religious writers, heart is the core of the integral human being.

**Abstract.** This paper focuses on the philosophical issue known as the *metaphysics of the heart* within Orthodox Christianity – both Russian and Byzantine versions. Russian religious thought is based on patristic tradition. Influences and connections can be seen in Florensky's philosophy of All-Unity. This Russian philosopher was highly inspired by Gregory Palamas, fourteenth-century Eastern Church. These two Orthodox thinkers, mainly their metaphysics of heart are objects of interests.

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<sup>73</sup> В.Н. ТОПОРОВ, *op. cit.*; Н.Т. АШИМБАЕВА, *Особенности «сердцеведения» Достоевского*, [in:] ЕАДЕМ, *Достоевский: Контекст творчества и времени*, Санкт-Петербург 2005, p. 67–87.

<sup>74</sup> Б.П. ВЫШЕСЛАВЦЕВ, *Вечное в русской философии*, [in:] ИДЕМ, *Кризис индустриальной культуры*, Москва 2006, p. 618.

<sup>75</sup> S. ROMAŃCZUK, *Cichość serca (кротость)*, [in:] *Idee w Rosji. Идеи в России. Ideas in Russia*, red. A. DE LAZARI, vol. II, Łódź 1999, p. 208.

<sup>76</sup> V. LOSSKY, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, New York 1976, p. 9.