

VJAČESLAV IVANOV AND THEOLOGY¹

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Это был долгий период смутных поисков,
глухого брожения умов, алчущих религи-
озной гармонии, миросозерцания целост-
ного и утешительного. Рождались причуд-
ливые сказания, возникали иррациональ-
ные “могилы богов”.
(Ivanov 1994: 71)

Горних стран потребна мера,
Недр земных измерить дно.
Говорят душе равно
Умозрение и вера:
Вифлеемская пещера,
Новый гроб в скале – одно.
(III, 556)

1.

The fact that Vjačeslav Ivanov was not a theologian has limited both his acknowledged influence on professional theologians and the attention paid to the theological implications of his works by his readers. Yet this does not mean that his works have not proven of value to theologians, nor that non-theologians can view Ivanov's potential theology as a merely incidental aspect of his thought. Ivanov himself fully realized the significance of theology in his work, as well as that of his work for theology, as he hinted in an article from 1908:

[В] эстетических исследованиях о символе, мифе, хоровой драме, *реалиоризме* [...] я подобен тому, кто иссекает из кристалла чашу, веря, что в нее вольется благородная влага, – быть может, священное вино. (II, 571)

As this quotation indicates, Ivanov saw an organic, crystalline unity at the base of his topical studies in aesthetics, cultural typology and religious psychology. His articles do yield definitive and closely argued conclusions, but they also seek to communicate aspects of their author's inscrutable, pre-rational intuition, as well as a sense of the immeasurability of the full task at hand. Both the intuition and its incommunicability are expounded in Ivanov's articles through abundant quotation of poetry (mostly his own), oblique intellectual allusions, implicit polemic and selective self-revelation ("umalčivanie").² Few of Ivanov's theoretical works were spontaneous in genesis, most being evoked by some more or less incidental commission or arising from literary polemics; still, he always used the immediate occasion to explore the implications of a silent, but stable and perceptible basic position. Therefore, while Ivanov never formally addresses theology, it is not difficult to sense that his various phenomenological studies involve some theological precepts.

Unfortunately, Ivanov's expectation that readers would divine his underlying theological meaning and inspiration through its immediate expression has not often been met. The most lurid example of misguided appreciation is the following passage from an essay by the Symbolist poet and future priest Sergej Solov'ev:

В своем стремлении к разрушению основ христианской веры, искусно лавируя между различными течениями современной русской мысли, он, в целом ряде статей и стихотворных произведений, выводит христианство из недр греческой мистики, отождествляя символы Диониса и Христа, не останавливаясь перед такими выражениями, как "Христос-Геракл" и даже "Голгофа Вакха". Туманный язык часто затемняет от читателя истинный смысл теорий В. Иванова, и этим можно объяснить такие явления, как сопоставление В. Иванова чуть ли не с отцами церкви в книге В. Эрнста о Сковороде. (Solov'ev 1916: 52)³

Sergej Solov'ev was not the only one to accuse Ivanov of heresy. In the context of the émigré church schism in the nineteen-twenties, Georgij Grabbe traced the Russian Church's decline back to the Symbolist period, and specifically to Ivanov's meeting Anna Minclova, which allegedly gave a foothold to the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross in Russia (Grabbe 1927: 10). A view characteristic of conservative commentators is the following:

В двадцатом веке “радения” совершались не в лесах, а в петроградских гостинных и отдельных кабинетах ресторанов. Кровь “культурно” вытаскивали и пили с вином. Пляски, хороводы – сохранились. Мэнад, вакханок – заменили философы, артисты, поэты – те, кто пытается ныне учить нас Православию! (*Vozbuditeli raskola* 1927: 20)

This passage is revealing in several regards. Acknowledging the mystical basis of Russian modernism, the anonymous author finds Ivanov's patented terms symptomatic of its ambivalent religious inspiration, encompassing ancient orgiastic and the Russian sectarians (Chlysty). Moreover, he discerns a direct link between these religious ambitions and the theology of such thinkers as S.N. Bulgakov, A.V. Kartašev, and other prominent émigré thinkers grouped around the St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris. The author testifies not only to the notoriety of some of Ivanov's ideas, but also to the common impression that, in some unfathomable way, they aspired to have significance for the Church.⁴

However, all of these critiques underscore the danger of making judgments on the basis of a hasty reading of Ivanov's works. One must not seek to label the defining unity of his thought with individual formulations culled from isolated sources, whether they be Ivanov's own articles or memoiristic literature. Superficial readings are particularly misleading with respect to his writings' religious import. For example, in his 1909 article ‘Ancient Terror’ Ivanov postulates an ancient belief in a cosmic goddess, what he terms thelmonotheism (III, 103). Despite his obvious (though vague) sympathy with this belief he would later warn one student against interpreting it “as an integral part” of his own religion (Segal 1994: 343). Another example is revealed by contemporaries' diaries, which preserve two contradictory statements on the virginity of Mother of God, pronounced only four months apart in 1909 (Obatnin 1994: 143; El'čaninov 1984: 61); taken together they bear witness only to his particular interest in this Christian mystery and his knowledge of esoteric and allegorical traditions. A piecemeal approach to Ivanov's “religion” can only lead to its fragmentation and distortion.⁵ In order to receive guidance in its interpretation, one must turn to the most immediate and integral part of his creative heritage – his poetry.

As poet, Ivanov understood himself roughly as fulfilling the role, and exercising the rights, of prophet, as expounded by Vladimir Solov'ev in his tripartite vision of theocracy.⁶ Solov'ev understood prophecy, not as the prediction of future events, but as the “free and living activity” of the Holy Spirit, that unites the divinely-ordained Church and state in the common, divine-human task (Solov'ev 1948: 206; cf. II, 87). Charismatic prophecy hovers above traditional realms of human activity, whether they are concerned with phenomena immanent to the world (aesthetics) or transcendent

(religion), presaging and prefiguring the future unity of the two cosmic realms. Accepting this definition at least for Ivanov's self-perception, one must seek to determine Ivanov's "prophetic" message within the dynamic process of cosmic integration, without substituting any of its parts for the whole. For this reason we shall commence our consideration of Ivanov's theological significance with the analysis of a poem.

Есть в Оптиной пустыни Божия Матерь Спорительница.
По видению старца Амвросия
Написан образ Пречистой:
По край земли дивное
Богатство нивное;
Владычица с неба
Глядит на простор колосистый;
Спорятся колосья,
И множатся в поле снопы золотистого хлеба...

Тайныя церкви глубин святорусских Затворница,
Руси боримой со светлыми духи Поборница,
Щедрая Благотворительница,
Смут и кровей на родимой земле Умирительница,
Дай нам хлеба в скорости, –
Добрым всходам спорости,
Матерь Божия Спорительница!

22 декабря [1917]

(Ivanov 1918; with inaccuracies IV, 75)

This poem is the seventh and final one in a cycle written in response to the October Revolution, entitled 'Songs of the Time of Troubles' ('*Pesni smutnogo vremeni*'). At the time, according to a later memoirist, the cycle was perceived as "malicious, counter-revolutionary verse";⁷ this, together with the fact that Ivanov did not include it in his posthumous collection *The Evening Light* (*Svet večernij*), has led to its marginalization in Ivanov's poetic corpus. Still, the poems of the cycle crystallize large themes in Ivanov's creative work and grant entrance into the world of the integral poet-thinker.

This is certainly true with respect to the historiosophical and political stance adopted in the cycle, which moves from an empirical reaction to the events of late 1917 towards their metaphysical basis and religious resolution. In the closing months of 1917, Ivanov had already inscribed the following prognosis:

Революция протекает внерелигиозно. Целостное самоопределение народное не может быть внерелигиозным. Итак, революция не выражает донныне целостного народного самоопределения. [...] Для истинного свершения своего [...] она

должна явить целостное и, следовательно, прежде всего религиозное самоопределение народа. (III, 364)

Such a probing reaction to the Revolution was well characterized by D.H. Lawrence: "It is the absence of the Easter kiss which makes the Bolshevik bread barren, dead. They eat dead bread, now" (1962: 238). Ivanov, however, would never have agreed that religion could be completely and irrevocably absent, and he fully appreciated the spiritual value of suffering and deprivation; he concludes his cycle on the revolution envisioning new crops of enlivened bread. Here, perhaps, we see an example of the Christian aesthetic principle Ivanov called "prophesying in hope", instead of "in memory", which was the realm of pre-Christian art (III, 97). The vision of humanity as a ripe field is essentially eschatological: instead of seeking causes of events in a lost Golden Age, it seeks their ends in the age to come.

The cycle is also significant in the way that it appropriates the traditions of Russian literature for illustration and confirmation of the inevitably religious destination of culture, as it achieves unity with religion in the future synthesis in a transformed cosmos. In previous poems of the cycle reference is made to such texts as Puškin's 'The Demons' ('Besy') and *The Bronze Horseman*, Lermontov's 'Meditation' ('Duma'), Dostoevskij, even Nekrasov's 'Morning Stroll' from *On the Weather*, all works containing prophetic statements and images concerning the Russian Revolution. Ivanov's final poem in his cycle on the revolution is both the culmination of this implicit meditation on the ways of Russian literature and a step away from literature in the strict sense towards semi-liturgical writing, a kind of overture to the symphony of Russian literature.

The first clearly liturgical feature of the poem is its subject, the Icon of the Mother of God "Sporitel'nica chlebov", which was revealed in about 1890 to St. Amvrosij of Optina, just before his repose in 1891.⁸ The degree of Amvrosij's participation in the icon's composition is not entirely clear: he probably named the icon and may himself have directed its composition, but he might simply have directed that the harvest scene be added to an existing icon; some accounts claim that he merely was presented the icon in its existing state.⁹ In no account of the origin of "Sporitel'nica chlebov", contrary to Ivanov's poem, is there any mention of the icon being conceived in a vision. Whatever its actual origin, Amvrosij presented the icon to the Šamordino Convent he founded near Optina Pustyn', indicating that its feast be celebrated on October 15. For its liturgical celebration Amvrosij also composed a short verse to be added to every other stanza of the Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God: "Rejoice, o Full of Grace, the Lord be with Thee! Grant also us unworthy ones the dew of Thy grace and show Thy mercy!" Subsequently a new Akathist Hymn to the icon has been composed, along with a special

devotional prayer and the shorter hymns used in regular church services, the troparion and kondakion.

Пречистая Дево Мария, Мати Царя Небеси и Земли! Благо-
утробно призираеши на любящих Сына Твоего, Христа Бога
нашего, и трудящихся во имя Его вечного ради спасения, и
подаеши им вся обильно к наслаждению, Спорительнице су-
щи хлебов им, избавляя их всякия нужды и утеснения и
устроая им рабом Твоим сущим, избавление вечныя муки и
жизнь вечную.

Честное жилище бывшее неизреченного естества Божест-
веннаго, выше слова и паче ума и грешным еси Споручица,
Подаваеши благодать и исцеление, яко Мати всех царствую-
щих. Моли Сына Твоего получитьи нам милость в день суд-
ный. ('Akafist' 1992)

The icon "Sporitel'nica chlebov", like the similar "Bogomater' Deržavnaja" (Panteleimon 1958: 530-531), has thus seen a rapid spread from local veneration to regular liturgical status in the Russian Orthodox Church.

The unusual structure of Ivanov's poem is actually quite reminiscent of a troparion and kondakion, which are sung together in Orthodox services in honor of whatever or whomever is being celebrated on any given day.¹⁰ Either kind of liturgical stanza can consist of a descriptive exposition, as seen in the first stanza of Ivanov's poem, or a direct and encomiastic appeal, as seen in the second stanza. Although both stanzas of the "Sporitel'nica" hymns as we have quoted them are addressed to the Mother of God, the same combination as in Ivanov's poem can be found, for example, for the feast of the Annunciation. In the hymns composed to the "Sporitel'nica" icon, however, one can notice a concentration of epithets in the kondakion (the second hymn), as in Ivanov's poem. In addition to the bipartite structure, another hymnic feature is the devotional tone of Ivanov's poem, which can be compared to that of the famous Akathist, a long series of kondakia and oikoi. Some have seen the Akathist as excessively devotional with respect to the Mother of God, Who, in Orthodox tradition, must not be separated in devotion from Her Son (a prescription followed in both hymns to the "Sporitel'nica" icon). The poem's liturgical feel is augmented by a pair of Church Slavic grammatical forms (the genitive singular feminine "tajnyja cerkve" and the instrumental plural "duchi"; the form "Mater" might also be included), and many of the words of the poem, especially the epithets of the Mother of God, are perhaps more common in Church Slavic than in Russian.

In 1913, Ivanov had confessed that "in his long meditations on the essence of poetry" he had "lost the ability to recognize the limits of holy allotments", so that some of his poems would doubtless seem to many "to be

dedicated to subjects inaccessible to the Muse by their loftiness or their 'transcendence'" (III, 7). While unable to judge "desirable from undesirable" according to content, Ivanov claims that the ultimate measure of appropriateness is "the integrity of form" (III, 8). Not too long before writing "Songs of the Time of Troubles", Ivanov had again defended the mixture of faith and artifice in his religious poetry by alluding specifically to the "most difficult and refined form" of the Akathist Hymn (Ivanov 1916). While affirming the artist's freedom to use such forms as "an expression of the pure need of strict prayer", he notes that the poet is most convincing when he is "true to his own style" (*ibid.*). Following Ivanov's indications, one easily sees that, despite its liturgical accoutrement, his poem remains decidedly a modern poem. Firstly, the lines are rhymed in an irregular fashion. The rhymes are, moreover, very significant for the meaning of the poem, for example "Amvrosija" is linked by rhyme with "kolos'ja", and by an inner rhyme to the word "Božija" from the first line; the ripening ear of wheat ("kolos") and laboring hermit are likened to each other in their devotion, both achieving a divine state of perfection, as the Eucharistic bread and divine-humanity, respectively. The word "Sporitel'nica" is marked in the first stanza by its lack of rhyme, and in the second stanza by ending the only non-paired line (which does, however, rhyme with two other lines). The word's odd position links the beginning and end of the poem; its meaning stresses the organic nature of the spiritual of growth patronized by the Mother of God and concentrates the reader's attention on the word "Sporitel'nica" itself. Among the poem's other non-liturgical formal features is its loose but clear rhythm, alternating between two- and three-foot meters, and combinations thereof.

The second main distinction between Ivanov's poem and liturgical hymnography concerns the epithets of the Mother of God. "Prečistaja" is traditional, and "Sporitel'nica" stems from the icon, but all of the remaining epithets ("Pobornica", "Blagotvoritel'nica", "Umiritel'nica", and "Zatvornica") are not themselves used with any frequency in liturgical texts, although similar ones are (cf. "Voevoda", "Zastupnica"; "Vratarnica"¹¹ is the actual name of the revered Iveron Icon of the Mother of God). Also, the epithets are given in the nominative case, not the vocative of Church Slavic hymns (e.g., "Nevesto nenevestnaja" from the original Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God).

Therefore the poem exists in some space between poetry and liturgy, incorporating the two, linking them at the root, but giving itself wholly over to neither. It asserts both the religious destination and creative freedom of art, in accordance with Ivanov's understanding of art as prophecy. It would be an injustice, therefore, to view the poem as a contamination of poetry and liturgy that subordinates both to some arbitrary criterion. It would be more accurate to see it as a myth of the prophet-poet, caught in his eternally artistic movement towards the final reunification of culture and religion in the King-

dom of God, whether the latter is understood as Solov'ev's millennial Empire or as the fulfillment of the Church in a more traditional sense. In this sense the poem clarifies the role and position of the prophetic artist while demonstrating that for Ivanov, at least in the late 1910s, the presaged and prefigured reunification, eschatological reality, would preserve forms more or less traditional in Russian Orthodoxy. We find not only a myth of the poet's general stance as prophet, but also a symbol of his positive confession of Orthodoxy in this particular period.

Both the prophetic nature of art and Ivanov's personal faith refer us to the central principle of his world-view: the belief in two, mutually dependent worlds, heavenly and earthly. The two worlds are one in principle, in possibility, and – eschatologically – in reality; but in time, in space, the two worlds appear as dichotomous. In his book on Skovoroda, mentioned by Sergej Solov'ev as the apotheosis of Vjačeslav Ivanov, Vladimir Ėrn called such a world-view “dualistic monism”, or “supra-essential realism” (1912: 263). In the poem under consideration this principle is reflected with particular clarity in the person of the Mother of God, who is simultaneously a supra-essential being with dominion over the earth and the earth itself, both the prototype and the icon of the cosmos. The connection between the Mother of God and the earth is expressed in the lines:

Владычица с неба
Глядит на простор колосистый;
Спорятся колосья,
И множатся в поле снопы золотистого хлеба...

The two levels of reality are parallel: the Mother of God looks, the earth brings forth fruit. Indeed the two levels are in a sense identical, which is what allows the poet, when speaking of the icon, to say “There *is* in Optina Pustyn' the Mother of God...”. This relationship of identity, for Ivanov, is symbolic, and therefore he can speak both of the earth and of the icon as symbols of the Mother of God, i.e., as manifestations of her essence in time and space. The symbolic nature of the cosmos also extends to the particular actions of beings, what Ivanov would call myths. The Mother of God not only is the earth, She brings forth fruit – “the Fruit of her womb, Jesus” in the traditional “Hail Mary” prayer, the literal fruit of the earth in this poem, or the Eucharistic bread that makes all of these levels of reality present simultaneously and in the same place. Each of these acts is mythical insofar as it is performed by a transcendent subject within the bounds of time and space.

In these images Ivanov's Symbolism reveals its principal significance for understanding the interplay of divine and natural realities in Christianity, preeminently in the sacraments. Indeed, Eucharistic symbols were prominent

in Ivanov's theories as early as 1905, in the early article 'On Descent', which details aesthetic principles characterized by phrases from the Eucharistic canon.¹² The doctrine of real presence is an obvious model for Ivanov's Realistic Symbolism, but this doctrine itself is of limited value without a broader understanding of the nature of symbolic relations, and of the realities that are being made present. Ivanov places the principle of symbolism, and the symbol itself, at the center of an entire complex of doctrines, covering everything from aesthetics to cosmology. Ivanov's achievement logically leads back to reflection on the Eucharistic vision that lay at its beginning.

This points to Ivanov's first major and lasting contribution to Orthodox theology: the symbol and myth as categories that explain embodiments of transcendent reality and truth. As we have seen, the symbol itself is a particularly rich and powerful concept, singularly "prophetic" in its ability to integrate entire doctrines in its very definition. Ivanov's gradual contemplation of the symbol revealed a distinct metaphysics ("monistic dualism") and the kernel of a renewed sacramentology. In the absence of direct documentary evidence, it is premature to speak of Ivanov's direct influence on theologians who have elaborated a revitalized Orthodox sacramentology and aesthetics, from Pavel Florenskij to Vladimir Lossky and Alexander Schmemmann,¹³ but Ivanov's writings on the symbol undoubtedly played a central role in establishing the ontological dignity of the religious principle of representation, as an expression of transcendent reality that remains in some true sense identical to that reality (cf. Lepachin 1988). The importance of his theories for Onomatodoxy ("imjaslavie"), which promotes belief in divine names as icons or symbols of the divinity, has recently begun to receive due attention (Evtuhov 1997: 213-214; Ghidini 1996). But Ivanov's contribution was broad and rich enough that it inspired not only an enriched understanding of liturgical art and the sacraments, but even of dogma as symbolic and antinomial formulations of transcendent truth (cf. II, 613-614). Whatever his direct influence may have been, the reader of Ivanov recognizes much in the modern Orthodox theology of the symbol that can be traced to him and which might benefit from renewed acquaintance with this source.

The symbols and myths of Mary discussed above make manifest the energies of her nature. Perhaps the central symbol of the Mother of God in the poem is the untranslatable epithet and symbol "Sporitel'nica", both the principle and agent of fertility. The word "Sporitel'nica" is both clear and obscure. It is clear that the word refers to some aid rendered to the organic process; etymologically the word is connected to the English "spore", a kind of parcel of life. Yet there appears to be no single word in English that would describe precisely what is meant by the phrase "sporjatsja kolos'ja". It is not fertilization, nor is it ripening; it is the intermediate stage when the fertilized grain accepts life and begins its growth. Moreover, no biological term in English seems fully appropriate for the Mother of God; "Facilitator" is a

weak compromise for the rich “Sporitel’nica”, the obscurity of which underscores both its great semantic capacity and, ultimately, its transcendent origin. It effectively communicates the silence inherent in any work of art, the poet’s silence before the fact of creativity and before the object of his contemplation (cf. Ivanov 1916).

In the case at hand both aspects of the poet’s creative-receptive act are united in a single image: the object of contemplation is precisely the creative potential of the cosmos. The life-giving aspect of the Mother of God had particular interest for Ivanov, engaged as he was in reuniting the two separate realms through the receptivity of the lower realm. The Mother of God, identified in the Orthodox tradition as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jacob’s Ladder, joining heaven to earth, is the patron of all human growth, and particularly of art, the preeminent objectification of, and witness to, ontological growth. As such, She becomes for Ivanov and other Symbolists the pre-eminent patron of “prophecy”, this prefiguration of ontological and phenomenal unity.¹⁴ In this sense the Mother of God is even present in this poem on another level, as the leaven on which it has grown.

If we identify the symbol as Ivanov’s first important contribution to Orthodox theology, then his second will be this view of spiritual growth through the receptivity of divine energies, and of holiness as a palpable gift.¹⁵ It is significant that the poem is not only about the Mother of God, but also about Starec Amvrosij, one of the pillars of modern Russian sanctity. Apropos of Dostoevskij, Ivanov wrote that “he understands how incomparable is the joy of the people when on its earthly fields, amid the stunted stalks half-choked by weeds, a blade shoots up that is born in God as the precursor of the coming crop of a better humanity; like a Eucharistic stalk in which the Holy Ghost has invisibly transformed the Earth into the Sun, the grains of wheat into the body of the Lamb” (1989: 160; Russian text III, 316, cf. IV, 584). The “good crops” called for by Ivanov in the poem are personified by Amvrosij, whose name after all rhymes with “Božij” and “kolos’ja”. If we read a couple of individual lines from the poem this picture stands out with particular clarity:

По видению старца Амвросия
Написан образ Пречистой:
[...]
Глядит на простор колосистый;
Спорятся колосья.

Amvrosij-Božij kolos, ripening on the field of the Mother of God, is himself as it were an icon of the Most Pure One. His being serves as another ladder to heaven, “the angels ascending and descending”, and it was of such men that Ivanov wrote in his long poem ‘Man’ (‘Čelovek’): “Creator of icons and

himself an Icon" (II, 198; cf. Lepachin 1988: 105).¹⁶ In modern Russian culture, and especially in the work of Ivanov, Vološin, and other poets, the greatest image of iconic humanity is St. Seraphim of Sarov, who was especially closely identified with the Mother of God.¹⁷ The words She addressed to St. Seraphim, "He is of our kind" ("On našego roda"), are echoed in Ivanov's reference to "native land" ("rodimaja zemlja"). Again we note a deep connection between Symbolism in human life and the Mother of God.

The source and focus of this full vision of the symbol is precisely in the importance it imparts to the reality and strangeness of mystical experience. Without exaggerating the degree of his personal asceticism, it must be acknowledged that Ivanov was one of the first, if not the first major cultural figure to incorporate the language of monasticism in aesthetics, utilizing unusual terms that have since become commonplace and generally understandable: "umnoe delanie", "molitvennoe delanie".¹⁸ Moreover Ivanov placed these terms in the context of an aesthetic that was influential among theologians. Compare, for example, this later assertion by Florenskij:

Право на символотворчество принадлежит лишь тому, кто трезвенною мыслью и жезлом железным пасет творимые образы на жизненных пажитях своего духа. Не виртуозность разработки, но аскетическое трезвение в самом буйстве творческих порывов есть признак истинного творчества.
(Florenskij 1991, II: 121)

Again, it is very difficult to prove any particular influence of Ivanov on the renewed understanding of monasticism in recent Orthodox theology, although some of the main scholars and popularizers of Russian sanctity, including Pavel Florenskij, Georgij Fedotov and Ioann Kologrivov, do cite Ivanov in their works. Central to this new understanding of personal sanctity is the image of illumination by divine light, that is the aesthetic expression of an inner, ontological transformation of the individual into an icon of the divine.

Ivanov's contribution to understanding mystical experience was countered somewhat by his role in the general "inflation" of mysticism during the Silver Age. Ivanov easily equated "prophets" both with "artists" and "mystics" so that any artist seemed mystically blessed automatically. Entire nations, if graced with a particular historical role, might become "nations of mystics" (III, 324). Even in 1916, long after the heady days of the Tower and the Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society, Ivanov remained quick to defend artists as mystics (1916). Ivanov's own mystical experiences were closely tied to a period of deep interest in extra-ecclesial mysticism, such as Russian sects and Western "mysteries".¹⁹ As in many areas of Ivanov's creative work, it is difficult here to isolate a primordial basis of this confusing

array of interests and appellations, which, to some extent, excuses those who saw Ivanov's religious task as the perversion of traditional Christianity through "mystical inflation" and Rosenkreuzerism. Against this background the poem under analysis represents a rather safe harbor from which forays can be made along the dark shores of Ivanov's thought.

The two particular contributions identified here, the symbol and a new or simply revitalized image of sanctity, are of course closely interrelated. It is worth recalling that Ivanov's symbolism organically grew out of, and to a certain extent superseded, his Dionysianism, understood as the mystical experience of divine all-unity. Direct mystical experience was for Ivanov always a precondition of any artistic or theoretical expression of the more real ("realiora"), the true, which coincides with the divine aspect of the cosmos. It may seem almost blasphemous to recall Dionysus in the context of Christian theology, and indeed many, like Sergej Solov'ev, have found the implied connection profoundly inappropriate. Yet the analysis of the poem at hand provides a proper context. Mystical experience is the fruit of individual labors, but also of a divine willingness to facilitate individual growth and effect cosmic reunification. In the poem the Mother of God comes first, granting a vision to Amvrosij. Amvrosij communicates this vision to the icon-writer, who with a necessary amount of spiritual ability expresses it in the icon. Even in the fourth generation the icon communicates to the poet energies of the Mother of God, so that of this poem we can say that "She is there". Reading the poem is therefore not simply an aesthetic exercise, but – in a theological sense – the acceptance of a sacramental gift of grace that affects the entire person, in a moral, ontological, and aesthetic way.

In a very direct sense Ivanov's meditations on the divine presence in human existence, on the immanence of the transcendent, are a reflection of the trinitarian debates that dominated Russian intellectual thought at the beginning of the century (cf. Meerson 1996: 119-143). It was Vladimir Solov'ev who placed at the forefront of the contemporary Russian consciousness the problem of how the transcendent God achieves immanence, most notably in his *Lectures on Divine Humanity*. The Trinity itself is an expression of God's desire for *otherness* (the Logos) and unity (the Spirit); this pre-eternal process achieves embodiment in Sophia, the shared being of the triune God-head. The objectivization of this multiplicity-in-unity is the cause of the creation, but the latter always remains a reflection of the inner life of the Trinity. Like Florenskij, Ėrn, Sergej Bulgakov and many of their contemporaries, Ivanov saw the resolution of humanity's dilemma in the realization that human (or, more generally, cosmic) life is the manifestation of divine being, the life of God. The intrinsic shortcoming of their attempts, in the context of Orthodox theology, is that their theories had little need for the Trinity itself, nor for its revelation in the world, as they dealt with its embodiment – the divine creation or Sophia.

The foregoing exposition of Ivanov's significance for Orthodox Christian theology has centered on the figure of the Mother of God, the Theotokos, whereas Christ Himself has been mentioned only in passing. This single fact is sufficient to illustrate some of the objections raised to the understanding of symbols and symbolic being common to Ivanov and such contemporaries as Vladimir Ėrn and Florenskij. As shown briefly above, symbols are for them less a gift of grace than the very principle of existence: things *are* to the extent that they *share* in divine being, to the extent that they symbolize their divine potential. Nature's or humanity's natural receptivity to the divine is often seen, in such Christian pantheism, to dwell in the *seeds* of divinity ("logoi spermatikoi"). The human soul (for Ivanov) or fleshly image (for Florenskij) must come to renounce its worldly independence and accept its potential divinity: Psyche seeks Amor, Anima – Animus, and the Earth – Spirit. Since humanity is already *in principle* identical to the divinity, Christ-Logos, the accent shifts to the almost natural process of growing into one's inherent divinity, revealing or illuminating one's inner *logos* or *countenance* ("lik"). This aesthetic focus is the basis of the one direct critique of Ivanov's Symbolism as theology:

Символ и символизм только констатируют наличие в земной действительности несовершенных отражений более реальных, потусторонних предметов и явлений. [...] Приглашая человека унестись а *realibus ad realiora* символ и символизм от самого человека не требует выявить собственную реальность, т. е., *очиститься от грехов*, сбросить с себя ветхого человека. (Popov 1949: 16)

It is quite common in Russian religious thought for deification to be understood in this way as an "eternal relationship" instead of a moral-religious *process* (Swoboda 1996: 245). The primordial matter of creation and the prophetic principle of receptivity and unity combine into the image of the Mother of God: on the one hand she is the earth, the passive principle of creation, creature, the receptacle of the divine logoi. On the other hand, however, she is the "shower of the way" (Hodegetria),²⁰ "the prophetic sign" ("Znamenie"),²¹ "the facilitator" ("Sporitel'nica"), which are also characteristics of the Spirit. The various roles of the Mother of God are in their turn identifiable almost at will as Mary, the World Soul (Earth), or Sophia (Heaven). The Holy Spirit ("the chorus-leader of life"; II, 743), which Ivanov sometimes evokes as the male counterpart to feminine matter/earth/universe, is also in the final analysis identical to the divine creation. The Spirit and the Divine Mother merge as the immanent aspect of transcendent divinity, and this confusion is repeated on other levels. Primordial paradise, for example,

actually turns out to be identical to the accomplished cosmos, which calls into question the value of real cosmic life, development and history.

The imagery of seminal logos and receptive soil-flesh is not necessarily heterodox, recalling, for example, of the following passage from St. Justin Martyr (2nd century):

All that [the pagans] have well said belongs to us, the Christians. [...] These writers were able to perceive the Truth obscurely (*amudros*) thanks to the sowing (*spora*) of the Word which had been placed within them. But it is one thing to possess a seed (*sperma*), and a likeness proportioned to one's capacity, and quite another to possess the reality itself, both the partaking and the imitation of which are the results of the grace which comes from him.

(*II Apology* XIII, 4-6; cited by Daniélou 1973: 42)²²

The difference between Ivanov and Justin lies in their view of the source of grace, which bridges the gap between the created logos and Divine Logos: Justin sees grace as originating in Christ, Ivanov often speaks as if it issues from a continuation of this sowing (*spora*), on the part of the "Sporitel'nica", who is either the immanent aspect of the divine or the cosmos as divinity. St. Justin identifies such views as Ivanov's as a fundamentally pre- or extra-Christian religiosity, based on the mere illumination of natural symbolic relations inherent in the *logoi spermatikoi*. Indeed, there can hardly be much account of such historical developments in such a radically anti-historicist cosmology as that of Ivanov. His eschatological orientation is, in the final analysis, effortlessly transmuted into a Romantic longing for the Golden Age. As Ol'ga Deschartes (Šor) insisted, Ivanov's work is filled with the prophetic and mystical vision of "heaven on earth" (I, 49-51), but without an account of historical development this vision could be consistent with most religious teachings. On the other hand, the absence of a clear explanation for death and time ruling on the earth, or of their defeat, may be the result of "prophetic" blindness caused by the glory of that final vision.

It is the inherent divinity of the cosmos that allowed the "Christians before Christ", from Ivanov's Dionysians to the Platonists and Virgil, to grasp Christian truths before their revelation from beyond the cosmos. This religious continuity is the basis of Pavel Florenskij's view of the icon of the "Sporitel'nica":

Ведь что же есть эта Спорительница Хлебов, как не видение Богоматери во образе, в канонической форме Матери Хлебов – Деметры? Сквозь не подчинившиеся духовному импульсу живописные приемы 80-х годов, ощущением однако прозреваешь именно это таинственное видение, церковное

“да” древнему образу благостной Деметры, в котором собирали Эллы часть своих предчувствий о Матери Божией.
(Florenskij 1995: 84)

To many such a proliferation of divine truth in the Symbolist vision smacks of pantheism, which seems always to be the scourge of mystically-inspired theological systems and of “prophecy” in general, oriented as it is to eschatological unity. Subsequent theologians (such as Vladimir Lossky, Georges Florovsky and John Meyendorff), attempting to reconcile Symbolism with a more traditionally dualistic understanding of an entirely separate creation and an absolutely transcendent God, have found it necessary to reintegrate this vision of unity with a lucid account, first of the creation itself, and then of the means of its reunification with God (Meyendorff 1983: 30-37). While the traditional domains of such concerns has been christology and pneumatology, post-Symbolist Orthodox theologians have concentrated their energies on an ecclesiological cosmology: the Church is not only taken as the mediator between God and man, but is limited by history and sacramental membership. Discussing the confusion of the cosmos with the transfigured creation of the Church in mystic theologians from Boehme to Solov’ev and Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky noted: “It is not legitimate to accord to origins that which belongs to vocation, to accomplishment and the final end” (Losskij 1957: 112). Still, Lossky must admit the positive value of Russian religious philosophy as a stimulus and inspiration for further theological inquiry. The Trinitarian ecclesiology of Lossky, Florovsky, Meyendorff and others is in many ways a logical development of turn-of-the-century attempts to locate human life within the Trinity, whether through outright pantheism or a religion “of the Spirit”. Ivanov’s particular contribution lies in his powerful account of Symbolism (in realms from aesthetics to ontology) and his inspired, if effusive vision of mysticism and sanctity.

Ironically, the vague and unformulated nature of Ivanov’s theological intuitions may help to accord him his rightful place in religious thought as a Solovyevean “prophet”, the herald of potential, but non-existent unity. In this he differs significantly from, say, Fr. Sergij Bulgakov, whose single-minded attempt to elaborate a full dogmatic system, resulting in open conflicts with ecclesiastical authorities, has inevitably hindered a fair assessment of his thought. While Ivanov’s basic theological intuition may be consistent with that of Bulgakov, he appears much more conscious of the difficulties inherent in granting it systematic account. Ivanov is more willing to use his inspiration to inspire, rather than teach. And, while his vision cannot be called theology, it has undoubtedly inspired theologians; while Ivanov’s precise formulations may be unsuitable for dogma, his artistic embodiments of these same truths present the fullness of a reality that craves dogmatic expression. In the limited sense intended here, with respect to the life of the church,

Ivanov's view of himself as "prophet" has been fully justified, and that his prophetic vision of the symbol and sanctity remain vital sources of religious creativity.

NOTES

- ¹ All references to Ivanov's *Sobranie sočinenij* (Ivanov 1971) indicate volume (Roman numeral) and page (Arabic numeral). The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to Dr. Michael Hagemeister, Mr. Boris Jakim and Prof. Igor' Višneveckij for invaluable help in the preparation of this article.
- ² From the draft of letter to Andrej Belyj from April 9, 1908; RGB 109.9.8 ll. 3-4.
- ³ Solov'ev refers to Vladimir Ėrn's book *Grigorij Skovoroda* (Ėrn 1912), discussed below.
- ⁴ Both Grabbe and the anonymous author base their accounts mostly on Belyj's 1922 *Vospominanija o Bloke* (Belyj 1995: 219-220, 267-270), but the anonymous author also refers to V.V. Rozanov's (uncorroborated, but unchallenged) assertion that Ivanov and his wife were among the thirty or forty participants in a blood-drinking ritual at the house of poet N.M. Minskij, apparently around 1905 (Rozanov 1932: 142), and to N. Arsen'ev's quite derivative study of Dionysian religion (1926).
- ⁵ Ivanov often called for circumspection in labelling his aesthetics as a religious teaching (see, e.g., II, 567-572; Sapov 1994, II: 291, 303). In a later lecture, in 1927, Ivanov spoke of the crucial difference between "religious thought" and "theology" (Ivanova 1992: 171); for a summary of this lecture series (on the Westernizers and Slavophiles, Dostoevskij, Solov'ev, and others) see dell'Isola (1927). Fedor Stepun also notes the precedence of poetry over reflection in Ivanov's thought (Ivanova 1992: 376).
- ⁶ Here, of course, Ivanov opened himself up to new criticism, as when N. Arsen'ev commented: "Ein Sophist, kein Prophet. Oder wenn ein Prophet, so von welchem Geiste?" (1929: 254).
- ⁷ On the history of the cycle see Ueland (1992: 77-80); Kotrelev (1982: 163).
- ⁸ Information on the icon's history is taken from: Četverikov (1912: 311-312); Agapit (1900: 103-104); *Skazanija* (1958: 491-493).
- ⁹ The composition of "Sporitel'nica chlebov" is strikingly similar to "Bogomater' Novgorod-Severskaja", also called "Spasitel'nica utopajuščich", on which the Mother of God holds her protective veil over loggers who are

floating rafts of logs down a river to disastrous effect. This icon is, in turn, a variation on the popular "Pokrov" type of icon, in which the Mother of God's protection is symbolized by her holding her veil and/or by her wing-like, flowing omophorion (see Gebarowicz 1986: 168-169, ill. 133; for poems on this icon see Novgorod-Severskij 1966: 40, 46). Despite the absence of a veil in "Sporitel'nica chlebov", it might be seen as a regular development of the "Pokrov" tradition.

- 10 Themes from hymnography appear in many of Ivanov's poems, from the psalm-like 'Chory misterij' of 1904 (I, 812-815) to the 1914 poem 'Roždestvo' (III, 556), and later the Catholic-inspired poem from *The Roman Diary* (*Rimskij dnevnik*) for May 1 (III, 609).

- 11 Taking "Zatvornica" to be "Gatekeeper" and not "Recluse", which is also possible.

- 12 The significant section-headings (e.g., 'Grace of Peace') were included only in the original publication (*Vesy*, No. 5, 1905, pp. 26-36), and dropped in subsequent publications of the essay under the new title 'The Symbolics of Aesthetic Principles' (I, 823-830).

- 13 See in particular Schmemmann's 'Sacrament and Symbol' (1988: 135-151; cf. also the echo of Ivanov's "realiorist" terminology in Šmehan (1984: 48).

- 14 Tomas Venclova has presented a full analysis of the "nuptial encounter" of earth and spirit in Ivanov's 1926 sonnet 'Jazyk'. Venclova concludes that "language – and poetry – is just a portent, a prototype, a forerunner [predteča] of a future universal ecumenic bond of people" (Venclova 1986: 121). If one also considers that "And the Word become flesh" ("I Slovo plot' byst"; Jn 1:14), the original epigraph of the poem, is also the name of an icon of the Mother of God (of the "Sign" ["Znamenie"] type), one can see that in 'Jazyk' the Mother of God plays a role analogous to the one presented in our analysis. Cf. Makovskij (1955: 298); Gercyk (1973: 70).

- 15 This imagery was by no means unusual for Ivanov; cf. the second poem "d" in Part Four of 'Čelovek':

Пою: из мертвенных борозд
Богооставленного поля
Святая всколосится воля
Упавших наземь Божьих звезд.
(III, 236)

- 17 On St. Seraphim in Ivanov's works see Docenko (1996).

- 18 There is now a wide literature on these terms; for one of the earliest items from modern Russian thought see Solov'ev's strange (although incompletely preserved) note on "umnoe delanie" and also its bowdlerized use in Pisemskij's novel *Masonry* (Florovsky 1965).

- 19 See II, 771-780; Wachtel (1990: 124-125, 137-139; 1994); Carlson (1988); Blok (1927: 242); Gercyk (1973: 46-55).

- ²⁰ Ivanov calls mystical anarchism "*Hodegetics*, i.e., [it] is subordinated to the general concept of philosophizing on the ways (and not goals) of freedom" (III, 89). Thus the epithets of the Mother of God are taken as technical terms denoting immanent religious experience.
- ²¹ See III, 625-626, I, 8-9; see also note 11 above.
- ²² Ivanov cites the first phrase of this passage in his 1934 letter to Alessandro Pellegrini on "Docta pietas" (III, 440, 443).

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