

Name-Glorification, Hesychasm, and Palamism in Alexei Losev’s “Onomatodoxy” and “Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology”*

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■ Abstract

This article considers how early Alexei Losev dealt with the concepts of hesychasm, Palamism, and Name-Glorification. It reveals a range of important sources that Losev employed in his essay “Onomatodoxy” while developing his formulas of hesychasm and Name-Glorification, elaborating on the concept of absolute symbolism and touching on his teaching about universals. These sources include “Synodikon of Orthodoxy,” “Philokalia,” and Pavel Florensky’s essay “Onomathodoxy as a Philosophical Premise.” Although Losev follows the main framework of Florensky’s project in his “Onomatodoxy” (1921–1922)—treating Palamism and Name-Glorification as derivatives of Platonism and comprehending the nature of applying the notion “God” to the divine essence and energies—he differs from Florensky in his interpretation of the structure of symbol. In Losev’s later work, “Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology” (1930), he exchanges his understanding of the correlation between Palamism and Name-Glorification with Platonism, which directly correlates with Losev’s changed attitude toward Florensky. However, in the “Essays,” the specific interpretation of the application of the notion “God” to the essence and energies, dating back to Florensky, is preserved.

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■ Keywords

Alexei Losev, Name-Glorification, hesychasm, Palamism, symbol, antinomies, Neo-Patristics

■ Introduction

This article examines how the early works of Alexei Losev (1893–1988), a religious philosopher of the Russian Silver Age, dealt with the concepts of hesychasm, Palamism, and Name-Glorification (*Imiaslavie*, Onomatodoxy) in the framework of the so-called Neo-Patristic movement. Before I turn to the main subject of this study, a few preliminary remarks are in order. Palamism is a theological system, formulated in fourteenth-century Byzantium by Gregory Palamas, arguing for the distinction in God between the unknowable and imparticipable essence on the one hand and the knowable and participable uncreated energies of this essence on the other. According to Palamas, the Taborian light, revealed to the apostles during the transfiguration of Christ (Matt 17:2), is such an uncreated energy. The representatives of the circle of the Russian Name-Glorifiers at the beginning of the twentieth century maintained that, when Christians think about God and name him, as in prayer, they participate in God himself, in his energies, and therefore God's names, which human beings think of and utter, are themselves divine energies (in the Palamite sense), which means they are God himself.¹

¹ For accounts of the Name-Glorifiers controversy and the doctrine of the Name-Glorifiers, see: Scott Kenworthy, "The Name-Glorifiers (*Imiaslavie*) Controversy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought* (ed. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, and Randall A. Poole; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 327–42; idem, "Archbishop Nikon (Rozhdestvenskii) and Pavel Florenskii on Spiritual Experience, Theology, and the Name-Glorifiers Dispute" in *Thinking Orthodox in Modern Russia: Culture, History, Context* (ed. Patrick Lally Michelson, Judith Deutsch Kornblatt; Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014) 85–107; Hilarion Alfeyev, *Le Nom grand et glorieux. La vénération du Nom de Dieu et la prière de Jésus dans la tradition orthodoxe* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2007); Nel Grillaert, "What's in God's Name: Literary Forerunners and Philosophical Allies of the *Imjaslavie* Debate," *Studies in East European Thought* 64 (2012) 163–81; Maryse Dennes, "Les glorificateurs du Nom: une rencontre de l'hésychasme et de la philosophie au début du XXe siècle en Russie," *Slavica Occitania* 8 (1999) 143–71; Lasha Tchantouridzé, "In the Name of God: 100 Years of the *Imiaslavie* Movement in the Church of Russia, A Review Essay," *The Canadian Journal of Orthodox Christianity* 3 (2012) 216–28; Holger Kuße, "Von der Namensverehrung zur Namensphilosophie. Ihre zeichentheoretischen Konzepte," in *Name und Person. Beiträge zur russischen Philosophie des Namens* (ed. Holger Kuße; München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 2006) 77–110; idem, "La sémantique de l'interprétation d'A. F. Losev et les théories de la sémantique au XXe siècle," *Slavica Occitania* 31 (2010) 281–301; Viktor Troitskiy, "La philosophie des mathématiques d'A.F. Losev et le problème du fondement de la Glorification du Nom," *Slavica Occitania* 31 (2010) 147–56; Maria-Candida Ghidini, "A. Losev et P. Florenski: la rencontre de la philosophie du langage et de l'onomatodoxie (Glorification du Nom)," *Slavica Occitania* 31 (2010) 281–301; Naftali Prat, "Orthodox Philosophy of Language in Russia," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 20.1 (1979) 1–21; Lara Sels, "Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* and Onomatodoxy in Russian Theology," in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III: An English Translation with Commentary and Supporting Studies: Proceedings of the 12th International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa (Leuven, 14–17 September 2010)* (ed. Johan Leemans and Matthieu Cassin; Leiden: Brill, 2014) 660–74; Gary Hamburg, "The

The theme of the Palamite controversy and the teaching of Gregory Palamas played an important role in Alexei Losev's *oeuvre*, as seen in the latter's earliest-preserved text dealing with the problems of the Name-Glorifiers controversy, an essay entitled "Die Onomathodoxie (russisch *Imiaslavie*)" ("Onomatodoxy"), written in 1921–1922.² The text is preserved in Losev's archive in German. The original, unpreserved Russian text was probably translated into German by Maria Grabar-Passek.³ Contemporary editions of Losev's works contain this article in the reverse translation from German to Russian, performed by Andrei Vashestov and edited by Liudmila Gogotishvili and Aza Takho-Godi.⁴ As we shall see, Losev's program of comprehending Name-Glorification in relation to Palamism and Platonism, in general, corresponds to Pavel Florensky's program, expressed in the essay "Onomatodoxy as a Philosophical Premise." At the same time, Losev's "Onomatodoxy" has stipulations which differ from those of Florensky's program.

■ Losev's "Onomatodoxy": Name-Glorification, Hesychasm, and Palamism

Losev's "Onomatodoxy" consists of two parts: "The history of the question" and "Dogmatic teaching." At the very start of his article, Losev defines Name-Glorification as "one of the ancient and characteristic mystical movements of the orthodox East, expressed in a special veneration of God's name, interpreting God's name as a necessary dogmatic condition of a religious teaching, and as a cult and mystical consciousness in Orthodoxy."⁵ Next, Losev embarks on a short historical outline of the Name-Glorifying tradition. He points out the corresponding parts of the Bible and turns to the patristic tradition, arguing that the gist of Name-

Origins of 'Heresy' on Mount Athos: Ilarion's Na Gorakh Kavkaza (1907)," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 23.2 (2003) 16–47; Thomas Seifrid, *The World Made Self: Russian Writings on Language, 1860–1930* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005) 193–97; Dmitry Biriukov and Artem Gravin, "Palamism, Humboldtianism, and Magicism in Pavel Florensky's Philosophy of Language," *Religions* 14 (2023) 197, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020197>; Bernhard Schultze, "Der Streit um die Göttlichkeit des Namens Jesu in der russischen Theologie," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 17 (1951) 321–94; Antoine Niviere, *Les glorificateurs du nom. Une querelle théologique parmi les moines russes du mont Athos (1907–1914)* (Geneva: Editions des Syrtes, 2016).

² For a discussion of the dating of Losev's "Onomathodoxy," see Dmitry Biriukov, "The Name-Glorifying Projects of Alexei Losev and Pavel Florensky: A Question of Their Historical Interrelation," *Studies in East European Thought* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-023-09555-9>.

³ Elena Takho-Godi, *Aleksej Losev v epohu russkoj revoljucii: 1917–1919* (Moscow: Modest Kolerov, 2014) 165; cf. Alexei Losev, *Na rubezhe epoh. Raboty 1910-h – nachala 1920-h godov* [At the Turn of the Epochs: Works of the 1910s to the Early 1920s] (ed. Aza Takho-Godi, Elena Takho-Godi, and Victor Troitsky; Moscow: Progress-Traditsia, 2015) 1045–46; Elena Takho-Godi, "Aleksei Losev and *Vekhi* Strategic Traditions in Social Philosophy," in *Landmarks Revisited: The Vekhi Symposium 100 Years On* (ed. Robin Aizlewood and Ruth Coates; Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013) 214–41, at 228.

⁴ Takho-Godi, *Aleksej Losev v epohu russkoj revoljucii*, 1046.

⁵ Aleksei Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolut* [Personality and absolute] (ed. Aza Takho-Godi; Moscow: Misl', 1999) 226. All translations are the author's unless otherwise specified.

Glorification is in the teaching of the Eastern monkhood on the Jesus Prayer which, in its final form, is revealed by the hesychasts, whose leader was Gregory Palamas.⁶ Then, Losev briefly relates the contents of the Palamite debates to the Taborian light. According to him, the anti-Palamites, Barlaam of Calabria and Gregory Akindynos, taught that the Taborian light, seen by the apostles during the transfiguration of Christ and then by the monks and zealots during the Jesus Prayer, is simply the created light but not God as such. However, Palamas and his followers insisted that God himself, in his energies, appears before people. Here, Losev observes the clash between the two basic directions of human thought, namely the subjectivist psychologism (corresponding to the position of the anti-Palamites) and the objectivist position that insists on the existence of eternal forms present before things and in things.⁷

It is for this reason, Losev notes, that the Synod of 1351 excommunicated Barlaam and Akindynos, declaring that the Taborian light is neither God's creation nor the divine essence; that the divine essence is incomprehensible and inaccessible while its energies are comprehensible and participated in by humankind; and that the Taborian light is the intelligible light of the divine essence, the energy of the divine essence, inseparable from it and, therefore, is God himself.⁸ Next, Losev focuses on the description of the hesychast way of prayer, after which he correlates the problematics of Name-Glorification with the eighth-century Byzantine polemics on icons. Losev likens iconoclasm, which corresponds, he argues, to the position of the Name-Glorifiers' opponents,⁹ with Kantianism, with its abyss dividing things-in-themselves and phenomena.¹⁰ Then, he compares the position of the iconophiles and the corresponding doctrine of Name-Glorifiers with the Platonic teaching that a phenomenon is the revelation of an essence unknowable in itself and given only in symbols understood as transcendent forms.¹¹ According to Losev, after the waning of the medieval worldview, the ancient teachings on the differences between the essences and the energies in God had disappeared into the shadows

⁶ About the Jesus Prayer, see Robert Sinkewicz, "Early Byzantine Commentary on the Jesus Prayer: Introduction and Edition," *Medieval Studies* 49 (1987) 208–220; Dirk Krausmüller, "The Rise of Hesychasm," in *The Cambridge History of Eastern Christianity* (ed. Michael Angold; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), 101–26, at 103, 108 and 117. About hesychasm, see Krausmüller, "The Rise of Hesychasm," 101–26.

⁷ "It is obvious that, here, two basic directions of human thought have collided, namely the subjective psychologism that turns every object into a subjective one and only relatively significant experience, and a strict objectivist position that is being substantiated from the points of view of the eternal forms that were before things and in things, and are not involved in a stream of random and constantly changing experiences in any way" (Losev, *Lichnost' i Absoljut*, 228–29).

⁸ Losev, *Lichnost' i Absoljut*, 229.

⁹ Cf. Pavel Florensky, *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah* [Works in four volumes] (Moscow: Misl', 2000) 3.1:268.

¹⁰ See Seifrid, *The World Made Self*, 198 n. 341.

¹¹ Losev, *Lichnost' i Absoljut*, 230. Pavel Florensky, in his "Onomatodoxy as a Philosophical Premise," also makes a correlation (briefly, in contrast to Losev) between the position of the opponents of Name-Glorification and Iconoclasm. See Florensky, *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, 3.1:268.

and were revived, in modified form, only at the beginning of the twentieth century in the theology of Name-Glorifiers.¹²

Next, Losev briefly elaborates on the history of the Name-Glorifying controversy, providing an outline of the basic provisions of the Name-Glorifiers' teaching. Losev sees a direct analogy with the iconoclast and Palamite controversies in the polemic on Name-Glorification. Within this polemic, the teaching of Name-Glorifiers—who insisted that God's names contain divine energies inseparable from God and, therefore, these names are God himself—corresponds to the Palamite doctrine, while the position of their opponents corresponds to the anti-Palamite one.¹³

■ Sources of Losev's "Onomatodoxy"

A. Pavel Florensky and the "Synodikon of Orthodoxy"

Overall, these stipulations in "Onomatodoxy" are in line with the reception of Palamism by the Russian thinkers who were proponents of Name-Glorification and especially with Florensky's teaching in his "Onomatodoxy as a Philosophical Premise." Indeed, Losev qualified Palamism (and the Name-Glorification identified with it) as Platonism, exactly as the preceding pro-*imiaslavie* philosophers and theologians, such as Mitrofan Muretov, Pavel Florensky, and Vladimir Ern, did. Losev connects anti-Palamism and Barlaamism¹⁴ with subjective psychologism, which is close to nominalism. This is consistent with Florensky's rhetoric, which also linked the anti-Palamites and the anti-Name-Glorifiers with Barlaamism and subjectivism.¹⁵

Considering the nature of Losev's account of the Palamite doctrine and his references to the anathemas against Barlaam and Akindynos in the conciliar decision of 1351, quoted in the "Synodikon for the Sunday of Orthodoxy," I believe that Losev's knowledge of Palamism in his "Onomatodoxy" came from the "Synodikon." Apparently, it was also the only primary source on the Palamite doctrine that the earlier adherents of Name-Glorification had at their disposal.¹⁶ Furthermore, the anathemas against Barlaam and Akindynos, which Losev refers to in his "Onomatodoxy," bear resemblance to those from the "Synodikon" used by Florensky in his "Onomatodoxy."¹⁷ Obviously, Losev relied on Florensky's

¹² Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolut*, 231.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 231–2.

¹⁴ After Barlaam of Calabria, the opponent of Palamas.

¹⁵ Florensky, *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, 3.1: 252, 270, and 357.

¹⁶ Cf. Tatiana Senina, "The Status of Divine Revelation in the Works of Hieromonk Anthony Bulatovich," *SJT* 64 (2011) 377–89, at 382; Kenworthy, "Archbishop Nikon (Rozhdstvenskii)," 99; Dmitry Biriukov, "'Palamism' and 'Barlaamism' in the Russian Name-Glorifiers' Controversy of the 1910s: A Philosophical Background," *Sophia* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-024-01029-7>.

¹⁷ Florensky, *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, 3.1:270–71. Here Florensky presents, likely in his own translation, certain anathemas against Barlaam and Akindynos from the "Synodicon of Orthodoxy." He quotes them fragmentarily but in a manner that conveys the essence of the anathema.

elaboration, turning to the “Synodikon,” when he gave his own account of the Palamite doctrine.

B. Losev’s “Formula of Hesychasm” and Its Sources

In his “Onomatodoxy,” Losev also touches upon the ascetic dimension of Palamism, identifying it with hesychasm.¹⁸ Losev describes the hesychasts, whose views Gregory Palamas represented, in the following way: “[A]ll of [their] thoughts are concentrated on one highest point and there is nothing left in the soul of a person who prays, except for the light of the divine essence.”¹⁹ What were Losev’s sources for this “formula of hesychasm”?

As far as I can see, Losev relied on at least two sources. Textual analysis demonstrates that, in terms of the expressed metaphysics of light and the assumption that there is nothing in the mind of a hesychast except for the divine light, Losev could have used the following excerpt from “The Practical and Theological Chapters” by Symeon the New Theologian, published in the fifth volume of the *Philokalia*, in the Russian translation by Theophan the Recluse: “[O]ur mind, being simple when it is freed from all outward thinking and immersed in the simple light of God, embraced and enveloped by this light, cannot countenance anything other than the light it is in” (ch. 147).²⁰ However, this excerpt talks about the divine light, which leaves nothing except for itself in the mind it pierces, but not about “the light of the divine essence” (which is understood as divine energy), as Losev did. In other words, Losev’s formula of hesychasm should have one more source apart from Symeon’s fragment. This source is the “Synodikon,” which Losev turns to in his article a bit later after he uses the formula of hesychasm. To be precise, Losev draws on the anathemas against Barlaam and Akindynos from the “Synodikon,” specifically three provisions summarizing the meaning of the first three anathemas out of the six. One of these provisions, corresponding to the first anathema, states: “The Taborian light, the intelligible light of the divine essence, is the energy of the essence, inseparable from his essence and, therefore, is God himself.”²¹ Thus, the source of the expression “the light of the divine essence” from Losev’s formula of hesychasm is found in the “Synodikon,” in the fragment that Losev himself used in his essay.

¹⁸ De facto historical hesychasm was not identical to Palamism (though close to it). See Antonio Rigo, *Monaci esicasti e monaci bogomili. Le accuse di messalianismo e bogomilismo rivolte agli esicasti ed il problema dei rapporti tra esicismo e bogomilismo* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1989) 6–7 n. 13.

¹⁹ Losev, *Lichnost’ i Absolut*, 228.

²⁰ In *Dobrotoljubie v russkom perevode, dopolnennoe. T. 5. Izdanie vtoroe* [Philokalia in Russian translation, supplemented. Vol. 5. Second edition] (Moscow: Printing House of I. Efimov, 1900) 48.

²¹ Losev, *Lichnost’ i Absolut*, 229.

■ Losev's "Onomatodoxy" and the Problem of Universals

While describing Palamism and Name-Glorification as a variety of Platonism, Losev touches on the problem of universals; he argues that Palamism (and Name-Glorification) suggests a position substantiated from the standpoint of eternal forms, which are present before things and in things. In my mind, the problem of universals, which appeared in Losev's article, is contextualized by the early stage of the Name-Glorifying debates.

This matter dates back to Fedor Uspensky (1845–1928), a Russian historian, philologist, and byzantinist, the first Russian historian of Byzantine philosophy and the editor of the critical edition of the "Synodikon,"²² which Losev used. Uspensky suggested an understanding of the course of Byzantine theology and philosophy in which orthodox Byzantine thought is associated with Aristotelianism-Nominalism and the non-orthodox with Platonism. In Uspensky's scheme, Palamism was associated with Aristotelianism-Nominalism and Barlaamism with Realism-Platonism.²³ Concerning the latter, he referred to the tenth section of the chapter "Against Barlaam and Akindynos" of the "Synodikon" published by Uspensky himself.²⁴ This scheme was not fully accepted by subsequent Russian thought, but it raised a question that would be answered in some way in the following years during the Name-Glorifying debates.

Mitrofan Muretov, a professor of the Moscow Theological Academy and sympathizer of the Name-Glorifying movement, maintained an understanding directly opposite to Uspensky's scheme: associating Palamism (and the Name-Glorification identified with it) with Platonism and philosophical realism and Barlaamism with nominalism. He accepted such a qualification of Palamism and Barlaamism by default, without turning to the sources. Anthony Bulatovich, an Athonite monk and a leader of the Name-Glorifiers, did not expressly formulate his views in the philosophical qualification of Palamism and Barlaamism. However, he assimilated Palamism in his works, polemically ascribed the Barlaamite position to his opponents,²⁵ and, like Muretov, put forward a teaching about the forms in

²² Fyodor Uspensky, *Sinodik v nedelju pravoslavija. Svodnyj tekst s prilozhenijami* [The Synodikon of the Sunday of Orthodoxy: Summary text with attachments] (Odessa: Printing House of the Odessa Military District, 1893).

²³ Fyodor Uspensky, *Očerki po istorii vizantijskoj obrazovannosti* [Essays on the history of Byzantine education] (St Petersburg: Printing House of V. S. Balashev, 1891) 311.

²⁴ Uspensky, *Sinodik v nedelju pravoslavija*, 35. In the new edition of the "Synodikon" by Jean Gouillard: "Le Synodikon de l'orthodoxie: Édition et commentaire, *Travaux et mémoires* 2 (1967) 1–316, at 89.698. See also: Pavel S. Ermilov, "Feodor Uspenskij and his Critics in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia: A Debate Concerning Byzantine Philosophy," in *Byzantine Theology and Its Philosophical Background* (ed. Antonio Rigo in collaboration with Pavel Ermilov and Michele Trizio; Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011) 187–96, at 188–89.

²⁵ Anthony Bulatovich, *Apologija very vo imja Bozhie i vo imja Isus* [Apology of faith in the divine name and the name of Jesus] (Moscow: Edition of the Religious and Philosophical Library, 1913) XIII, 26, 101 and 188. See: Sels, "Gregory of Nyssa's *Contra Eunomium* and Onomatodoxy in Russian Theology," 665.

the context of Name-Glorification.²⁶ According to Muretov and Bulatovich, divine names refer to, and are associated with, such forms in God.

Sergey Troitsky, an opponent of the Name-Glorifiers, criticized the teaching of Muretov and Bulatovich on the forms and accused them of Barlaamism, associating the latter with Platonism, partially following the scheme of Uspensky and referring, as he did, to the “Synodikon.” In Troitsky’s mind, Bulatovich’s and Muretov’s teaching that God’s names necessarily refer to the forms in God, which are God himself (in the sense of the divine energies), stands in opposition to Gregory Palamas’s teaching of deification, for the latter is given by the grace of the Holy Spirit and consists in supranatural illumination, not in rational cognition (what grasping the forms would require).²⁷ Troitsky thought that Bulatovich and Muretov occupied a rationalist position and followed Barlaam, who was condemned in 1352 for introducing Plato’s forms into the Church. Here, Troitsky referred²⁸ to the same words of the conciliar decree that Uspensky had quoted, when speaking about Barlaam’s Platonism. Next, Vladimir Ern and Florensky, acting as apologists for the Name-Glorifying teaching, developed Muretov’s understanding in which Palamism and Name-Glorification were connected with Platonism and realism while Barlaamism and the teaching of the opponents of Name-Glorification were connected with nominalism.²⁹

Thus, Losev’s mentioning of the universals seems polemically loaded, and this is connected with the Name-Glorifying controversy. Here, Losev is polemicizing the position of Troitsky who, in the course of the controversy, denied the possibility of speaking about the existence of the forms in God as Muretov and Bulatovich did, protecting the Name-Glorifying doctrine. Troitsky argued that the postulation of the forms in God contradicts the teaching of Gregory Palamas on deification, which is a supernatural epiphany but not the result of rational inquiry. It is in opposition to Troitsky that Losev states that the Palamite and Name-Glorifying doctrine presupposes the existence of the eternal and unchangeable forms that are present in things and before things.³⁰ Apart from this, the polemical context of Losev’s remark might be connected to the historical-philosophical scheme of Uspensky, linking Palamism with Aristotelianism and Barlaamism with Platonism, which are diametrically opposed to the scheme of Losev (and the preceding pro-

²⁶ See Senina, “The Status of Divine Revelation,” 384.

²⁷ Sergei Troitsky, “Afonskaja smuta [The Athos turmoil],” *Pribavlenija k Cerkovnym Vedomostjam* 20 (May 18, 1913) 882–909, at 898; *Svjatoe pravoslavie i imenobozhničeskaja eres’* [Holy orthodox and heresy of Imiabozhie] (3 parts; Kharkiv: Diocesan Printing House, 1916) 1:127–28.

²⁸ Troitsky, “Afonskaja smuta,” 898–99.

²⁹ Vladimir Ern, “Spor Dzhoberti s Rozmini [Dispute between Gioberti and Rosmini],” *Izvestija Tiflisskih vysshih ženskikh kursov* 1 (1914) V; idem, “Spor o psihologizme v ital’janskoj filosofii (okončanie) [The Disputation on psychologism in Italian philosophy (end)],” *Bogoslovskij vestnik* 1.4 (1914) 78 n. 3; Florensky, *Sochinenija v četyreh tomah*, 3.1:274.

³⁰ About Losev’s early philosophical realism, see Seifrid, *The World Made Self*, 187; Troitskiy, “La philosophie des mathématiques,” 149–50.

imiaslavie Russian thinkers), maintaining that true orthodox philosophy—that is, Name-Glorification and Palamism—is Platonic.

■ Losev's Absolute Symbolism and Florensky's Platonism

While reasoning about the philosophical and dogmatic component of the Name-Glorifying doctrine, Losev states that, similar to hesychasm, it denies *absolute apophatism* or agnosticism (which presupposes the total incomprehensibility of God)³¹ as well as *absolute rationalism* (which presupposes that God reveals himself completely), but represents *absolute symbolism*, that is, “the teaching that the divine essence, incomprehensible in itself, manifests and reveals itself in certain appearances.” Such *symbolism*, in Losev's mind, unites both apophatism and rationalism and corresponds to the doctrine of symbol by Byzantine theologians such as Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, and Symeon the New Theologian, and the hesychasts of the fourteenth century, that is, the Palamites.³²

Here, Losev, as he often does in his “Onomatodoxy,” is obviously following the line of Florensky's principle of logical schematizing and replicating the specific logical scheme given in Florensky's “Onomatodoxy.” Specifically, Florensky discusses Palamism and Name-Glorification as a variety of Platonism, and characterizes them using the language of symbolic logic in such a way that these doctrines exhibit the following relation between essence and phenomenon: phenomenon is included in essence, but essence is not included in phenomenon (“phenomenon \supset essence: entity \supset —³³essence”³⁴). It is exactly this scheme of Florensky that represents the basis for Losev's reasoning on the relation between the name of God, essence, and energies in Palamism and in the Name-Glorifying doctrine. Florensky further describes Platonism as a dialectical compound of Kantianism and Immanentism.³⁵ He states that Platonism is related to Kantianism

³¹ Cf. Seifrid, *The World Made Self*, 197.

³² Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolut*, 235. See Teresa Obolevitch, “Christian Philosophy and the Name of God: Aesthetics as a Way of Life according to Aleksey Losev,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 71 (2019) 93–106, at 98–99.

³³ Minus.

³⁴ Florensky, *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, 3.1:273–74. About the background of this formula, see Dmitry Biriukov, “Two Russian Thinkers in Dialogue on Palamism: The Sophiological Palamism of Sergius Bulgakov and the Neo-Palamism of Georgy Florovsky in the 1920s,” in *The Legacy of St. Gregory Palamas: Studies in Late Byzantine Theology* (ed. Tikhon Alexander Pino; Brepols: Turnhout, 2025), forthcoming; idem, “The Name-Glorifying Projects of Alexei Losev and Pavel Florensky.”

³⁵ However, the main line of Florensky's comprehension of the interrelation between Platonism and Kantianism was their strict contraposition as two opposite poles of philosophy. See Michael Hagemeister, “Wiederverzauberung der Welt: Pavel Florenskijs neues Mittelalter,” in *Pavel Florenskij — Tradition und Moderne. Beiträge zum internationalen Symposium an der Universität Potsdam, 5. bis 9. April 2000* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001) 21–41, at 23; Frances Nethercott, *Russia's Plato: Plato and Platonic Tradition in Russian Education and Philosophy* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000) 80–82; Andrea Oppo, “Platone e Kant nell'epistemologia di Florenskij,” in *Il pensiero polifonico di Pavel Florenskij. Atti del convegno per gli 80 anni dalla morte* (ed. Silvano Tagliagambe, Massimiliano Spano, Andrea Oppo; Cagliari: PFTS University Press, 2018) 383–413, at 391–96.

with its conviction of the self-existence of essences (here the Kantian thesis on the unknowability of the manifested through manifestation is left out) and, to a certain extent, to Immanentism, which says that manifestation fully represents essence (here the aspect of Immanentism that does not distinguish between the manifested and manifestation is left out). In this way, Florensky provides a scheme on the basis of which Losev determines his *absolute symbolism* as the doctrine compounding agnosticism (Florensky's Kantianism) and rationalism (Florensky's Immanentism).

■ The Structure of Symbol

The principle of symbolism, understood in terms of an essence's energeticity, also plays an important role in Florensky's "Onomatodoxy as a Philosophical Premise."³⁶ However, in this essay, Florensky understands "symbol" differently compared to the understanding in Losev's "Onomatodoxy." Florensky is developing a teaching about symbol as essence, whose energy is merged with the energy of a higher essence,³⁷ which presupposes the concept of "synergy" in Florensky.³⁸ Such a scheme is absent in Losev's essay, where "symbol" is a manifestation and disclosure of the essence and does not represent a separate essence with its own energy, as Florensky states.

This matches the development of Losev's doctrine of symbol, suggested by Lyudmila Gogotishvili. From her perspective, in the times of Losev's formative period as a thinker, there were two main traditions in conceptualizing symbol. The first tradition, dating back to Kant, suggests that symbols refer to something totally different—to the meaning not provided directly within the symbol itself.³⁹ According to the second tradition, symbol is considered as a balance between the internal and the external (the symbolizing and the symbolized), and, within the structure of the symbol, there is no reference to a totally different entity. This treatment of symbols ascends to Neoplatonism and has clear expression in Friedrich Schelling.⁴⁰ Early-Losev adhered to the second interpretation of symbol;⁴¹ later, however, Losev

³⁶ Florensky, *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, 3.1:255–58.

³⁷ For instance: "[Symbol is] such an essence, the energy of which, intertwined, or rather, merged with the energy of some other essence, more valuable in this respect, carries in this way this latter in itself" (ibid., 257). See Dmitry Biriukov, "'Synergy,' 'Energy' and 'Symbol' in Pavel Florensky and Palamism," *SJT* 74 (2021) 147–57, at 148–50.

³⁸ Florensky, *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, 3.1:256–57. See Biriukov, "'Synergy,' 'Energy' and 'Symbol,'" 149–55.

³⁹ Cf. Seifrid, *The World Made Self*, 197–98.

⁴⁰ See Petr Rezvykh, "Friedrich Schelling and Alexei Losev," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 56 (2018) 477–90, at 486.

⁴¹ For instance, see Losev's "Thing and Name" (from the second half of the 1920s): "We are going to understand symbol as the total and absolute sameness of essence and manifestation, the ideal and the real, the infinite and the finite. Symbol does not point at some reality, as it itself constitutes this very reality. Symbol does not denote a thing, but it represents the revealed and designated thing itself. Symbol does not denote anything that it does not constitute. The very thing that symbol denotes is symbol itself; and that which symbol is, this is what it denotes," Alexei Losev, *Bytie. Imja. Kosmos* [Being. Name. Space] (ed. Aza Takho-Godi and Igor Mahan'kov; Moscow: Misl', 1993) 876.

followed the first tradition of perceiving symbol as an unbalanced structure.⁴² “Symbolism,” which Losev discusses in his “Onomatodoxy,” presupposes the pairing of the incomprehensible essence and the appearance [= symbol] that reveals it (or, in the language of Palamism, the incomprehensible essence and the energy revealing it). This conceptualization of symbolism belongs, obviously, to the balanced interpretation of symbol, which he adhered to in his early period.

Interestingly, Palamas, in his “Triads,” also offers a teaching on symbol: he calls energy the natural symbol of essence.⁴³ This strictly corresponds to the interpretation of symbol in Losev’s “Onomatodoxy,” although, at that time, Losev was not familiar with the corpus of Palamas’s philosophical-dogmatic texts, including “Triads.”

■ “The Mystical Formula of Name-Glorification,” Antinomies, and Palamism

Now we can focus on Losev’s interpretation of the dialectical dimension of the Name-Glorifying doctrine, following his deliberations on its philosophical background. Losev suggests the following “mystical formula of Name-Glorification”: “a) God’s Name is God’s energy, inseparable from God’s very essence and, therefore, is God himself; b) however, God differs from His energies and His Name and, therefore, God is not His Name, and not any name as such.” Losev repeats this formula, presenting it first in Russian and then in Greek.⁴⁴ Next, Losev argues that the philosophical-dialectical level of Name-Glorification is antinomic and constructs the Name-Glorifying formula in an antinomic way: “Energy is God, but God is not energy; energy differs from essence, albeit is inseparable from it.”⁴⁵

In my opinion, while following the spirit of his age⁴⁶ and desiring to make all pivotal philosophical-theological provisions antinomical, Losev makes a

⁴² Lyudmila Gogotishvili, “*Simvol u rannego i pozdnego Loseva: sdvig v tolkovanii (rekonstrukcija i opyt interpretacii)*,” in *Tvorchestvo A. F. Loseva v kontekste evropejskoj i kul’turnoj tradicii. Materialy Mezhdunarodnoj nauchnoj konferencii XIV «Losevskie chtenija»* (ed. Aza Takho-Godi and Elena Takho-Godi; Moscow: Dizajn i poligrafija, 2013) 81–93, at 82–84. See also Artem Gravin, review of *Lestnica Iakova. Arhitektonika lingvofilosofskogo prostranstva*, by Lyudmila Gogotishvili, *Studies in East European Thought* 75 (2023) 203–8, at 207.

⁴³ Cf. Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, III.1.14, 19–20 and 36. See Dmitry Biriukov, “Neilos Kabasilas’s Rule of Theology and the Distinction Between the Light and Warmth of Fire in Neilos Kabasilas and Gregory Palamas,” *Scrinium: Journal of Patrology and Critical Hagiography* 14 (2018) 373–91 at 390; idem, “‘Synergy,’ ‘Energy’ and ‘Symbol,’” 148–52 and 155–57.

⁴⁴ Losev, *Lichnost’ i Absolut*, 236 (section II.A.5).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 236–37 (section II.B.1).

⁴⁶ See Ksana Blank, “The Rabbit and the Duck: Antinomic Unity in Dostoevskij, the Russian Religious Tradition, and Mikhail Bakhtin,” *Studies in Eastern European Thought* 59 (2007) 21–37; Harry James Moore, “Antinomism in Twentieth-Century Russian Philosophy: The Case of Pavel Florensky,” *Studies in East European Thought* 73 (2021) 53–76; Brandon Gallaher, “Antinomism, Trinity and the Challenge of Solov’evan Pantheism in the Theology of Sergij Bulgakov,” *Studies in Eastern European Thought* 64 (2012) 205–25; Stephen Hutchings, “Making Sense of the Sensual in Pavel Florenskii’s Aesthetics: The Dialectics of Finite Being,” *Slavic Review* 58 (Spring 1999) 96–115, at 99 and 108–11; Kuße, “Von der Namensverehrung zur Namensphilosophie,” 104–5;

significant misjudgement. Indeed, the Palamite doctrine that Losev relies on in his deliberation on the theological foundations of Name-Glorification does not agree with his stipulation that God differs from his energy and is not the divine energy. According to historical Palamism, God is the divine essence and energies at once, and the absence of any of these modes of being in God is impossible.⁴⁷ In accordance with Losev's "mystical formula of Name-Glorification," energy which is different but inseparable from God's essence is God; but God is not energy. In my opinion, this formula is linked to the interpretation of Palamism that Losev inherited from Florensky. I discern in Florensky the following logic of relating God's essence and energies in their connection to naming: God as such, on his own, is the divine essence, and the energies are the mode of God's "spreading outwards," towards humans as created beings, and in this respect the energies differ from the essence. Therefore, according to Florensky, the name "God," in the proper sense, corresponds to the divine essence, and it is from this that the name is transferred to the divine energies.⁴⁸ In my opinion, it is precisely this intuition of Florensky—that the notion of God in the proper sense is related to the divine essence (and in the proper sense God *is* the divine essence) and from the essence this notion is transferred into energy—which lies behind Losev's formula found in his "Onomatodoxy," where energy, being inseparable from the essence but differing from it, is God himself, while God is not energy. I think that within Losev's formula of Name-Glorification, as well as in Florensky, the word "God" refers to the divine essence, which, according to this view, is God in the proper sense. Precisely because of that, Losev's formula states that God is not energy.⁴⁹ In fact, this formula claims that action (energy) is named in accordance with the actor (essence), while the actor is not named in accordance with its action.⁵⁰

Oppo, "Platone e Kant nell'epistemologia di Florenskij," 396–403; Pavel Rojek, "Pavel Florensky's Theory of Religious Antinomies," *Logica Universalis* 13 (2019) 515–40.

⁴⁷ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.27; III.2.5–7; Saint Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters: A Critical Edition, Translation and Study* (ed. and trans. Robert Sinkewicz; Studies and Texts 83; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988) 72–3, 166–68, 113, 140, 212, 244).

⁴⁸ "The establishment of these main provisions [of the Palamite doctrine] by the consciousness of the Church in fact comes down to the necessity to distinguish two aspects in God—the inner aspect, or his essence, and the aspect directed outwards, or energy, which are unconfused, but inseparable. Due to this inseparability, *people and any created beings, in communicating with God's energy, are thus connected with his essence, though not directly, so that they can apply to this energy the name of Agent, i.e., God*"; and especially: "The thesis concerning the application of his Name to the divine energy is an implied premise of any religious judgment. It is clear to a believer that he is dealing with manifestations of God, though he is not identifying or merging with his essence. Therefore, *he would never have occasion to use the word God if His activity were not called by this name of the Essence. When we say 'God saved,' 'God healed,' 'God said,' etc., we always have His corresponding activity in mind*" (Florensky, *Sochinenija v chetyreh tomah*, 3.1:271 [italics added]).

⁴⁹ For another interpretation of this formula, see: Paweł Rojek, "Onomatodoxy and the Problem of Constitution: Florensky on Scientific and Manifest Images of the World," in *Faith and Reason in Russian Thought* (ed. Teresa Obolovitch and Paweł Rojek; Copernicus Centre Press, 2015) 136–40.

⁵⁰ Hence, Losev's formula of Name-Glorification would have been fair if instead of "God" it used the "divine essence," i.e., if it was the following formula: "God's Name is God's energy, inseparable

■ The Formula of Name-Glorification and Platonism in Losev's "Onomatodoxy" and "Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology": Commonalities and Differences

Losev's interpretation of the relation between naming, essence, and energy finds confirmation in another of his texts where he offers a broad overview of the Palamite doctrine. These are the well-known final chapters in Losev's "Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology" (1930), written seven or eight years after "Onomatodoxy." His views on some subjects had changed during the intervening years, but his interpretation of the relation between naming, essence, and energy remained the same. A comparison of "Onomatodoxy" and "Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology" shows Losev's rethinking of the status of Platonism. In "Onomatodoxy," he exhibits a positive, almost enthusiastic attitude toward Platonism and Neoplatonism. As I have pointed out, in "Onomatodoxy," following Florensky, Losev analyzes Palamism and Name-Glorification as a variation of Platonism. He even uses the Neoplatonic doctrine as an example of the future development of the Name-Glorifying system.⁵¹ In "Essays on Ancient Symbolism," however, he exhibits a very critical attitude toward historical Platonism and Neoplatonism and dedicates entire sections of the work to demonstrating the inferiority of non-Christian Platonism (and Catholic Platonism) as a worldview to the position of Orthodoxy with which he associates himself.⁵² In this regard, Losev speaks positively of "our, Byzantine Platonism,"⁵³ that is, Palamism and Name-Glorification.

This line of argument in "Essays on Ancient Symbolism" is linked to his reappraisal of Florensky. As we have seen, in "Onomatodoxy," Losev, in many ways, follows Florensky's Name-Glorifying project established in "Onomatodoxy as a Philosophical Premise" as well as his enthusiastic attitude toward Platonism. However, in "Essays on Ancient Symbolism," we observe Losev's careful, even critical, attitude toward Florensky.⁵⁴ This rethinking of Losev's attitude toward

from God's very essence and, therefore, is God himself; however, God's essence differs from His energies and His Name and, therefore, God's essence is not His Name, and not any name as such."

⁵¹ "Name-Glorification is possible only as a strict dialectical Platonism of the Plotinus or Proclus type. [...] Name-Glorification's goal is in a dialectical-antinomical deduction of the main categories: essence, form etc. Plotinus' doctrine on three world substances or Proclus' triadic dialectic can serve as examples. Name-Glorification here is presented as a strictly elaborated system of categories, whose form of connection with the immediate mystic of prayer represents a typical sign of powerful Neoplatonist systems. New European metaphysics is a miserable degeneration in comparison with them, both in terms of dialectics and mysticism" (Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolut*, 237).

⁵² See in particular paragraphs 14 and 15 of chapter VI of Alexei Losev, *Ocherki antichnogo simvolizma i mifologii* [Essays on ancient symbolism and mythology] (ed. Aza Takho-Godi and Igor Mahan'kov; Moscow: Misl', 1999), 865–75.

⁵³ Losev, *Ocherki antichnogo simvolizma i mifologii*, 865, 867 and 892. See further Lyudmila Gogotishvili, "The Early Losev," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 35 (1996) 6–31, at 17–18; and Alexander Treiger, "Platonism in Soviet Russia," *Dionysius* 38 (2020) 197–220, at 219–20.

⁵⁴ Losev writes: "From my current point of view, Florensky still over-Christianizes Platonism"

Florensky correlates with Losev's changed view of historical Platonism. In Losev's "Essays on Ancient Symbolism," I find the same line descending from Florensky on the application of the notion "God" to the divine essence and energies as in his "Onomatodoxy." In "Essays" as in "Onomatodoxy," Losev discusses the formula: "God's energy is God, but God is not energy." In this context, he expresses the idea that "God" in the proper sense is precisely the divine essence, while energy is different from, but also inseparable from, the essence, and it is precisely for this reason that the notion "God," which, in the proper sense refers to the essence, is being transferred into energy as well: "The essence as such is non-energetic; it does not reveal, manifest, or share itself. God's essence is God himself; the energy of the essence is not separable from the essence itself; therefore, divine energy is God himself. However, God in himself differs from His energies and, therefore, God is not His energy."⁵⁵

■ Conclusion

While developing his formulas of hesychasm and Name-Glorifying, Losev employed a range of sources in his "Onomatodoxy." These sources include "Philokalia," "Synodikon of Orthodoxy," and Florensky's essay "Onomatodoxy as a Philosophical Premise," the latter affecting Losev the most. Losev's project of interpreting Palamism and Name-Glorification through Platonism corresponds to the analogous project of Florensky. Although Losev follows the main framework of Florensky's project in his "Onomatodoxy," as in, for instance, treating Palamism and Name-Glorification as derivatives of Platonism, he differs from Florensky in his interpretation of the structure of symbol. Losev adopts from Florensky a specific understanding of the application of the concept of "God" to essence and energies in Palamism, according to which precisely the divine essence is taken as God as such. In Losev's later work, "Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology" (1930), he shifts in his understanding of the correlation of Palamism and Name-Glorification with historical Platonism, a change that directly correlates with his changed attitude toward Florensky. However, in "Essays," the specific interpretation of the application of the notion "God" to the essence and energies, dating back to Florensky, is preserved.

(Losev, *Ocherki antichnogo simvolizma i mifologii*, 705, transl. in Alexei Losev, "Plato's Doctrine of Ideas: Conclusion [The Summing-up and the Next Steps]," *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 56 (2018) 513–37, at 533.

⁵⁵ Losev, *Ocherki antichnogo simvolizma i mifologii*, 866, cf. 873.