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# GEORGES FLOROVSKY ON HUMAN RIGHTS? AN ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyses the extent to which we could approach a human rights perspective in G. Florovsky's work. The first part describes his conception relating to man's nature and destiny, a conception derived from the patristic ideas on the creation of the world in general and of man in particular. The second part of the study focuses on the relationship between Christians and the contemporary world, respectively on how the Orthodox Church should promote its permanent values in a (post)modern world. Finally, we tried to see the importance of this conception in current Orthodox theology, meaning if and to what extent it can represent a way of dialogue between Orthodox theology and the principles of a secularized modern Occidental world.

*Keywords:* anthropology, human, dignity, God, creation

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## **1. Introduction**

In our opinion, the study of Georges Florovsky's (1893-1979) [1-3] ideas on human rights is very exciting, even if we were to consider only the biography of this great Russian patrologian, historian, Slavonic scholar and Orthodox theologian. On the one hand, his critical viewpoint on Western culture and theology was recognised both in the extensive *Ways of Russian Theology* [4] and at the First Congress of the Faculties of Orthodox Theology held in Athens (1936). In Athens, he presented two programmatic reports: in the first one, called 'Western Influences in Russian Theology', he approached critically the 'double pseudomorphosis' of Orthodoxy; this meant that the primarily Roman Catholic and then Protestant heterodox influences on Orthodox theology in general and on Russian theology in particular were denounced. (In the second paper, 'Patristics and Modern Theology', the Russian theologian proclaimed the necessity of the 'return' to the Fathers, and this postulation of the renewal of Orthodox theology was closely related to the equation of 'Christian Hellenism' with an eternal category of the Church) [5]. Therefore, we find a twofold view on Theology and culture: a positive view, regarding the Eastern Orthodox one, and a negative view, regarding the Western one.

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On the other hand, Florovsky was one of the bright representatives of the tragic and extraordinary political, cultural and religious phenomenon given by the Russian diaspora's development in Western Europe and in the USA. (It is estimated that, in 1920-1922, under the pressure of the Soviet regime, materialized in one of Lenin's decrees, between one and two million dissidents chose to leave everywhere in the world, the most important centres being Sofia, Belgrade, Prague, Berlin, Paris and New-York) [6]. Since he lived in Paris and then in the USA, and taught at prestigious institutes and universities, such as Harvard and Princeton, Georges Florovsky came to know both the cultural achievements and the ethical values of the 'free world' [7-9].

This study analyses the extent to which we can approach a conception of the human rights in G. Florovsky's work. Then we will focus on the relevance of these ideas for the current Orthodox theology, i.e. if and to what extent it can represent a manner of dialogue between Orthodox theology and the principles of the secularized modern western world.

The first part will describe Florovsky's notion of man's nature and destiny; we want to emphasise that his conception owes a lot to the patristic ideas on the creation of the world in general and of man in particular. The second part of the study deals with the relationship between Christians and the contemporary world, respectively with how the Orthodox Church should promote its eternal values in a (post)modern world. Finally, we will draw several conclusions, while we take into account the aforementioned objectives.

## **2. Human's nature and destiny**

Father Georges Florovsky's doctrine regarding the creation, a doctrine derived mainly from the ideas of Saint Athanasius the Great [4, vol. 4, 1975, 39-62], has a particularly important place in his theology and it is centred on three aspects: the contingency of all the creatures, God's freedom and His transcendence in relation to the creation, respectively the absolute ontological distance between the Creator and the creature (the spiritual one included) [10]. When we describe Florovsky's teachings on creation, we need to emphasise an additional aspect: the required central position and special place the human being has within the creation. The man is a 'microcosm' that reunites all the elements of the world and, thus, he has the ability to guide it toward God or to shatter it, by isolating it from Him [4, vol. 3, 1976, 106].

We need to say first that, by being an act of God's free will rather than of the necessity of His nature, the world reflects these attributes – the creatures' freedom and absolute autonomy (self-determination). Without them, the creation could not meet its actual purpose, i.e. the movement toward and the union with God by its own effort and achievements. Like the Holy Trinity, Whose face is engraved on the world [4, vol. 3, 1976, 72], being and life do not coincide in the creation. Although capable of 'metaphysical suicide', it is in fact indestructible. Moreover, its primordial and ultimate vocation is the participation to godly life, the only one which can provide it with the wholeness and reality of a complete

existence [4, vol. 3, 1976, 48-50]. Created ‘in the image’ of God, human hypostases reflect all the more so the divine attributes and they express the calling and availability for communion. In fact, by synthesizing Father Florovsky’s description of man’s constitution, based on personal and communion traits, we will be able to operate an improved identification of the purpose of his creation.

First, Florovsky shows that, in modern theology and philosophy, there is a movement which, not without hindrance, has stressed that, in Christianity, there is an emphasis on the ‘Resurrection of the body’ (Anders Nygren) rather than on the ‘immortality of the soul’; “Christianity without an immortality of the soul is not altogether inconceivable”, but “on the contrary, absolutely inconceivable, is Christianity without a Resurrection of Man” (Etienne Gilson); therefore, Christianity was not concerned with a *natural* ‘Immortality’, but rather with the soul’s *supernatural* Communion with God (Henry Dodwell) [4, vol. 3, 1976, 213-214].

This idea, however, is not new; instead, as claimed by Father Florovsky, it is an obvious ‘return to the position of the Early Fathers’: for example, Saint Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, in *Dialogue with the Jew Tryphon*, states that we should not call the soul immortal, because this it would mean it is also unbegotten; thus, he reprises the thesis of the Platonists. Begotten, the soul is ‘corruptible’, it is not life in itself, it merely ‘partakes’ of life. God alone is life and this is why the soul can only *have* life. Therefore, the creation’s contingent nature reflects also on the ‘highest’ component of man, i.e. the soul. It is ‘immortal’ not by nature, but by grace, which excludes its presence in the scope of ‘divinity’ – for a Greek, ‘immortality’ of the soul would immediately imply its ‘eternity,’ i.e., an eternal ‘pre-existence’ [4, vol. 3, 1976, 216].

This viewpoint is also present at Theophilus of Antioch who stressed the ‘neutral’ nature of man ‘*by nature*’, Man is neither ‘immortal’ nor ‘mortal’, but rather ‘capable of both’, *dektikon amphoteron*. Tatian went even further. “The soul is not in itself immortal, but mortal. Yet it is possible for it not to die.” Although the early apologists’ ideas did include a series of contradictions and ambiguities, Georges Florovsky believes it has two closely related essential aspects: first, the issue of immortality had to be approached against the backdrop of the doctrine on creation and, second, ‘immortality’ was not a mere natural attribute of the soul, but something that relied on man’s actual relationship with God [4, vol. 3, 1976, 217]. The importance of this view is also derived from the fact that it is continued the following Holy Fathers. Saint Irenaeus of Lugdunum rejected the argument according to which in order to stay in existence souls had to be ‘unbegotten’ (*sed oportere eas aut innascibiles esse ut sint immortales*), for otherwise they would have to die with the body (*vel si generationis initium acceperint, cum corpore mori*). As creatures, the souls ‘endure as long as God wills them to endure’): if God alone is Life, the soul is not life (*sic et anima quidem non este vita, participatur autem a Deo sibi praestitam vitam*) (The soul is not life by itself; it partakes of life, by the grant of God). Clement of Alexandria, in spite of his Platonism, would occasionally recall that the soul was

not immortal ‘by nature’ (*non est naturaliter anima incorruptibilis*). Saint Athanasius would demonstrate the immortality of the soul by arguments which can be traced back to Plato, and yet he insisted very strongly that everything created is ‘by nature’ unstable and exposed to destruction). Augustin said the soul is equally immortal and mortal. Saint John of Damascus says that even Angels are immortal not by nature, but only by grace, and Saint Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem (634), in the ‘synodical’ letter read and favourably received at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (681), condemns the errors of the Origenists, the pre-existence of the soul and apokatastasis, and states plainly that ‘intellectual beings’, though they do not die, ‘are not immortal *by nature*’, but only by the *grace of God* [4, vol. 3, 1976, 218-219]. Contrary to Platonist and Neo-Platonist theories, Christianity has emphasised two inter-relational aspects regarding human constitution: first, death, seen as a separation of the soul from the body, is not a ‘release’, a return to the sphere of the spirits; it is a ‘catastrophe’, a consequence of sin, because – and this is the second aspect – man was created with a body and a soul, as a single living entity. The purpose of his creation – eternal existence – means necessarily the continuity of life with the two components (hence the importance of the philosophy of the ‘resurrection of the bodies’) – and “the basic presupposition of the whole argument is that the body intrinsically belongs to the fullness of human existence” [4, vol. 3, 1976, 221-222].

We should not ignore that, as stressed by Father Florovsky, Christians, as Christians, are not committed to any philosophical doctrine of immortality. But they are committed to the belief in the General Resurrection. There is nothing ‘naturalistic’ or pantheistic about the name given by the Fathers to this fact, i.e. the term ‘deification’ (*theosis*) [4, vol. 3, 1976, 239-240]. Saint Athanasius insisted that this world, man included, can escape ‘mortality’ and ‘corruptibility’ only by the holy grace and by partaking of the energies of Logos, “God’s One born Son” [4, vol. 4, 1975, 50].

Certainly, the distinction between the divine essence and energies, between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, can generate new and apposite clarifications. This is what Gregory Palamas also believed; he described the ‘inseparable, myriadfold hypostatic distribution’ of God’s grace or work. Characterized by Florovsky as a ‘bold expression’, the aforementioned claim sought to show that “each hypostasis, in its own being and existence, is sealed by a particular ray of the good pleasure of God’s love and will” [4, vol. 3, 1976, 73]. Creatures are in God, but in the ‘image – icon’ rather than in nature: the infinite distance between the Unbegotten and the begotten is ‘filled’, ‘bridged by Divine love’. It is a ‘likeness’, a ‘mirroring’ of the Proto-Image (Arche-Image), Which shines like a calling, like a model: “There is in creation a supra-natural challenging goal set above its own nature, the challenging goal, founded on freedom, of a free participation in and union with God. This challenge transcends created nature, but only by responding to it is this nature itself revealed in its completeness. This challenging goal is an aim, an aim that can be realized only through the *self-determination* and efforts of the creature. Therefore the process of created

becoming is real in its freedom, and free in its reality, and it is by this becoming that what-was-not reaches fulfilment and is achieved. Because it is guided by the challenging goal.” [4, vol. 3, 1976, 73-74]

To some extent, an opposition between nature and finality is postulated here: “In a certain sense, this goal itself is ‘natural’ and proper to the one who does the constructive acts, so that the attainment of this goal is somehow also the subject’s realization of *himself*. And nevertheless this ‘I’ which is realized and realizable through constructiveness is not the ‘natural’ and empiric ‘I’, inasmuch as any such realization of one’s self is a rupture — a leap from the plane of nature onto the plane of grace, because this realization is the acquisition of the Spirit, is participation in God.” [4, vol. 3, 1976, 74] Man, by tending toward God’s communion by virtue of an ‘élan’ within him, cannot obtain achievement of a natural process, because “the goal lies beyond nature, it is an invitation to a living and free encounter and union with God” [4, vol. 3, 1976, 74]. Therefore, this process is not a development, a mere unfolding and manifestation of innate ‘natural’ ends. Maximus the Confessor believed the supreme self-determination of the human nature is revealed by the urge to ‘outstrip itself’: the goal of created becoming is ‘divinisation’ or ‘deification’, as crowning of the creature’s vocation and effort and of the work of grace (therefore, an equally ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ action) [4, vol. 3, 1976, 74].

Finally, we add that deification does not erase the irremovable ‘precipice’ between the created nature and the uncreated nature: any ‘transubstantiation’ of the creature is excluded. The ‘participation’ in the divine life and gifts makes man ‘similar’, ‘conformed’ to the God’ image or to their prototype, as entities ‘anointed and sealed by the Spirit’; but they become, in and through Christ, sons adopted ‘by grace’. Not by accident, Father Florovsky believes this concept, *theōsis* [deification], ‘divinization’ was crystallized only when the doctrine of God’s ‘energies’ had been explicated once and for all. Anastasius of Sinai and especially Saint Maximus has already identified directly the deifying grace with God’s benevolence regarding creation, with the creating *fiat*. Gregory Palamas synthesized the previous patristic teaching, writing “there is a real distinction, but no separation, between the essence or entity of God and His energies. This distinction is manifest above all in the fact that the Entity is absolutely incommunicable and inaccessible to creatures. The creatures have access to and communicate with the Divine Energies only. But with this participation they enter into a genuine and perfect communion and union with God; they receive *deification*.” [4, vol. 3, 1976, 68] (Palamas starts from a threefold ‘distinction’ in God: the essence-nature, the work-energy and the hypostatic Trinity. The union with God ‘in nature’ is impossible, for nature is ‘imparticipable’; union ‘according to hypostasis’ is specific to the Incarnate Word; finally, union ‘according to energy’ is addressed to the created and coincides with ‘deification’.) Beyond any necessity of nature, God’s creating will (which concerns the entire creation and which is called to become Church) is completed in the human hypostasis developed into a vehicle and vessel of Grace [4, vol. 3, 1976, 76-77]: “Human nature must be freely discovered through a responsive

movement, by overcoming the self-isolation of its own nature; and by denying the self, as one might say, receive this mysterious, and terrifying, and unspeakable double-naturedness for sake of which the world was made. For it was made to be and to become the Church, the Body of Christ.”) Through the Church creaturely efforts are crowned and saved. And creation is restored to its fullness and reality. “In the Church creation is forever confirmed and established, unto all ages, in union with Christ, in the Holy Spirit.” [4, vol. 3, 1976, 77-78].

### **3. The relationship between the Church and the society**

Father Florovsky emphasised repeatedly that the two attempts to solve the issue of the Church’s historical presence in the world – “the flight to the desert” [11] and “the construction of the Christian Empire” – failed [4, vol. 3, 1976, 28-29 and 99-100]. Monasticism, characterized as Christian maximalism, tried to create an independent society opposed to this world (the given example is the ‘monastic republic’ at Mount Athos), but it failed because not all Christians can flee into the wilderness; the theocratic empire, characterized by Christian minimalism, tried to adjust the Church to the realities of this world, which meant, at core, that the world’s ‘baptism’ remained a nominal one. Therefore, the former movement includes the temptation of a sect, by obscuring the ‘universal’ character of the Christian message, while the latter leads to the secularization of the Church, by targeting the baptism of the world in the form of a universal State or Empire (like the Byzantine Empire) or of a national one (like Russia and its ‘Third Rome’ claim). To conclude, each of these two programmes is inherently contradictory [11]. The idea that the Church is always exposed to the temptation of excessive adjustment to the environment (Empire) or of a separation from the world (Desert) is reprised in Florovsky [4, vol. 3, 1976, 99-100], with a small variation. A third risk is mentioned here, the one of ‘double standards’ developed with the ascension of monasticism. It was read as an ‘exceptional way’, above the usual, general Christian votes. Thus, “not only was the Christian Society sorely rent asunder and split into the groups of ‘religious’ and ‘secular’, but the Christian ideal itself was split in twain and, as it were, ‘polarized’, by a subtle distinction between ‘essential’ and ‘secondary’, between ‘binding’ and ‘optional’, between ‘precept’ and ‘advice’” [4, vol. 3, 1976, 100]. However, we cannot accept A. Nichols’s opinion, according to which in G. Florovsky’s theology “the true Church exists within the deep recesses of Byzantium, *harmoniously uniting* the twin poles of empire and desert, culture and asceticism” [12].

Beyond the aforementioned claims, Father Georges Florovsky did not have a pessimistic or intractable attitude toward the Church’s social mission. According to his calling, he proceeded from Russia’s historical situation to prove the importance of the Church’s social dimension. ‘Social Christianity’, said Florovsky, was the basic and favourite theme of the whole religious thinking in Russia in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Dostoevsky would go so far as to suggest that the Orthodox Church was precisely ‘our Russian socialism’, because the Church could inspire and enforce an ultimate realization of social justice in the spirit of brotherly love and mutuality. Authentic Christianity, founded on the feeling of shared responsibility, on the spirit of reciprocity, of humility and of compassion, would be valid only as social action.

Vladimir Solovyev shared Dostoevsky’s vision, thus, he was also centred on freedom and brotherhood, as well as on the ‘Slavophile school’ [13]. Although his attitude regarding the latter was generally critical (he rebuked its ‘Utopian exaggeration’), Father Florovsky admitted its social accent was ‘fully justified’. Solovyev, A.S. Khomyakov – “who elaborated a theological basis of social Christianity” –, and, later, N. Berdyaev knew, to some extent, “that this Eastern feeling for social and communal values was due, not to the Slavic national character, but precisely to the tradition of the early Church” [4, vol. 2, 1974, 137]. Although they were laymen, these authors knew no one could attain their goal on one’s own, in isolation, that the Church’s spiritual fellowship that resulted from Christ’s loving ‘divine-humanity’ (*vseedinstvo*) was fundamental [14]. Generally, all were loyal to Tradition, even if they deviated from some of its aspects [4, vol. 2, 1974, 137-138]. This note is surprisingly ‘soft’, since we know Florovsky’s harsh opinion, in *Ways of Russian Theology*, regarding Vladimir Solovyev and Nikolai Berdyaev).

“The faith of the Church provides a solid ground for social action, and only in the Christian, spirit can one expect to build afresh a new order in which both human personality and social order would be secured” [4, vol. 2, 1974, 138] – this was the main religious belief in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. However, it could not materialize adequately as expected. The cause of this was historical, like the invasion and the Muslim rule in Byzantium, at the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, or the formation of secular national states, according to a western, bourgeois pattern, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: we are talking about the catastrophe of the Russian Revolution, which brought to the fore the full complex of social problems. The installation of the Bolshevik regime meant the enforcement of a *Polizei-Staat* on the Church; the latter had to withdraw ‘in its own sphere’, to limit its activity to religion only. However, this was not a normal situation, as some voices ‘behind the Iron Curtain’ claimed, based on the ‘transcending’ (‘otherworldly’) nature of the Church. It is not supported by any historical experience testimonial – although the Church is indeed ‘not of this world’, it does have an important mission ‘in this world’. Both in the East and in the West, the Church was the ‘supreme teacher’ of the ethical values derived from Christian sources and, first and foremost, from the Christian Gospel. Thus, even if the Church should not commit to any specific social or economic programme or to the political clashes, the Christian’s attitude should not be indifferent; “if the Church, as an institution, cannot adopt the way of an open social action, Christians cannot dispense with their civic duties for theirs is an enormous contribution to make ‘in the material sphere’, exactly as Christians” [4, vol. 2, 1974, 139-143].

Certainly, the ‘salvation of society’ seems an ambiguous and difficult mission for the church, and the Byzantine political-ecclesial experience – an ‘honest attempt to solve a real problem’ – cannot be repeated in different historical conditions. Furthermore, monasticism either could never become a general way of life and its failures should be admitted and recognized in all fairness [4, vol. 2, 1974, 96-100]. Beyond all these aspects, the Church’s main mission is ‘the proclamation of the Gospel’, which means, inevitably, the announcement of a judgement of the world. “The Gospel itself is a judgement and a final tension, a contrast and an opposition are in the world, because the Gospel ‘is not of this world’, it is a proclamation of the world ‘to come’.” [11, p. 55] The Church’s attitude is always ‘revolutionary’ in relation to the ‘former regime’ of this world, and the Christian should be a ‘new creature’, while the world should be a ‘new creation’. In other words, since God claims man in his fullness, the Church bears witness to this ‘total’ claim of God in Jesus Christ.

The ways in which the Church achieves the goal of the Gospel are also important, because they reveal it is more than a ‘fellowship of preachers’ or a ‘teaching society’, more than a ‘mission circle’. It does more than challenge or teach people; it introduces them to this ‘new life’. Ecclesial mission is different from any general mission: the Church is “truly a body of mission and its field of mission is the whole world. But the goal of its mission does not stop at the communication of true beliefs or ideas or at the necessity of a specific discipline or rule of living; first and foremost, its goal is to introduce them to a new reality, to *convert* them, to lead them through faith and atonement to Christ Himself, to have them reborn in Him, from water and Holy Spirit. Service of the Word is accomplished in the service of the Sacraments.” [11, p. 55]

As noted by Y.-N. Lelouvier [15], according to Father Florovsky, the mission of the Church is more than an ideology, than the mere statement of moral-educational messages; it does more than convert by *verbo et exemplo*, it ‘initiates’ a new reality, by the Sacraments. The dynamic presence of the Church in the world means a ‘transfiguring eschatology’, a ‘sum’ of the existing positive values (e.g. love), owing to the fact it was created by God Himself. Of course, ‘the gift of acumen’ is not easy, on the contrary, it is very difficult. History involves an ‘antinomy’, an inextricable blend of good and evil, of positive and negative things. Hence the radical tension between Church and world, as well as the false historical shapes it took: the exclusivist society of monasticism (*ghetto* Church) and the attempt to baptise the world, to integrate it fully in its being (the Empire). Although these forms failed – because they did not consider the essentially antinomian historical reality of the Church, the tension between the transcending otherness of human life and the absolute solidarity with the human destiny on Earth – and any fusion between these aspects is impossible, G. Florovsky’s attitude toward culture is not negative. On the contrary, by approaching the idea that our age is a ‘critical’ rather than an ‘organic’ one, largely ‘post-Christian’, hence defined by faithlessness, uncertainty, confusion, despair, he believed the “real root of the modern tragedy does not lie only in the



fact that people lost convictions, but that they deserted Christ” [4, vol. 2, 1974, 11].

Georges Florovsky offers a double meaning of the term ‘culture’: on the one hand, ‘culture’ is a specific attitude of human personalities and groups, a system of goals and ‘concerns’ and a ‘system of habits’ that distinguish a ‘civilized society’ from a ‘primitive’ one. On the other hand, it is a system of values produced and gathered in the creative process of history, which tends to obtain an existence semi-independent or even independent from the ‘creative struggle’ that generated and found those (multiple and varied) values. When a crisis of culture is approached, said Florovsky, we usually understand “a disintegration in one of these two different, if related, systems, or rather in both of them” [4, vol. 2, 1974, 11]. Father Florovsky also approaches Oswald Spengler’s distinction between ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’: while the first has a positive value, result of specifically human creativity, the latter (to which culture could degenerate at any time) has a negative value, it is an alienation of man: “in civilization man is, as it were, estranged from himself, estranged and detached from the very roots of his existence, from his very self, or from nature, or from God” [4, vol. 2, 1974, 14].

Although culture is not and cannot be a goal or an ultimate value for man, Christians are challenged to “rebuild” the world, to convert it, to have its values ‘tested apocalyptically’. The Christian’s ‘temptation’ is still to simply show indifference or opposition regarding culture (a double cause of this negative attitude is found: 1) the idea that the world is transitory, that history is insignificant ‘in the perspective of eternity’, which means all human values are ‘perishable’, relative and uncertain, as culture is in the perspective of imminent termination; 2) ‘the obscuring’ of the Mystery of Creation by the Redemption, the latter being seen as a rejection of the fallen world (hence of culture) rather than as its healing and recovery), and Florovsky listed four types of this ‘pessimistic’ attitude.

1) *pietism*, through which people believe they met God and the Saviour in their private and personal experience, and that the life of the world is nothing but ‘sinful entanglement’ (out of which they are glad to be released). They cannot identify any positive value in the process of culture, in civilization, and they preach ‘virtue of simplicity’, opposed to the complexity of sociocultural commitment. This is a sectarian attitude, an isolation in a subjective Christianity, a private religion concerns only with individual ‘salvation’, a specific kind of psychological ‘retirement from the world’: ‘a paradoxical mixture of penitence and self-satisfaction, of humility and pride’, double by disregard of doctrine.

2) *puritanism*, a similar reduction of belief, although an active type: in the absence of any kind of desire to evade history, the latter is seen as ‘service’ and ‘obedience’ rather than as ‘creative opportunity’. “The basic contention is that man, this miserable sinner, can be forgiven, if and when he accepts the forgiveness which is offered to him by Christ and in Christ, but even in this case he remains precisely what he is, a frail and unprofitable creature, and is not essentially changed or renewed” [4, vol. 2, 1974, 17-18]. Even as a ‘forgiven

person', man remains a 'lost creature' who lacks any beneficial value. By promoting a strictly 'utilitarian' purpose, this perspective must be endured as a process of character building and as test of patience.

3) *existentialism*, based on the protest against man's enslavement in civilization, on the nothingness of the real man, 'as he is and knows himself'. Even if the atheistic form is accompanied by a form that leaves room to God in history, existentialism insists that 'man is still but 'nothing,' in spite of the redeeming love and concern of Creator for His lost and stray creatures'. Man's 'creatureliness' coincides, then, with man's 'nothingness' – the terms of reference are, as shown by Father Florovsky, the 'All of God' and the 'Nothing of man'. Symptom of cultural disintegration and disillusion, existentialism would always promote "a lonely and solitary being, inextricably engaged in the scrutiny of his predicament" [4, vol. 2, 1974, 18].

4) the opposition or indifference of the '*Plain Man*' who "may live rather quietly in the world of culture, and even enjoy it, but he would wonder what culture can 'add' to religion, except by the way of decoration, or as a tribute of reverence and gratitude, i.e. especially in the form of art" [4, vol. 2, 1974, 19-20]. There is suspicion regarding the use of reason in matters of faith, doubt about the utility and value of culture – defined as 'worldliness', a frail and perishable thing. The 'plain man' denies, ultimately, any religious justification of the human urge to know and to create; then, he choose the 'simplicity' of religion, by rejecting nearly all the doctrines and dogmas of the Church as 'theological speculation' [4, vol. 2, 1974, 16-20].

At the end of this list of false solutions to the relationship between 'Faith and Culture', Father Florovsky emphasised the damaging effect of a 'pessimistic' attitude in the modern world, hence the necessity of a new 'theology of culture', including our 'practical' decisions. Paradoxically, the overemphasis of 'transcendence', of 'eternal life' leads to a false eschatological perspective, to a displacement of God's plan. The obscuring of the creation's positive value, where the man had the function of 'co-creator' with God (and would have acted in the world as its emperor, priest and prophet) leads to the neglect of time and its value for the redemption of man situated both in the Church and in the world. Although a 'poor anticipation' of the 'Age to come', 'history' is in fact its actual anticipation, and the cultural process in history relates to the ultimate accomplishment (even if in a way that cannot be currently understood). To conclude, we 'must be careful not to exaggerate 'the human achievement, "but [...] should also be careful not to minimize the creative vocation of man. *The destiny of human culture is not irrelevant to the ultimate destiny of man* (our emphasis)." [4, vol. 2, 1974, 20-21] (It is historically obvious that the Church built culture, throughout the centuries; even from the beginning, Christianity emerged in one of the most difficult historical period, during a significant crisis of culture which was overcome only by the birth of 'Christian Culture'. In the Russian theologian's opinion, not even monasticism opposes culture. The depth of spiritual life generates spiritual creativeness, and not by accident ascetic effort was described as a 'philosophy', as a 'love of

wisdom'. Without considering that asceticism always led to creativity, Florovsky wrote that the deliverance of creativity from 'all sorts of utilitarianism' occurs through "ascetic re-interpretation"; "Ascetic renunciation unfetters the spirit, releases the soul"; "through the ascetic trial the very vision of the world is changed and renewed", and "the world must be re-instated to its original beauty, from which it fell into sin"; this is why 'asceticism leads to action' [4, vol. 2, 1974, 126-129].

#### **4. Conclusions**

As seen above, Georges Florovsky was not interested directly in the topic of human rights. However, some reflections included in his work do not lack relevance on this subject. Starting from the ideas of the Holy Fathers, he tried to explain both the nature and destiny of man – created 'in the image' of God and tending toward 'likeness' with Him – and the Christians' position in the current socio-historical context. In fact, we are dealing with an update in the assertion of the Gospel's eternal values, by avoiding the extreme standpoints that should define a valid relationship between the Church and the world. We can identify, step by step, the following fundamental principles:

- 1) Created by God, man has a central position in the creation. Gifted with absolute freedom, he is the one on who relies the redemption or, on the contrary, the loss of himself and of the elements of cosmos. His double structure – body and soul – has a finality: to obtain the communion with God. This communion takes place by grace and some Holy Fathers called it deification or divinisation (*theosis*).
- 2) The environment of this dynamic process of deification is the Church. As Body of Christ, the Church is a community; its works have a social dimension. Therefore, there is an inherent relationship between the Christian life and the Church's mission in the world.
- 3) The two great designs of edification of the Christian view on society – the 'Empire' and the 'desert' – were fated to fail. But this does not mean the mission of the Church in the world should cease. On the contrary, Florovsky strongly defended this work and opposed equally strongly the opinions that saw a rupture between the Church and the society. Furthermore, he rejected the four positions that gave a 'pessimistic' perspective on the relationship between theology and culture.

What is the relevance of Father Georges Florovsky's ideas to contemporary Orthodox theology? First, we need to note that he promoted a theological view on the human being, on man's qualities and rights, as well as on the relationship between Christianity and society. This approach is prevailing in Orthodox theology; it can be also found at other contemporary Orthodox theologians who wrote about human rights, explicitly (as Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, Christos Yannaras, Patriarch Kirill I or Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev) [16-21; C. Yannaras, *Human Rights and the Orthodox Church*, 2002, [http://jbburnett.com/resources/yannaras/yannaras\\_rights&orth.pdf](http://jbburnett.com/resources/yannaras/yannaras_rights&orth.pdf); Patriarch

Kirill, *Some Human Rights are 'heresy'*, 2016, <http://orthochristian.com/91765.html>] or implicitly (as Paul Evdokimov or Dumitru Stăniloae) [22-24]. They also asserted that, although human rights are not strictly a religious issue, their Christian foundations are doubtless. Second, in *Ways of Russian Theology*, G. Florovsky postulated two opposing civilizations and religious mentalities, an Eastern and a Western one. However, at a closer look, we note that his ideas also included reflections which did not rely on an antagonism between the Church and the society, between theology and culture (More about Florovsky's vision of 'unity' and 'reintegration' in Baker [25] and Toroczkaï and Andrei [26]). On the contrary, there is a positive attitude regarding the complementarity of Christian values and the values of the contemporary world [27]. Perhaps we may even conclude that, in Florovsky's opinion, Orthodox Christianity implies human rights principles?

Finally, there are some deficiencies at Georges Florovsky which should be considered. This viewpoint provides only a general frame of approach of the issue of man in a (post)modern society; it also gives only the basis of the principles for the relationship of Church, State and society. Unfortunately, the exposure of the past unilateral attempts of solutions by Orthodoxy to this relationship ('Empire' and 'Desert') is not followed by the suggestion of an alternative. In fact, although he lived in the free world (France and then the USA), Florovsky seemed to reject the dialogue (the confrontation?) with modernity, with the democratic society and its values. Nevertheless, if the Orthodoxy does not intend to continue with the image of a *ghetto*-Church (mentioned by Florovsky himself), it needs to commit to this dialogue.

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