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In the Absence of God's Plan

Fedorov, Bulgakov and the Eschatological Problem of Modernity

ABSTRACT: Between the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX centuries in Russia rose to prominence a most peculiar philosophical and religious trend, later identified as “Cosmism”, which sought, among other things, to reframe mankind's purpose and goals on a higher scale – first the whole planet and then the whole cosmos. Any form of predestination is negated, and Mankind's absolute freedom means that the fulfilment of its (cosmical) task is left to its own devices. This new reframing of mankind, reflected in much of our contemporary worldview, was seen by some of its contemporaries as revealing a fundamental issue of modernity – the abandonment of any eschatological dimension. We will explore this node through the analysis of the ideas on predestination of two authors: Nikolaj Fedorov, perhaps the most important representative of Cosmism, and one of its critics, Russian philosopher and theologian Sergej Bulgakov.

SOMMARIO: Tra la fine del XIX e l'inizio del XX secolo in Russia si affermò una corrente filosofica e religiosa molto particolare, in seguito identificata come “Cosmismo”, che cercava, tra le altre cose, di riformulare lo scopo e gli obiettivi dell'umanità nella sua interconnessione con un contesto più ampio, prima l'intero pianeta e poi l'intero cosmo. Per i Cosmisti, qualsiasi forma di predestinazione è negata, all'umanità viene attribuita una libertà assoluta, a tal punto che l'adempimento del proprio compito (cosmico) non dipende da nessuna altra forza. Questa nuova riformulazione dell'umanità, che troviamo riflessa in gran parte della nostra visione contemporanea del mondo, è stata vista da alcuni dei suoi contemporanei come rivelatrice di una questione fondamentale della modernità: l'abbandono di qualsiasi dimensione escatologica. Esploreremo questo nodo attraverso l'analisi delle idee sulla predestinazione di due autori: Nikolaj Fedorov, forse il più importante rappresentante del Cosmismo, e uno dei suoi critici, il filosofo e teologo russo Sergej Bulgakov.

KEYWORDS: Cosmism; Predestination; End of History; Resurrection; Russian History of Philosophy

1. INTRODUCTION

In the US television show *Star Trek* (originally aired from 1966 to 1968), and more in-depth in its sequel *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (from 1987 to 1994), the writers imagined a utopian society that managed to overcome strife, scarcity, and greed. In this society, the main drive for human action is not the accumulation of material goods but the will to self-improve. The main plot device used to justify the existence of such a society is twofold: the invention of the fictional ‘replicator’, a machine capable of producing organic and non-organic matter solely from energy, and the ethical-political



choice to allow the free use of these machines by the whole population, as opposed to other societies that restrict or commodify their use (we will discuss this second part more in detail in the following of this paper).

This imagined machine rendered the members of this fictional society, for all intents and purposes, *autotrophs*, i.e. capable of converting non-organic energy sources into organic compounds, which can fuel metabolic processes - in other words, they can produce food from energy.

About forty years before, in 1925, Russian/Ukrainian biogeochemist Vladimir I. Vernadskij published in the *Revue générale des sciences pures et appliquées* a paper titled 'Human Autotrophy'¹ containing an alarming, and all too actual, warning:

The stock of raw materials that are basic to [mankind's] existence appears to be diminishing over time. If their consumption increases at the same rate as before, the situation will become serious. [...] This phenomenon is inevitable, for man is rapidly destroying [...] the raw materials fundamental to culture, formed over myriad centuries. Even if unknown new sources were to be found [...] this would only postpone the critical moment, but the alarming problem would remain unsolved.²

In the same paper, Vernadskij envisions what is, for him, the only way out of this problem:

The direct synthesis of food, without the mediation of organised beings [organisms], once discovered, will radically change the future of man. [...] Its creation would free man from his dependence on other living matter. From a being socially heterotrophic he would become a being socially *autotrophic*. [...] an autotrophic animal, an autotrophic vertebrate, would have appeared on the Earth's crust for the first time in the geological history of the globe [...] it is obvious that it would be the crowning of a long paleontological evolution. [...] The creation of a new, autotrophic existence will give him the possibility so far lacking to fulfil his age-old spiritual yearnings; it will truly open to him the path to a better life.³

There is a connection between Vernadskij and Star Trek through the literary medium of science fiction: novels about the exploration of the cosmos, the possible futures of mankind, and the marvels of technology were extremely popular in late XIX century Russia and the Soviet Union.⁴ Many of those tales were translated into English, especially in the United States of America in the early '60s.⁵ Through U.S. literature and cinema, the view of the world behind those tales entered the collective consciousness of Western culture.⁶

In our technology-driven, post-capitalist era, Russian and Soviet ideas on the fu-

1. The paper, originally published in French, appeared for the first time in Russian in a collection of papers by Vernadskij titled *Biogeohimičeskije očerki* (Mosca & Leningrado, Ak. Nauk. SSSR, 1940), and was then collected in the first anthology of Russian Cosmism by Gačeva and Semenova, 1993.

2. Vernadskij 1993: 299

3. *Ibid.*: 301-303.

4. On the topic see e.g. Banerjee 2018.

5. For example, in 1962 an anthology of Soviet science fiction was published in translation in the U.S. with an introduction by Isaac Asimov: Beljaev *et al.* 1962.

6. Bould and Miéville 2009.

ture still inform, at its core, our vision of the 'ideal' tomorrow: the end of scarcity and endless expansion of life in the cosmos.

This vision of an 'infinite' tomorrow, however, has been criticised, among others by Russian philosopher and theologian Sergeij Bulgakov, for the absence of any eschatological perspective and the complete negation of any form of predestination, of 'metahistory' and of an 'end'. We will explore Bulgakov's critique in the second part of the present paper.

2. RUSSIAN COSMISM AND THE TASK OF MAN

Vladimir Ivanovič Vernadskij is regarded as one of the most influential scientists of the last century, having revolutionized our approach to the study of our planet and its living organisms: "so much of [his] thought has now been accepted as axiomatic in natural science that it is difficult to appreciate how fresh and bold his ideas seemed when initially published".⁷ One major example is Vernadskij's concern for the use and depletion of natural resources, which brought to the creation in 1915 of the *Commission* (then, from 1930, *Soviet*) *for the study of the natural productive forces*, tasked with researching and assessing the natural resources of the country. The originality of his ideas was also the result of his effort to decline in a rigorous academic-scientific framework the philosophical approach developed by a group of thinkers, philosophers, and scientists who, between the second half of the XIX and the first of the XX centuries, elaborated a unique and fascinating view of the world, often referred to as "Cosmism" (of which Vernadskij is considered a representative of its 'scientific' current).

The very definition of Cosmism is somewhat complex, also because the thinkers usually regarded as the founders of Cosmism did not consider themselves as such. In general, Cosmism can be regarded as a theological, philosophical and scientific movement that regards mankind as a microcosm that is in turn a part of a wider cosmos, to which is in relation as a part is to its whole. Ideas on the essence, the purpose and the moral duties of man are conceived within this framework of interconnectedness and constant inter-action. Such a general definition, however, does not capture the essence of Cosmism, as it can also be attributed to other religions, Oriental philosophies and even from certain points of view to the "mythological consciousness". For this reason, one of the first and most important researchers on the history of Cosmism, Svetlana Semenova, proposed to orient the definition of Cosmism around the idea of *active evolution* [*aktivnaja evoljucija*]: "the necessity for a new conscious stage of development of the world, when humanity directs it on a course which reason and moral feeling determine, when man takes, so to say, the wheel of evolution into his own hand".⁸

Cosmism has therefore a *practical* character which, in a certain measure, is a defining trait of the Russian philosophical tradition in general, famously illustrated by the idea of the "What is to be done?" [*Što delat'?*]: "not the priority of 'reality' to knowl-

7. Young 2012: 158.

8. Semenova 1993: 3.

edge, but the inclusion of knowledge in our relationship to the world, our ‘activity’ in it”.⁹ All the branches of human knowledge, from philosophy to theology to technology, must be directed and cooperate towards one single goal, towards one practical task. This characteristic is evident in the most influential and renowned of the Cosmists: Nikolaj Fedorovič Fedorov (1829-1903).

Fedorov was, at first glance, a peculiar albeit not very interesting character: the illegitimate son of a Russian Prince, he worked most of his adult life as a librarian in Moscow, living a modest and quasi-ascetic life. His ideas, however, were as extra-ordinary as they were powerful and fascinating, and quickly garnered the attention and admiration of the most influential Russian intellectuals in Moscow, such as Dostoevskij and Tolstoj.¹⁰

Fedorov has been referred to as the ‘hedgehog’ (as in the famous book from Isaiah Berlin) who knows ‘one big thing’.¹¹ For as many topics he tackled, as many branches of knowledge he explored, his whole life’s work has been oriented towards one singular, grandiose goal: overcoming death. Not only overcoming our present (or future) death, i.e. the decay of our bodies, but also overcoming *past* death: resurrecting our ancestors, creating new (synthetic) bodies for them and bringing them back to life is the final step in Fedorov’s plan of achieving universal immortality.¹²

The ‘common task’ he sets for humanity is comprised (in an interesting parallel with Star Trek’s utopian society) of two aspects: on one hand, technological advancement, that which will allow us not to be subject to the blind forces of Nature but to become its masters. On the other hand, a necessary precondition for the development of a truly progressive technology will be the creation of a sense of kinship among mankind, through the understanding that we are all connected as sons and daughters not only of God but also of all our ancestors. Only a true sense of kinship would allow us to divert all our energies from creating instruments of war to creating instruments for peace and prosperity to solving the greatest issue of mankind - famine, scarcity, exhaustion of natural resources and, eventually, death itself.

Fedorov, in imagining these grandiose plans, was not perceived by his contemporaries (as he would perhaps today) as producing pseudo-scientific fantasies. He was actually embedded in the scientific practices of his time. For example, he had in mind the numerous experiments that were being conducted (unsuccessfully) towards the end of the XIX century in Europe, aimed at influencing weather and precipitations with the use of cannons:¹³ it was for him a paradigmatic example of how an instrument of war could and should be used to bring life instead of death. Moreover, the effort required to introduce weather regulation on a significantly vast scale would be so great, argues Fedorov, that it could only be achieved through the joint efforts of many nations, thus reinforc-

9. Zen’kovskij 2003: 6.

10. Young 2012: 63.

11. *Ibid.*: 46.

12. Fedorov 1990a.

13. Fedorov 1990b: 33.

ing our sense of kinship and our interconnectedness, strengthening peace against war.¹⁴

Another goal should be the creation of global communication system, that would require so much energy to surpass not only the capabilities of any single nation, but also that of the “past energy” stored in our planet (coal, peat etc.). This global communication system, given its scale, “will have to be made of the force which gives rise to storms, hurricanes and so on”. In other words, human information, and with it human thought, will flow not through cables or paper, but through the natural phenomena of Earth. This will imbue our planet, in a very concrete sense, with our very consciousness: “united humanity will become the consciousness of the planet Earth and of its relationships with other heavenly bodies”.¹⁵

Fedorov thus envisions a project of immense chronological scale, for as the final goal is the resurrection of all, including the ancestors, it would eventually bear fruit for everybody no matter the ages gone by.

3. FEDOROV AND PREDESTINATION: WHAT WAS MAN CREATED FOR?

In the Russian edition of Fedorov's most important work, *The Philosophy of the Common Task*,¹⁶ the term *predestination* (*predopredelenie*) occurs only once, and with a negative connotation. The context of its occurrence is quite revealing of Fedorov's relation to the doctrine of predestination:

If Protestantism did not become the religion of the whole of Europe, and if not all of Western Europe abandoned Catholicism, [...] it was because both the commerce of sacred objects and the holy shedding of blood were merely substituted with resurrection by means of internal salvation, of dogma alone, without deed. Such redemption could not extend beyond the scholarly and intellectual environment, and this caste redemption by belief alone (by dogma) led necessarily to pessimism, which found expression in the stern Calvinism, with its dreary exaggeration of the doctrine of predestination.¹⁷

This form of redemption, and the doctrine of predestination that it entails, is but a symptom of the separation of religion from life, from the life of the common people (the ‘unlearned’), operated by the scholars (the ‘learned’). Fedorov harshly critiques the (European) scholars and their philosophy, especially Kantism,¹⁸ accusing them of regarding the world as a static, abstract image or representation. Separating theoretical from practical reason made the former helpless and without purpose, detached from a sense of kinship with mankind and thus deprived of any real consequence: “Intelli-

14. *Ibid.*: 35.

15. *Ibid.*: 70.

16. Fedorov published very little during his lifetime, and often anonymously. After his death, his friends V. A. Koževnikov and N.P. Peterson published in 1906 a collection of Fedorov's manuscripts which they titled “Filosofija obščego dela” (Fedorov 2020), translated as “the philosophy of the common task” or “of the common cause”.

17. *Ibid.*: 386.

18. Fedorov 1990: 47.

gence without feeling becomes knowledge of evil without any desire to root it out, and a knowledge of good without any wish to promote it”.¹⁹

This critique also extends to the scholars when it comes to interpreting the Scriptures: they interpret the laws as a *dogma*, and prophets as backwards historians of sorts. According to the ‘learned’, argues Fedorov, “a prophet is a contemplative, that is, a scholar whose object is knowledge of the future - a predetermined, fatal event”.²⁰ Instead, the laws by nature demand actions, and prophets are not mere observers of the future: they denounce the breaking of the laws, the divisions and the discordance, and seek to restore the reign of the laws – of peace.²¹

Even the prophecies about the Apocalypse, according to Fedorov, are not unconditional, and are to be read as calls to action rather than as sentences about the future: “It would be great boldness indeed to assume that Christ might express regret that the prophecy about the destruction of the world should not come true”.²²

The salvation of mankind is a project that God entrusted entirely upon humankind itself, of which the final result is contingent and historical: “history [is] a project for universal redemption”.²³

The Christian idea of God is for us an example, a guiding model of what we can and must achieve:

The Divine Being, which is itself the perfect model for society, a unity of independent, immortal persons, in full possession of feeling and knowledge, whose unbreakable unity excludes death.²⁴

The “common task” is, at the same time, the answer to the question “what was humankind created for?”: “to be the heavenly powers replacing the fallen angels, God’s divine instruments for governing the Universe and restoring it to the incorruptible magnificence it had before the Fall”.²⁵

Thus, any form of predestination is completely denied. God does not influence our destiny but leaves it completely in our hands. Humankind’s utter freedom extends beyond and above Nature, unbounded even by God’s creation, and in the glorious task of resurrecting the ancestors will gain control over nature so as to even be able to steer our planet, and quite literally, in Fedorov’s mind:

Through the work of resurrection man, as an original, self-created, free being, is freely bound to God by love. Therefore, mankind should not be an idle passenger, but a deckhand, the crew of our earthly ship, of which is not yet known by what power it is propelled, whether it is photo-, thermo- or electric-powered.²⁶

19. *Ibid.*: 45.

20. *Ibid.*: 222.

21. *Ibid.*: 223.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*: 222.

24. Fedorov 1990b: 71

25. *Ibid.*: 128.

26. Fedorov 2020: 281.

The Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the bodies²⁷ is not as a *promise* of God, but rather a *task* that God entrusted upon Man.

While predestination is absent, according to Fedorov, through this common task Providence is demonstrated: God not only created humankind and entrusted upon them this task, but also gave them the capacity to fulfil it. For as much evil they are capable of, they are always able to turn it into good, to aim their cannons to the clouds.²⁸

As summarised by Roberto Salizzoni,

Fedorov is the author of a philosophy of 'immanent resurrection', of the universal redemption of matter through the means of a 'regulation' of nature [...] which envisages apocalypse only as an alternative, in the event of failure of the immanent 'enterprise'.²⁹

4. ECONOMIC MATERIALISM AND THE ESCHATOLOGICAL PROBLEM

Fedorov's ideas offer a very peculiar outlook on the spiritual dimension of mankind in the modern world. Their significance is way beyond the scope of the common task he sets in front of us: they can be read instead as the extreme expression of the eschatological contradiction of the modern world. This interpretation was put forth by Russian philosopher and theologian Sergej N. Bulgakov (1871-1944).

Bulgakov, originally a Marxist, around the time of the Revolution of 1905 started to shift towards a Christian-Orthodox perspective and became increasingly critical of the Marxist view and the Soviet project. In 1922 he was included among the 160 philosophers expelled from Russia via ship in the episode that came to be known as the "philosophers' steamers".³⁰

In his 1917 work *Unfading Light*, Bulgakov dedicates a whole chapter to the analysis and critique of Fedorov's common task.

According to the author, the whole project starts with a "regrettable ambiguity and indefiniteness" as it fails even to answer the basic question: "what is life and what is death?"³¹

In any way one would offer an answer to this question, however, Fedorov's resurrection is either undesirable or unattainable. If one were to interpret life as a purely materialistic phenomenon, and identity would be given merely by the material substance and form, then resurrections *of the same person* would be by principle impossible,

27. "He will come at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead and will render to the reprobate and to the elect according to their works. Who all shall rise with their own bodies which they now have that they may receive according to their merits, whether good or bad, the latter eternal punishment with the devil, the former eternal glory with Christ" (The Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, Canon 1, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp>, accessed December 28, 2024).

28. Fedorov 1990b: 34.

29. Salizzoni 1992: 14.

30. Chamberlain 2006.

31. Bulgakov 2013: 372.

because any re-construction of the body would create a similar but ultimately different individual, giving to the whole deal an eerie tone:

An overwhelming mystical horror and repugnance arise from the idea that we can meet some sort of automatic doubles, forgeries of our loved ones who are like them in everything; that we can caress them, love them, kiss them: the whole thing is in line with the gloomiest and most fantastic imaginings of an Edgar Allen Poe or E. T. A. Hoffman.³²

Instead, if one were to admit (as Fedorov does) the immortality of souls, then the act of reuniting the soul with the body is either beyond the capacity of humans, because it would require some sort of action either from the soul or from God, or requires a supernatural act that “transgresses by an unwarranted mingling of the spheres of economy and theurgy”.³³

This internal limit of Fedorov’s project is the extreme manifestation of what Bulgakov calls “economism” or “economic materialism”. Bulgakov discusses more in depth the meaning of economy in his 1912 book *The Philosophy of Economy*, where he gives a “preliminary definition” of economy as “[t]he struggle against the antagonistic forces of nature for the purpose of defending, affirming, and broadening life, with the aim of conquering and taming these forces, becoming their master, or proprietor”.³⁴ He sees the defining point of economy as the reduction of all relations to economic, “i.e. active-laboring influence of human beings on nature”.³⁵ Fedorov, according to Bulgakov, operates the same reduction. Any possible type of relation that mankind can instaurate is reduced to an act of labour upon nature, including relations of the spiritual dimension. Through work, life is produced and reproduced.³⁶ The supreme faith in the power of economy reduces religion and divinity to a commandment of resurrecting and a pedagogical example, while “humanity must make do with its own strengths”.³⁷ Bulgakov indicates in Marx and Marxism the beginning of this worldview, which he sees as an underdeveloped and less ambitious version of Fedorov’s ideas: “Marx was not able to interpret to the end his own economic ideas, something however that N. F. Fedorov was fully up to doing, thanks to the breadth of scope of his religious-economic idea. Fedorov’s doctrine is precisely what Marxism has dreamed of confusedly, which constitutes its unconscious but intimate motif”.³⁸

The position of Fedorov within the debate about *predestination*, between human freedom and God’s will, is decidedly on the side of the former. From one point of view, the very idea of predestination is negated, as *salvation* or *apocalypse* (both individual

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*: 373.

34. Bulgakov 2000: 72.

35. Bulgakov 2013: 365.

36. *Ibid.*: 371.

37. *Ibid.*: 376.

38. *Ibid.*: 379.

and collective, as the destiny of an individual is tied to the common task of the resurrection of *all*), as two alternative 'ends' of history, equally the result of human action (or inaction). From another point of view, this extreme polarization of the dichotomy produces the opposite effect.

In reading Fedorov's ideas as the supreme manifestation of modern economism, they become a deformed mirror of contemporary society, where Fedorov's project for the infinity of life is in direct continuity with the capitalist "imperative of endless accumulation".³⁹ Therefore, according to Bulgakov, "economy", or rather the economical-materialist vision that the modern world shares with Fedorov, "is a bad infinity that has no completion":⁴⁰

All the efforts of economism are directed by the force of circumstances towards the immortalization of the life of this world, to the denial of the end of the life both of a separate human person, and for the whole world.⁴¹

Both Fedorov's philosophy and the economism take "the current state of life as the only possible one on the whole", and any idea of an 'end' is substituted with an "an indefinite prolongation of human life by the removal of death".⁴²

The question of the meaning and the end of history in Fedorov and in the Russian Cosmism in general is too vast to be explored here, but it is necessary to offer some coordinates to continue in the exposition. According to Roberto Salizzoni, Russian philosophy is centered around the notion of 'end of history', where the 'end' must be understood under its double meaning: on one hand, we have the 'end' as the goal, the 'mission' of Russia. On the other hand, there is the 'end' as the end of history, the "expulsion of history from the universe".⁴³ The second meaning of 'end' is the fulfilment of the first. A common feature of many Russian philosophers and writers is the idea of the end of history as a counterpoint for the idea of infinite progress brought forth by Western modernization, a *bad infinity* that Russian philosophers see with mistrust or outright hostility.⁴⁴

Coherently, Bulgakov criticizes Fedorov's idea because in it there is no space "for *metahistory*, for the 'life of the future age', separated by an ontological catastrophe from the present eon":⁴⁵ it is not possible to achieve the *mission* because no *end* is given, in which the mission would find its fulfilment.

The paradoxical result is that human freedom is negated as well:

economy does not have in itself any eschatological tasks that would go beyond the bounds of the mortal life of this age, and its domain pertains exclusively to it. For this reason too it cannot be completed in its own proper limits.⁴⁶

39. Wallerstein 2007: 2.

40. Bulgakov 2013: 381.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Bulgakov 2000: 374.

43. Salizzoni 1992: 20.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Bulgakov 2013: 376.

46. *Ibid.*: 380-381.

Humans, as free as they are in the matter of action, are nonetheless unable to go beyond “*this flesh*” and “*this earth*”,⁴⁷ to be freed *from* economy:

under the guise of freedom in economy through the increase “of wealth” they want to consolidate the economic captivity of the human being.⁴⁸

These and many other critiques moved to Fedorov’s ideals bring Bulgakov to ask himself: “must the ‘project of the common task’ proclaimed by N. F. Fedorov be definitively and irrevocably rejected as a mirage and ‘charm’”?

But the soul resolutely opposes such an attitude toward it, and it would be an act not only of disrespect towards our wise man, but also of misunderstanding of the prophetic and new that he made known to the world. [...] *according to the letter* Fedorov’s project with its economic enthusiasm of “the common task” had to be rejected, but as a movement of the heart and will, as a prayer and inspiration, it is symptomatically important and dear. Therefore an involuntary contradiction is felt in the final relation to Fedorov’s doctrine; for all the unacceptability and even monstrousness of the project it cannot be simply rejected, for something intimate and necessary is bound with it.⁴⁹

What is so important in Fedorov’s project that, despite the “monstrousness” of its task, it cannot be simply rejected altogether?

Fedorov’s project is “not [only] the last word of economism [...] but at the same time the first *prayer* to God for resurrection, a first call of the earth to heaven for the raising of the dead”.⁵⁰ Fedorov’s call for the infinite prolongment of life, for resurrection, is conceived in the same spirit of the call, or prayer, of the living for the resurrection of the dead to God: in other words, it is a “prayer of the end”,⁵¹ for the end of history, for the fulfilment of the mission.

5. BULGAKOV ON PREDESTINATION

While Fedorov rarely mentions the word, in his work *The Bride of the Lamb* Bulgakov discusses at length the problem of predestination. The critiques he moves to the Christian (Western) notion of predestination are fundamental also to understanding the zones of difference and continuity between the two authors.

Bulgakov’s discussion opens with an analysis of St. Augustine’s notion of predestination, which he sees as the “most radical”.⁵² Bulgakov sees the whole question of predestination as an antinomy founded on a false premise. The problem of determinism *vs.* freedom is born because the relationship between God and the world is seen as a relationship of *cause* and *effect*, reducing the former to a ‘first cause’ and the latter to ‘second causes’:

47. *Ibid.*: 374.

48. *Ibid.*: 381.

49. *Ibid.*: 380.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

52. Bulgakov 2001: chap. 4.4.

The whole energy of causality in this causal scheme belongs only to the first cause, in relation to which the whole system of second causes is only a transmission mechanism. [...] The doctrine of determinism implies an anthropomorphic conception of the first cause: it introduces the first cause in the temporal process and defines it according to the categories of this process. The “first” cause therefore becomes the pre-cause or the cause of all causes, so to speak. It is predestination, a certain cosmic *fatum*.⁵³

The *first cause* will always take precedence over the *second causes*, which are “distinguished by complete passivity in relation to the first cause”.⁵⁴ A certain dialectical necessity takes over from these premises, compelling us to accept determinism as the only possibility. Even introducing, as St. Augustine does, “a distinction [...] between *praedestinatio ad gratiam* and *reprobatio ad gehennam*” is but a dead letter that produces

a dogmatic inconsistency (not to say hypocrisy) [as] this is only a fig leaf covering the nakedness of a systematic determinism, which, when one accepts its initial premise of human passivity and impotence (referred to as the bondage of the will), leads with inexorable logic to the recognition of both types of predestination.⁵⁵

The only way out of this antinomy is to change our understanding of the action of God unto the world, and its relationship with the world, by first of all denying the causal relationship: “The world does not have a cause, since it is created; and God is not the cause of the world and not a cause in the world, but its Creator and Provider”.⁵⁶

A similar problem involves the temporality of God:

The fundamental idea of the doctrine of predestination is that, from all eternity, God preestablished all events in time (whether as first cause or as absolute will). This idea implies a representation of the eternity-time relation such that eternity precedes time in some way, is placed at the beginning of time as a kind of pre-time, and establishes the beginning of the causal connection as the first cause.⁵⁷

Instead, according to Bulgakov, with the act of creation God, in a way, “voluntarily limits Himself” and “condescends, so to speak, to co-participation in its temporality and becoming”.⁵⁸

The fundamental idea of the absolute freedom of humankind is the same as Fedorov's. However, unlike Fedorov, the problem of predestination is reformulated altogether, instead of being resolved in one of the two poles of the dichotomy.

God does not mechanically cause people to act, but “calls” them towards Himself, giving them the freedom of choosing to answer the call. The call is heard, and the freedom is given, because as Creation, humans are correlated to God.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*: chap. 4.5.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

Bulgakov's ideas on the doctrine of predestination are founded on his theory of Sophianism, which is beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss in depth. In short, Sophianism is a religious/philosophical theory centred around the notion of Sophia or Divine Wisdom. Highly controversial and branded as heretic by the Orthodox Church in 1935, it was developed at the beginning of the XX century by philosophers and theologians Vladimir Solov'ev, Pavel Florenskij and Sergej Bulgakov. It sees Sophia as a hypostasis of God's Wisdom, alongside the Holy Trinity. With the creation, Sofia is doubled in the world as the "creaturely Sophia", to which all creatures participate, and through which all participate with God.

Unlike Fedorov, then, the final goal, the 'end' of history, could not be achieved by humans alone, but only through "synergism"⁵⁹ with God. Through this synergism, the causal effect is replaced with the influence that God exerts on the world: "Creaturely freedom, modal yet authentic within its limits, encounters divine suggestions which graciously flow into it and are 'synergistically' united with it".⁶⁰ Also, by introducing the question of 'synergy', Bulgakov sees the possibility of recuperating part of Fedorov's ideas on resurrection, elaborating them in a more defensible way:

resurrection of the dead is a divine-human act requiring the joining of divine grace and human action, and by acknowledging fully the divine side of resurrecting, humans must demonstrate their participation in it with their own effort coming from the opposite direction, with their own aspiration for resurrecting.⁶¹

6. A FEW CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Many of Fedorov's ideas can still be appealing to the contemporary reader, as they touch upon topics that are sparking interest and provoking debate. Even Fedorov's ideas on resurrection are not extraneous to the contemporary cultural landscape: one should not look far to find mentioning of, for example, cryogenic processes to preserve the body waiting for technology to finally be able to overcome death.⁶²

Indeed, the necessity for mankind to unite to join the material challenges and limits of its continuous expansion, which fascinated and preoccupied many Soviet scientists, such as Vernadskij,⁶³ is more and more being rediscovered today in the face of the rising environmental problems that afflict our biosphere in the so-called 'Anthropocene'.⁶⁴

In the present paper we mainly explored *one* aspect of Fedorov's idea, read through the lens of Bulgakov, a religious philosopher intent to investigate (and criticise) modernity. This interplay between the two represents not only the source of reflection on

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. Bulgakov 2013: 376

62. On the topic of cryogenics see e.g. Romain 2010.

63. Russ 2022.

64. Garrison, Östman and Van Poeck 2024.

the role of eschatology, predestination and 'end' in the modern world but also, in our opinion, an important, albeit very little regarded, page in the intellectual history, that can be read as the inception of the contemporary world-view and of our vision of the future.

In particular, the two authors discussed are both, in different ways, revealing what could be described as a form of *uneasiness* in their negation of predestination. The absence, in any form, of God's plan, of a foreknowledge of the world and of a pre-terminated end for our journeys, is also the absence of the comfort of knowing that our ultimate fate is administered by a benevolent force. This absence opens before the two authors an uncomfortable infinity, an unending, uncertain and perilous run towards the unknown that both authors seek to find shelter from: in Fedorov's case, by halting our journeys through the abolition of past, present and future death. In Bulgakov's case, by elevating a prayer for the end, since the goal *is* the end: "The goal of history leads beyond history [...] whereas the goal of the world leads beyond the world",⁶⁵ and "history has succeeded if it has prepared its regular end and exit beyond history".⁶⁶

The Cosmists' views, and with them the problem of dealing with the infinity of the cosmos, as we mentioned at the beginning, seeped into our contemporary world-view through fiction, and found their representation in some fundamental tropes of science fiction. On one hand, following Fedorov's ideal, we have Star Trek's autotrophic machine, representing the fundamental idea that technology can cease being the negation of nature, that it can "come around" to nature, and that mankind's "finitude" is reabsorbed in nature's "infiniteness". On the other hand, we can find Bulgakov's "prayer for the end" in the cathartic liberation given by the trope of the (scientific) apocalypse – the asteroid, the nuclear war, the planet-ending war machines.

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65. Bulgakov 2013: 427.

66. *Ibid.*: 425.

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