

# CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE NAME OF GOD: AESTHETICS AS A WAY OF LIFE ACCORDING TO ALEKSEY LOSEV

TERESA OBOLEVITCH\*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is a famous book by Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, the title of which conveys a seminal idea of both ancient and early Christian thought. According to this, philosophy is not just a purely abstract theoretical reflection (albeit an important and necessary one) but primarily a practice, the spiritual exercise and effort to achieve wisdom. Philosophy has been seen in the same mode by Michel Foucault and Leo Strauss.<sup>1</sup> Here the ideal of philosophizing relies not as much on the acquisition of knowledge as on improving one's own personality and attitude and, as a consequence, achieving the transformation of society.

In the patristic tradition, the term philosopher was synonymous with that of a Christian: to love wisdom meant to love God who is the true Wisdom. For instance, Clement of Alexandria used the term 'philosophy' to refer to the wholeness of Christian doctrine, and 'theology' was perceived as simply a part of the latter (*The Stromata*, 1, 28). Such expressions as *nostra philosophia*, *philosophia sacra*, *melior philosophia*, *philosophia divina* and others as the equivalents of Christianity can be found in the writings of numerous ecclesiastical writers at that time. On the other hand, the term 'theologian' sometimes (i.e. Evagrius Ponticus, *On prayer*, 61) referred to the man who

\* Sr Teresa Obolevitch is head of the Chair of Russian and Byzantine Philosophy at the Pontifical University John Paul II and a member of Copernicus Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Krakow (Poland). She is the author of multiple articles and six books on Russian religious thought and problem of relationship between faith and reason, especially in Russian culture.

<sup>1</sup> See Ch.H. Zuckert, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life: Hadot, Foucault, and Strauss', in *Philosophy, Politics, and the Conversation of Mankind: Essays in Honor of Timothy Fuller*, eds. P. Franco, T. Breyfogle, E. Kos (Colorado, 2016), pp. 139-157.

prays, especially to the monk who practices the so-called Jesus' prayer, although also in this case the centre of prayer (and theology itself) was located in the mind (*νοῦς*), hence, 'theology' did not mean the sphere of irrationality but was understood as a realization of the possibility of mind.<sup>2</sup> In this spirit, St. Gregory of Nazianzus favoured a pursuit of a 'philosophy' (*φιλοσοφεῖν*) on God (*Oration 27, 3*). In the patristic period, the practice of philosophy and theology was nothing other than a spiritual exercise which 'corresponds to the Greek terms *askesis* or *melete*,' 'a specific style of life, spiritual attitude.'<sup>3</sup>

## 2. AESTHETICS IN LOSEV

This very understanding of philosophy as a synonym of theology, love of God, was particularly close to the eminent Russian scholar, Aleksey Fedorovich Losev (1893–1988) who was deservedly recognized as the 'last classic' of the Russian religious thought of the Silver Age. His activity was religiously oriented, even if he took up some at first glance 'neutral' subjects such as mathematics, language, art or Greek mythology. In 1914, Losev graduated from philosophy and classical philology at Moscow University. His first publications, dedicated to ancient culture and philosophy of music (*Eros in Plato, Two Perceptions of the World* and *On the Musical Perception of Love and Nature*) immediately attracted the attention of prominent scholars such as Vyacheslav Ivanov, Fr. Pavel Florensky and Sergius Bulgakov. After the Revolution, Losev continued his academic work in the State Institute of Musical Science, at the State Academy for the Scientific Study of Art (GAKhN), and at the Moscow Conservatory. In his early books published in the 1920s and in 1930 (*Music as the Object of Logic, The Dialectics of the Artistic Form, The Ancient Cosmos and Modern Science, The Philosophy of Name, The Dialectics of Number in Plotinus, Criticism of Platonism by Aristotle, Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology*, and *The Dialectics of Myth*) the philosopher defended his religious

<sup>2</sup> P.B. Mikhaylov, 'Kompetentsii ratsional'nosti v teologii: svidetel'stva grecheskoy patristiki', in *Filosofiya religii. Al'manakh 2010–2011*, ed. V.K. Shokhin (Moscow, 2011), pp. 149–161, on p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. M. Chase (Oxford, 1999), pp. 128–130.

convictions, even if he was obliged to express them in a highly enigmatic mode. This did not help him escape prison and the labour camp.<sup>4</sup>

Beginning with his early works until his monumental *A History of Ancient Aesthetics* in 8 volumes (published from the 1960s and then posthumously), Losev chiefly focused on the issues of aesthetics – not in the ordinary sense of the word (as an academic discipline concerning beauty), but primarily as a peculiar fashion of the perception of reality. In his opinion, an aesthetic approach allows us to notice the inner essence of any material thing which is expressed in the external form. It could be a piece of art, but also the ordinary things of everyday life, for instance, a table: from an aesthetic perspective, a table is an empirical realization of its transcendent, ideal model or archetype.

Generally speaking, the subject of aesthetics is just ‘the aesthetic’ (*эстетическое*) which is ‘a synthesis of two levels: the external or manifesting and the internal or manifested,’<sup>5</sup> so, it is ‘something expressive is a dialectical unity of the internal and external, of what is expressed and what expresses it, and also as a unity which is experienced as an independent given, i.e., as an object of disinterested contemplation.’<sup>6</sup> ‘The aesthetic’ represents ‘the undivided wholeness of the subjective and objective, thought and sensation, essence and appearance, idea and image, ideal imagery and emotion, emotional-ideal imagery and act of will, the unconscious and the conscious, the irrational and the rational, the organically alive and the technologically produced, as well as the contemplative and the active.’<sup>7</sup>

Losev insists that the whole of reality has an aesthetic character, so that there is an expression of the inner content in the external shape. Aesthetics is not just a part of philosophy but is related to all kinds of knowledge: the ordinary, the religious and even the scientific. As a result, aesthetics is omnipresent in all spheres of culture. For this reason, the Russian philosopher

<sup>4</sup> See T. Obolevitch, ‘Alexei Losev – “The Last Russian Philosopher” of the Silver Age,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, eds. G. Pattison, R. Poole and C. Emerson (Oxford, 2020, forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> A.F. Losev, ‘Esthetics’, in *Themes in Soviet Marxist Philosophy: Selected Articles from the ‘Filosofskaya Entsiklopediya’*, trans. T.J. Blakeley (Dordrecht – Boston, 1975), pp. 200-219, on p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

identifies aesthetics and theory of being as such: 'aesthetics does not differ yet from the general science of being, that is ontology. Nevertheless, it is not merely ontology, but its closing part.'<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, in Losev's system 'the aesthetical is always bound up with the ontological and refers to it.'<sup>9</sup> Since aesthetics deals primarily with expression, it reveals something that is hidden and in this way increases our knowledge of reality. Losev describes it by means of a dialectico-phenomenological language: 'expression is the sort of self-relatedness that correlates itself with outside itself.'<sup>10</sup> At the same time, aesthetics has a clear apophatic dimension: the expression never exhausts the expressing content, but leaves room for its different interpretations. In this way, Losev continued the Patristic tradition of antinomism between expressivity and non-expressivity, representability and non-representability,<sup>11</sup> proclaiming the idea of their synthesis in the category of 'the aesthetic' which is also a synonym of a symbol that 'points to some object unknown to us, although at the same time it provides us with all kinds of opportunities to draw the required conclusions so that the object becomes known.'<sup>12</sup> Therefore, aesthetics concerns various types of symbols and a consideration of Losev's concept of the symbol seems warranted.

### 3. THE CONCEPT OF THE SYMBOL

The Greek word *συν-βάλλω* means 'to throw together' or 'meet with.' Losev explains that a symbol supposes the coincidence of two aspects of reality: the objective ideal meaning (or essence) and its external expression. Using one of

<sup>8</sup> A.F. Losev, 'Dve neobkhodimye predposylki dlya postroyeniya istorii estetiki do vozniknoveniya estetiki v kachestve samostoyatel'noy distsipliny', in *Estetika i zhizn'*, eds. M.F. Ovsyannikov, et al., issue 6 (Moscow, 1979), pp. 221-238, on p. 228. Cf. A.F. Losev, *Istoriya antichnoy estetiki*, vol. 6 (Moscow – Kharkiv, 2000), p. 733.

<sup>9</sup> V. Kosykhin, 'Losev's Eidetic Dialectic: The Structuring of Being and Anagogical Cognition', *Stasis*, 1 (2013), pp. 316-332, on p. 326.

<sup>10</sup> A.F. Losev, *The Dialectics of Artistic Form*, trans. O. Bychkov (München – Berlin – Washington, 2013), p. 164.

<sup>11</sup> See V.V. Bychkov, 'Esteticheskaya teoriya A.F. Loseva', in *Aleksey Fedorovich Losev*, eds. A.A. Takho-Godi, and E.A. Takho-Godi (Moscow, 2009), pp. 31-61, on pp. 52-53.

<sup>12</sup> A.F. Losev, 'The Symbol and Artistic Creativity', *Soviet Studies in Literature*, 12, 3 (1975), pp. 70-89, on p. 73.

his favorite metaphors, Losev writes: a symbol is ‘the arena where the signifier and the signified, which have nothing in common, meet.’<sup>13</sup> This definition has a merely formal character: it simply accentuates the connection of two orders of reality and says nothing about the concrete sphere of its realization. Eventually, everything can be treated as a symbol, which both reveals and conceals the inner idea alike.<sup>14</sup> One thing refers to the other, and all do so to the Absolute or God. However, for the correct (that is, ontological) understanding of the symbol (as something real, not conventional) man ought to have a proper intention. For instance, nature (a forest or lake) could be considered as an objective manifestation of divine kindness and beauty only from the religious perspective.

In his late book, *The Problem of Symbol and Realistic Art* (1976), Losev adds: ‘The expression of the things is such its inner life which has manifested in the external way, and such the external side of the thing which points on its inner life. The expression of the thing is both its inner and external side concurrently. (...) A symbol of the thing is its inner-external expression which is formed according to the general principle of its formation.’<sup>15</sup>

The category of expression Losev considers to be the ‘energy of essence’ – of course, first of all as divine energy and then as the ‘energy’ of each thing as such. In his book *The Dialectic of Artistic Form* (1927) he explains that the term ‘energy’ of the essence ‘is the identity of *realized or actualized* meaning with what is external to meaning,’ thus, ‘the energy of the essence is precisely the entirety of all *expressive* aspects of the essence.’<sup>16</sup> In other words, ‘energy’ is the crucial notion of aesthetics. Perhaps not accidentally, Losev defines a symbol as ‘the arena of meetings of the divine and human energies’<sup>17</sup> that corresponds with the patristic concept of synergy (cooperation) between God and man.

<sup>13</sup> A.F. Losev, ‘The Logic of the Symbol’, *Soviet Studies in Literature*, 20, 2-3 (1984), pp. 108-144, on p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> See A.F. Losev, *Problema simvola i realistscheskoe iskusstvo* (Moscow, 1995), p. 167; A.F. Losev, ‘Dialektika simvola i ego poznavatel’noe znachenie’, *Izvestiya Akademii nauk SSSR. Seriya literatury i yazyka*, 31 (1972), pp. 228-238, on p. 229.

<sup>15</sup> Losev, *Problema simvola i realistscheskoe iskusstvo* (see n. 14), pp. 27, 48.

<sup>16</sup> Losev, *The Dialectics of Artistic Form* (see n. 10), p. 164.

<sup>17</sup> A.F. Losev, ‘Pis’mo i tezisyy ob Imeni Bozhiem’, in Losev, *Lichnost’ i Absolyut* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 275-277, on p. 277.

## 4. THE DIVINE NAME AS A CATEGORY OF A SYMBOL ('THE AESTHETIC')

The departure point of Losev's deliberations on the symbol was the debate on onomatodoxy ('Name-praising' or 'Name-glorification,' Russian *imyaslavie*), according to which the name of God is not something conventional, dependent on the possibility of human language, but is real *par excellence*. The beginning of this teaching in Russia can be found in the spiritual bestseller by the monk Illarion entitled *In the Caucasus Mountains* (1907): 'it is impossible to separate the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ from His blessed Person. Knowing this, and moreover feeling this highest mystery, is so precious in our spiritual life that it serves as its center and foundation.'<sup>18</sup> The defenders of this interpretation of the divine name, for instance Fr. Pavel Florensky, Sergius Bulgakov and Vladimir Ern, referred to the ancient Christian practice of the Jesus prayer which was at the heart of hesychast spirituality, whereas their opponents (the archbishops Sergius Stragorodsky, Antonii Khrapovitsky and Nikon Rozhdestvensky) considered onomatodoxy as a heresy of pantheism – the identification of God and created reality (name) and, as a result, blasphemy.<sup>19</sup> In brief, this controversy concerned the 'mystic' (based on the spiritual experience) and 'rational' (founded on the logical, discursive reasoning) understanding of philosophy as such, including philosophy of language and philosophy of expression, or aesthetics in Losev's terminology.

Aleksey Losev was perhaps the paradigm example of the advocates of onomatodoxy movement. As a young student he summarized the essence of this concept in an article originally written for a German readership.<sup>20</sup> Losev shared Florensky's view, who maintained that 'if the "name" has only a subjective reality, a conventional symbol for the mind's cognition (like the equator for the geographer), then the experience of prayer is also a purely

<sup>18</sup> Cit. after L. 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), pp. 216-228, on p. 218.

<sup>19</sup> See S.M. Kenworthy, 'Debating the Theology of the Name in Post-Soviet Russia: Metropolitan Illarion Alfeev and Sergei Khoruzhii', in *Orthodox Paradoxes. Heterogeneities and Complexities in Contemporary Russian Orthodoxy*, ed. K. Tolstaya (Leiden, 2014), pp. 250-264, on pp. 250-251.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Tchantouridzé, 'In the Name of God' (see n. 18), p. 223.

subjective one, and there is no real communion between God and the person praying.<sup>21</sup> Losev was extremely engaged in the invocation of the name of God in the Jesus' prayer. From 1922, in his place in Moscow, the proponents of onomatodoxy discussed the justification of the realistic character of divine energy and, consequently, the name of God.

For Losev, the divine name is a very illustrious symbol (or, more precisely, a protosymbol). According to the patristic tradition (especially the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite), the name of God is nothing other than the divine energy which is different from the divine unknowable essence, yet inseparable from it. On the one hand, the divine energy displays His unknowable essence and, on the other, transmits His mystery. 'Divine energy is manifest in the created world in the form of *communication*, of *meaning* present in *symbol*, understood not conventionally, as a stand-in-for something not present, but rather as itself the living presence of the divine within the created world, apprehended as the *name* of God.'<sup>22</sup> That is why Losev described his philosophy as 'absolute symbolism,' 'situated between "absolute apophaticism" (God is absolutely unknowable and does not reveal himself) and "religious rationalism" (God reveals himself entirely, thus vacating the divine Mystery)<sup>23</sup>: the name of God is symbolic, yet real.

Losev delivered a number of talks dedicated to the philosophical-theological aspects of onomatodoxy. Consequently, he distinguished three levels or aspects of this teaching: (1) experimental-mystical and mythological, (2) philosophical-dialectical and (3) scientific-analytical.<sup>24</sup> All of them respond to the questions: 'How is the relationship between God and man possible?' Hence, the main problem of onomatodoxy could be formulated in the following

<sup>21</sup> See S.M. Kenworthy, 'Archbishop Nikon (Rozhdestvenskii) and Pavel Florenskii on Spiritual Experience, Theology, and the Name-Glorifiers Dispute', in *Thinking Orthodox in Modern Russia Culture, History, Context*, eds. P.L. Michelson and J.D. Kornblatt (Madison, 2014), pp. 85-107, on pp. 96-97.

<sup>22</sup> Ph.T. Grier, 'Adventures in Dialectic and Intuition: Shpet, Il'in, Losev', in *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930. Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity*, eds. G.M. Hamburg and R.A. Poole (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 326-345, on p. 332.

<sup>23</sup> P. Ladouceur, 'The Name of God Conflict in Orthodox Theology', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 4 (2012), pp. 415-436, on p. 422.

<sup>24</sup> See A.F. Losev, 'Imyaslavie', in Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolyut* (see n. 17), pp. 226-238, on p. 234; A.F. Losev, 'Imyaslavie izlozhennoe v sisteme', in Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolyut* (see n. 17), pp. 239-241.

way: 'How religion and religious language is possible?' This was not simply a theoretical issue but one which had profound practical consequences and implications.

For Losev, the experimental-mystical level of onomatodoxy refers to the patristic heritage. Defending the real character of the divine name proclaimed by the proponents of onomatodoxy and fighting off the accusation of pantheism, the Russian philosopher not only cites the works of the Greek and Byzantine writers of the first centuries, but also comments and develops their thoughts. Losev paid special attention to the experience of prayer<sup>25</sup> and biblical sources of the divine name.<sup>26</sup> In his opinion, onomatodoxy is 'the purest model of the Eastern Christian patristic mystic.'<sup>27</sup> As he writes, 'In Palamism, i.e., in strict Byzantinism, the God is an absolutely unfathomable abyss, who symbolically manifested Himself in certain energy and a name.'<sup>28</sup>

In 1923, Losev sent a letter to Fr. Pavel Florensky in which he presented his own understanding of experimental-mystical aspect of onomatodoxy in five points. His concise yet substantial thesis appeared as follows:

1. The divine name is the energy of the divine essence;
2. As the energy of the divine essence, the divine name is inseparable from the essence itself and for this reason is God itself;

<sup>25</sup> See A.F. Losev, 'Ob imeni Bozhiem i ob umnoy molitve', in Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolyut* (see n. 17), pp. 282-284; A.F. Losev, 'O molitvennom opyte I', *Voprosy filosofii*, 11 (2006), pp. 129-130; A.F. Losev, 'O molitvennom opyte II', *Voprosy filosofii*, 11 (2006), pp. 130-131; A.F. Losev, 'O molitvennom nauchenii', in A.F. Losev, *Mne bylo 19 let...? Dnevnik. Pis'ma. Proza* (Moscow, 1997), pp. 173-176.

<sup>26</sup> See A.F. Losev, 'Zametki ob upotreblenii Imeni Bozhiya v Novom Zavete', in Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolyut* (see n. 17), pp. 293-294; A.F. Losev, 'Imyaslavie', in Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolyut* (see n. 17), pp. 226-227; A.F. Losev, 'Imyaslavie i platonizm', *Voprosy filosofii*, 9 (2002), pp. 105-116; A.F. Losev, 'Veshch' i imya', in A.F. Losev, *Veshch' i imya. Samoe samo* (Saint Petersburg, 2008), pp. 165-187.

<sup>27</sup> A.F. Losev, 'O knige "Na gorakh Kavkaza"', in Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolyut* (see n. 17), pp. 270-274, on p. 274.

<sup>28</sup> A.F. Losev, *Ocherki antichnogo platonizma i mifologii* (Moscow, 1993), p. 874. Cit. from O.E. Dushin, 'St. Gregory Palamas and the Moscow School of Christian Neo-Platonism (A.F. Losev, S.S. Averincev, V.V. Bibihin, S.S. Horujy)', in *Triune God Incomprehensible but Knowable – The Philosophical and Theological Significance of St Gregory Palamas for Contemporary Philosophy and Theology*, ed. C. Athanasopoulos (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 102-113, on p. 106.



3. The divine names have a symbolical nature: the name of God is God, but God itself is not his name; He transcends every name and every knowledge, human and angelic. The divine names are the living symbols of the manifesting God, so that are God itself in his revealing to creation;
4. The divine name is not a sound and demands the respect proper to God;
5. In the divine name the meeting of man with God takes place.<sup>29</sup>

As we can see, the pivotal idea of Losev's reflection is a conviction of the dialectical correlation between the divine essence and the divine energy which manifests the first. It is worth mentioning that Losev's involvement in the onomatodoxy movement was thoroughly serious: in 1929 he with his wife were secretly ordained 'monks in the world' under the names Andronik and Afanasiya.

The second, philosophical-dialectical aspect of onomatodoxy was crafted by Losev himself. The author of *The Dialectics of Myth*, on the one hand, tried to find the ancient foundations of the name and symbol, and, on the other, to formulate them in terms of contemporary philosophical trends (such as phenomenology). Finally, the scientific-analytical level of onomatodoxy relies on the attempt to interpret the divine, ideal sphere in terms of set theory. Hence, Losev intended to 'modernize' the patristic theory of the divine name in order to justify it and make it more comprehensible for those in his period.

Besides this, Losev applied his multi-aspect reflection on onomatodoxy and the realism of the divine name to other philosophical issues. Ludmila Gogotishvili has suggested that 'the seemingly abstract-dialectical problem' of distinction between 'essence' and 'energy'

invariably accompanies all the topics in Losev's texts that are of central importance to him: Orthodox dogma, the theory of mythology, the dialectics of music, the philosophy of the name, and the doctrine of artistic form, as well as the principles

<sup>29</sup> A.F. Losev, 'Pis'mo i tezisy ob Imeni Bozhiem' (see n. 17), pp. 275-277. Cf. A.F. Losev, 'Imyaslavie', in Losev, *Lichnost' i Absolyut* (see n. 17), pp. 234-235; S. Bulgakov, *Unfading Light. Contemplation and Speculation*, trans. Th.A. Smith (Grand Rapids – Cambridge, 2012), p. 215: 'the Name of God, which is a constantly occurring operation of the power of God, the energy of the Divinity, is God'; T. Obolevitch, *Od onomatodoksji do estetyki. Aleksego Łosiewa koncepcja symbolu. Studium historyczno-filozoficzne* (Krakow, 2011), pp. 123-124.

of historicism and the classification of the principal social types of mythology, beginning with antiquity and ending with the 1920s themselves. All of the terms specific to Losev and reflecting the original perspective of his vision of the world are in some way or other associated with this same antinomy: expression and becoming, personality and countenance, symbol and myth, miracle and mystery, dialectics and realism.<sup>30</sup>

In particular, Losev's late writings dedicated to aesthetics were nothing other than a continuation of his initial presupposition concerning the symbol as the divine name. For example, Losev considered music to, in a sense, be a substitute for prayer, just because 'To feel in the musical manner, means not to know the God's detachment from the world. To feel in the musical manner denotes to praise every blade and every grain of dust. (...) To live in the musical way means to pray to everything.'<sup>31</sup>

The reason for the special status of music is the divine origin of the latter: 'the Absolute Being of music is both the being of the worn and of God. (...) In music there is nothing that is not divine.'<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, music could be treated as a particular material expression, a 'sound' of the divine name or energy. Music and onomatodoxy constitute various ways of mystical experience, of perceiving of the Absolute. For instance, Losev describes Scriabin's philosophy as 'mystical universalism,' even if Scriabin's vision of reality is 'pantheistic' and 'pagan.'<sup>33</sup> No wonder that Losev considers the philosophy of the name as 'the chief and fundamental part of philosophy at all (and not only philosophy!),' 'the foundation, power and purpose of the whole of human life.'<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> L. Gogotishvili, 'The Early Losev', *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 35, 1 (1996), pp. 6-31, on pp. 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> A.F. Losev, 'Muzyka kak predmet logiki', in A.F. Losev, *Forma. Stil'. Vyrazhenie* (Moscow, 1995), pp. 405-602, on p. 479. Cf. I. Borisova, 'A.F. Losev and the Philosophy of Resonance', *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 44, 1 (2005), pp. 82-99, on p. 92.

<sup>32</sup> Losev, 'Muzyka kak predmet logiki' (see n. 31), pp. 478-479. See K. Zenkin, 'On The Religious Foundations of A.F. Losev's Philosophy of Music', *Studies in East European Thought*, 56, 2-3 (2004), pp. 161-172.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. J.P. Scanlan, 'A.F. Losev and Mysticism in Russian Philosophy', *Studies in East European Thought*, 46, 4 (1994), pp. 263-286, on pp. 270-271.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. A.F. Losev, 'Filosofiya imeni', in A.F. Losev, *Iz rannikh proizvedeniy* (Moscow, 1990), pp. 9-192, on p. 138.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Onomatodoxy as a conviction about the real character of the divine name is not just a theoretical concept, but the ascetic-mystical practice of the Jesus' prayer which can also be expressed in philosophical terms and communicated to others. Accordingly, onomatodoxy is nothing other than an exercise in the love of the divine Wisdom. Losev, who dedicates himself to defining the divine name as a symbol *par excellence*, realizes his vocation of philosophizing in the very initial (and the patristic) meaning of this word as a 'way of life.' In *The Dialectic of Myth* he stresses that '*Absolute mythology* (or Christianity – T.O.) *is the life of the heart*.'<sup>35</sup> As Losev admits in a letter written from the labour camp, 'a philosopher [is someone] who builds a philosophy not of abstract forms, but of the living phenomena of existence.'<sup>36</sup>

The patristic distinction used by Losev between 'essence' and 'energy' (or 'expression') allowed him to stress the principal difference between God and creation and, on the other hand, to overcome the distance between them (that is a crucial point of religion in such). The category of energy (and its equivalents in Losev's thought: symbol and expression) has a universal ontological-aesthetical (expressive) significance. To exist, to communicate with God (or pray), to perceive reality, to enjoy art and so on, means to participate – in this or another way – in the divine energy. It is curious to note that the contemporary Russian thinker Sergey Horujy compares this Patristic line of philosophy with Foucault's 'practices of the Self.'<sup>37</sup>

To conclude, the following polysyllogism can be formulated:

For Losev,

1. Aesthetics is a sphere of expression of the inner content in the external form;
2. The 'expression' is nothing other than a symbol;
3. The protosymbol is the divine name;
4. Aesthetics concerns the divine name;

<sup>35</sup> A.F. Losev, *The Dialectic of Myth*, trans. V. Marchenkov (London – New York, 2014), p. 197.

<sup>36</sup> Cit. from S.S. Khoruzhii, 'A Rearguard Action', *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 40, 3 (2001-2002), pp. 30-68, on p. 49.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. S.S. Horujy [i.e. Khoruzhii], *Practices of the Self and Spiritual Practices: Michel Foucault and Eastern Christian Discourse*, trans. B. Jakim (Grand Rapids, 2015).

5. The worship of the divine name is onomatodoxy;
6. Aesthetics coincides with onomatodoxy;
7. Aesthetics is a spiritual exercise, a way of life.

It is not only Losev's early works on onomatodoxy which have a clear religious character but also his late *A History of Ancient Aesthetics*. As the Russian aesthetician Georgiï Gachev poetically wrote: 'the entire creative life of Losev is a *mastering of our house of being as the cosmos of all meanings*.'<sup>38</sup> If we take into account that he 'had to make a *creation of understanding of life all alone in the cultural vacuum*'<sup>39</sup> that was present in the USSR, his significance as a religious thinker and a witness of Christian wisdom was even more profound.

It is worth adding that Losev described the thought of his favorite philosopher, Vladimir Soloviev, as the 'philosophy of life constructed in the form of a system of categories.'<sup>40</sup> The same could be said about his own teaching. As Valentina Postovalova remarked, for Losev 'Christianity was never just an object of knowledge, a preoccupation of the reflective mind, but rather the profound foundation of his relationship with the world and with people. It constituted not only his thought and its foundation, but his very life. Religion, as Aleksey Fedorovich understood it, is first of all a certain kind of life, not just a personal worldview, however religious and mystical it might be.'<sup>41</sup>

Losev (as the monk Andronik) himself confessed:

Can a monk's subtlety of feeling and depth of contemplation be compared to the philistine nature of what is called 'worldly' life? Can anyone see history, i.e. the authentic and genuine history of the spirit, with its revolutions and wars, unknown to the world, in the blissful silence of the body and soul; in the subtle

<sup>38</sup> Cf. G.D. Gachev, 'Russkaya дума. Losev', in *Aleksey Fedorovich Losev*, eds. A.A. Takhogođi and V.P. Troitskiy (Moscow, 2007), pp. 566-569, on p. 569.

<sup>39</sup> M.A. Butin, 'Rival to the Time: a Search for Specific Features of A.F. Losev's Personality', *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities & Social Sciences*, 10 (2013), pp. 1450-1460, on p. 1454.

<sup>40</sup> Cit. from Scanlan, 'A.F. Losev and Mysticism in Russian Philosophy' (see n. 33), pp. 279-280. Cf. G. Gusejnov, 'The Linguistic Aporias of Alexei Losev's Mystical Personalism', *Studies in East European Thought*, 61, 2-3 (2009), pp. 153-164, on p. 163.

<sup>41</sup> V.I. Postovalova, 'Christian Motifs and Themes in the Life and Works of Aleksei Fedorovich Losev. Fragments of a Spiritual Biography', *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, 40, 3 (2001-2002), pp. 83-92, on p. 84.

sensation of the effect of thoughts on blood circulation; in the increased clarity of thoughts and a special, inexpressible light thinness of the body during fasting; in the sweetness of abstinence; and in the fragrant prayer of an opened heart? Everything is mediocre in comparison with monastic life, and every feat is philistine in comparison with it.<sup>42</sup>

Both the content and style of Losev's writings confirm his perception of reality through the prism of religious and aesthetic experience. Already in a diary from his youth, the Russian thinker noted that he understood philosophy as 'the relation to the world,' particularly 'in the areas of aestheticism and morality.'<sup>43</sup> Later on he added: 'my deal is aesthetics,'<sup>44</sup> because this field unites philosophy and philology. One could say that in this fashion Losev referred to the patristic tradition of Logos which, as he wrote, constitutes the peculiar feature of Russian philosophy in general<sup>45</sup> and which is a living Word revealed to the world. For him, all philosophy has an aesthetic, or expressive character.<sup>46</sup> He continued the venerable Eastern Christian tradition according to which aesthetics is a purely religious factor.<sup>47</sup>

Losev practiced philosophy in both an academic and non-academic manner. Apart from his highly speculative, dialectical considerations (compared with those of Hegel), he indulged in Jesus' prayer, even at academic councils.<sup>48</sup> His philosophy was inseparable from his person: his philosophical (including aesthetic) activity stemmed from his existential background. All of Losev's creativity, concentrated around the topic of the expression

<sup>42</sup> Losev, *The Dialectic of Myth* (see n. 35), p. 140.

<sup>43</sup> See A.F. Losev, 'Dnevniki 1911-1913', in A.F. Losev, *Na rubezhe epokh. Raboty 1910-kh—nachala 1920-kh godov* (Moscow, 2015), pp. 881-914, on p. 901; E.W. Clowes, *Fiction's Overcoat: Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy* (Ithaca – London, 2004), p. 216.

<sup>44</sup> V.V. Bibikhin, 'Aleksey Fedorovich Losev', in V.V. Bibikhin, *Aleksey Fedorovich Losev. Sergey Sergeevich Averintsev* (Moscow, 2004), pp. 8-302, on p. 26.

<sup>45</sup> See A.F. Losev, 'Die russische Philosophie', in E.A. Takho-Godi, *Aleksey Losev v epokhu russkoy revolyutsii: 1917-1919* (Moscow, 2014), pp. 191-232, on pp. 203-204.

<sup>46</sup> See A. Takho-Godi, *Losev* (Moscow, 2007), p. 82.

<sup>47</sup> See W. van der Bercken and J. Sutton, 'Preface', in *Aesthetics as a Religious Factor in Eastern and Western Christianity*, eds. W. van der Bercken and J. Sutton (Leuven, 2006), pp. i-x, on p. ix.

<sup>48</sup> See A. Takho-Godi, 'Losev molilsya dazhe na uchenykh sovetakh', *Foma* 12 (2014), pp. 6-11.

or the symbol, that is aesthetics, is testament to the realization of the venerable patristic thesis according to which philosophical activity relies not just on composing the *texts*, but on *life* itself, the experience of God and its transmission and sharing with the readers.

### Abstract

Losev was one of the most representative advocates of so called onomatodoxy movement in the Russian Orthodox Church according to which the name of God is not something conventional, but God himself. His practice of so-called Jesus Prayer, or invocation of the name of God is nothing but practical exercise in aesthetics as a way of life and love of the divine Wisdom. Both the content and style of Losev's writings confirm his perception of reality through the prism of religious and aesthetic experience.

*Keywords:* way of life, aesthetics, symbol, onomatodoxy, Alexei Losev, Patristics, religious experience, prayer