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The Philosophy of Religion: A New Field for Russian Philosophy

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What is it that can explain why the philosophy of religion, which constitutes an ancient and highly respectable philosophical domain, and one which moreover is enjoying a considerable resurgence (to judge from numerous incontestable signs to that effect), should have found itself reduced to being one of the most neglected 'fallow lands' of Russian philosophy? The most notable reasons appear to be ideological in nature: during the Tsarist period it was believed that religion needed protection from the inroads of philosophy, whereas during the Soviet era it was philosophy that had to be protected from all religious influence. These factors also go to explain certain objective facts: for the whole of the Imperial period, the only more or less well known studies that have come down to us are a course of lectures entitled 'Philosophy of religion' presented in Kiev, probably in the 1830s, by the archpriest professor Johann Skvortsov and the publication of a 'monograph and a half': *Religion, its essence and its origin* (1873) from a doctoral thesis by Victor D. Kudriavtsev-Platonov, a professor at the Ecclesiastical Academy of Moscow, and an incomplete monograph, *Philosophy of Religion, Part I: Historical Overview* (1915), the work of Nicolai M. Bogoliubov, professor of theology at the University of Kiev. That these manifestations of a philosophy of religion were so rare can equally be explained by the fact that, at the time, there was great difficulty in distinguishing such a philosophy from religious apologetics, and that its field of study was, for that reason, entirely taken up by the latter. During the Soviet period, it was common to publish manuals of 'scientific atheism', anthologies of Marxist classics on the essence of religion were produced, and a certain number of studies were undertaken into the way religious concepts were perceived by Marxism – but the expression 'philosophy of religion' seemed to bring together two terms that were so incompatible with each other (it was considered that religion had to be overcome and rooted out, rather than being philosophised about) that it was not considered a reputable field of study, even for the purpose of simple entries in reference encyclopaedias. As for the works of Western philosophers of religion

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(should they be considered worthy of any attention at all), they became the object of a uniform critique which treated them as philosophical supporters of reactionary clericalism and accused them of serving the class interests of the bourgeoisie, which were bound up in religion.

Consequently it is not surprising that the first genuine discussions around the thematics of religious philosophy had to await the collapse of the official atheist stance. Among these expressions, particular mention must be made of Yuri Kimilev's book entitled *Contemporary Western Religious Philosophy* (1989), which provided a near to objective presentation (together with a moderate Marxist critique) of the ideas of such well-known 20th century philosophers of religion as Richard Schaeffler and Bernhard Welte as well as a certain number of English-speaking philosophers. Subsequently, Kimilev published another monograph, *Philosophy of Religion: a systematic essay* (1998), which was characterised by the same descriptive and informative approach with nevertheless the difference that the viewpoints of the Western philosophers of religion were set out more clearly. We can also mention *Philosophy of Religion: principles for an analysis of its essence* (1998) by Evgeny I. Arinin, which principally demonstrates its author's intention to provide an introduction to the subject.

Today, elements of philosophy of religion are included in the manuals of general philosophy (being also published in the form of separate study materials) and also in those of the religious sciences. The discipline is also beginning to command a growing place in philosophical congresses and conferences. In 2007 the first number of a new international periodical appeared (Shokhin, 2007b), including studies under five broad headings: analysis of the philosophy of religion considered as a philosophical discipline; a section devoted to contemporary philosophical theism with translations of articles by English-speaking analytical philosophers; a presentation of the history of natural philosophy from Antiquity up until Second (Late Period) Scholasticism; translations and publications of texts as well as reviews and commentaries on various publications.

It might be said that this is a reasonable start. But it is as yet no more than a start. Too often the term 'philosophy of religion' is still understood as a respectful way of designating any incursions into the field of religion of those who consider themselves philosophers. More importantly still, discussions in this area broadly involve the ongoing relationships between the study of religion and theology and the boundaries by which these two are separated, whereas the philosophy of religion itself does not always provoke serious theoretical interest.

But since no domain of philosophy can advance in the absence of a rational self-identification – the essence of philosophy being precisely its self-reflexivity – such a stock-take represents the first task for the philosophy of religion as a new field of Russian philosophy.

The research that I have conducted arising from the new publications that have appeared in Russia (monographs, manuals, encyclopaedias) has served to bring out a number of points of view (whether implicit or explicit) on what might be the object of the philosophy of religion and its history. These points are summarised below.

The philosophy of religion covers, with equal legitimacy, both '*the philosophical study of religions*' and '*philosophical theology*', both of which it considers as among 'approaches to the religious experience' (Kimilev, 1989: 12–13, 15–16; Kimilev, 1998:

3–5). It can also incorporate on an equal footing the field of *religious philosophy* (Gubin and Sidorina, 2003: 616–639). It constitutes the 'base chapter' of the *sciences of religion* and must embrace as its objects, along with itself, both the conceptions that arise from philosophical theology and those from religious philosophy (Yablokov, 2000: 11–12). There is acceptance of the notion of the *dual genesis* of this discipline (Kimilev, 1998: 3–9; Garadja and Mitrokhin, 2001: 230; Krasnikov, Gavrilina and Elbakian, 2003: 8; Gubin and Sidorina, 2003; 616), principally on the basis of the distinction drawn between 'philosophy of religion' in the broad (*primordial*) sense and the 'philosophy of religion' in the narrow (*specialised*) sense. Perceived in this second sense, the philosophy of religion can be said to have emerged within the modern era, and is found also in two forms: an *early form*, emanating essentially from Spinoza (Kimilev, 1989: 6–7; Arinin, 1998: 36) and a *developed form* originating with Hegel (Arinin, 1998: 37; Koptseva, 1999: 5).

The idea of setting the philosophy of religion at the 'heart' of the religious sciences is an invention of those Russian specialists of religions who wish to distance themselves from any other discipline than the one which they practise. However, the ideas embracing a dual content for the philosophy of religion and its dual genesis do not at all relate to this approach. Both have been drawn from representations long established in Western philosophy which are solidly present not only in specialist monographs, but also in encyclopaedic publications, in anthologies and in historiographical works. Let us look at a few examples.

In the opinion of one of the major contemporary analytical philosophers of religion, William Alston (1998: 238–239), 'the philosophy of religion comprises any philosophical discussion of questions arising from religion. This has primarily consisted in the classification and critical evaluation of fundamental beliefs and concepts from one or other religious tradition. Major issues of concern in the philosophy of religion include arguments for and against the existence of God, problems about the attributes of God, the problem of evil and the epistemology of religious belief'. This author also puts forward something resembling a double truth concerning the object of the philosophy of religion: in the broad sense it takes in all philosophical reflection on religion, which takes it back to the very beginnings of philosophy itself; in the strict sense it focuses on the analyses devoted by Western philosophy to the Judeo-Christian tradition, or on 'what can more specifically be called *philosophical theology*' (*ibid*.). On the one hand, the way philosophy approaches beliefs and religious concepts must be marked, according to Alston, by an effort to *understand* (or put another way, to explain) the major concepts of religion and to subject them to critical and rational analysis, rather than by a *description* of these concepts, or by discovering laws that 'govern' them, a differentiation through which the philosophy of religion may be distinguished from the science of religions. On the other hand, such analysis 'is not conducted from the standpoint of any religious commitment: it appeals only to what is available to any rational person who reflects carefully on the matter. It is this which distinguishes philosophical theology from dogmatic theology' (*ibid*.).

Despite this equation of the philosophy of religion with 'philosophical theology', Alston's definition also extends to that epistemology of religious beliefs which Kimilev calls 'the philosophical study of religions'. The authors of the major anthologies accept this tacit integration of the two approaches. One such is Ninian Smart in

his famous anthology *Historical Selections in the Philosophy of Religion* (Smart, 1962). But I would like to draw attention to three more recent anthologies.

Melville Stewart (1996) gives pride of place to the theistic basis of religious beliefs, which corresponds completely to 'philosophical theology'. The anthology encompasses *topoi* as traditional as the relationship between reason and faith, the arguments in favour of the existence of God, the problem of evil and its associated theodicy, the attributes of God, the justification of the possibility of miracles and the immortality of the soul. However, alongside these themes, there are also articles on religious pluralism as well as on problems strictly within the domain of the science of religions, such as (in the section dedicated to arguments in favour of the existence of God) the interpretation of the religious experience itself, its relationship to faith and the issue of the relatively fertile character of the examined arguments for religious conscience (Stewart, 1996: 263–312).

The strength of the already classic anthology of Eleonore Stump and Michael Murray (1999) undoubtedly resides in the demonstration of the continuity of 'philosophical theology'. The present-day analytical perspectives are convincingly placed within a historical context thanks to the inclusion of extracts from medieval theologians (not all of whom are Christian). Nevertheless, this manual of speculative theology, with which the authors identify the philosophy of religion, and which encompasses the problematics of the attributes of God, of arguments in favour of God's existence, of evil and the theodicy, of knowledge and faith, of religious doctrines and practices, concludes with a section which reaches partially across to the science of religions with an examination of the links between ethics and faith and a miscellaneous set of articles including an assessment of the 'non-Jewish religions' from the point of view of Judaism, reflections on the problematic of *gender* for contemporary religious expression and experience and an analysis of the significance for Christianity of beliefs arising out of Africa (Stump and Murray, 1999: 401–480).

The syncretism between theology and the science of religions within the compass of the philosophy of religion also is apparent in the widely read anthology of Stephen Cahn (2005). Along with extracts from purely theological texts of Boethius or Anselm of Canterbury, the editor chooses to include passages taken from the work of William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, as well as texts of 20th century analytic philosophers, starting with a passage from Anthony Flew from a study of the problem of the relation between 'theology and falsification' (Cahn, 2005: XIII).[1]

The first historian of the philosophy of religion to have clearly and precisely enunciated the distinction between these two facets of its history was the theologian and specialist in religions Otto Pfleiderer, a liberal Protestant professor of systematic theology in Berlin who had been influenced by Schleiermacher and Hegel. For Pfleiderer (1893: 29–30), the philosophy of religion in the broad sense includes any philosophical reflection on any religious subject. That is the reason for its being as ancient as philosophy itself and constituting 'the root of all other philosophy'. In the narrow sense on the other hand, the philosophy of religion is 'the methodical scientific examination of and knowledge of that set of phenomena which constitutes "religion" in the life of humanity'. In this form it represents the latest of the philosophical disciplines to emerge and its beginnings cannot in any way be dated as earlier than the publication of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of 1670. And this was in no

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way a result of pure chance, in that the establishment of the philosophy of religion in the strict sense indicated requires that at least two conditions be present: religion must become a reality distinct from all other realities (and distinct especially from the socio-political reality), and it is also necessary for philosophy to be independent of all external authority such that it becomes 'a form of self-determining scientific research and a field of knowledge characterised by its logical coherence'. Before the advent of Christianity, the first of these conditions was lacking, and the second was not achieved until the modern era (Pfleiderer, 1893: 3).

Pfleiderer's precepts were raised to the status of fixed dogma across a whole range of philosophical reference dictionaries. Thus, although Friedrich Kirchner (1911) characterises the philosophy of religion as the philosophical science of religion, devoted to scrutinising the origin, essence, content and meaning of religion, the same publication also contains the declaration that the history of the discipline has always gone hand in hand with the general history of philosophy and that it began 'in the strict sense' with the English Renaissance (Kirchner, 1911: 818–819). In Rudolf Eisler's famous *Dictionary of Philosophical Concepts* in three volumes (1929), the philosophy of religion 'in the broadest sense' refers to any philosophical reflection that bears upon religion and which is conducted from a scientific point of view, whereas in the 'narrow sense' it may be characterised 'either as a logico-epistemological science embedded in the foundations and methodological principles of all sciences bearing upon religion, or as a science relating to the true content and the meaning of religion'. The history of the philosophy of religion in the broad sense covers the whole history of philosophy (and metaphysics) whereas in the narrow sense it begins only with the modern era (Eisler, 1929: 696). In Hoffmeister's *Dictionary of Philosophical Concepts* (1955), the philosophy of religion is described (as in Eisler) as a science bearing upon the essence of religion, its origin, its true content, its values, its relationship to philosophy, psychology and other fields of human knowledge as well as upon the methods of the sciences associated with religion – but its history is split into two strands. Origen, who strove to provide a philosophical foundation for Christian dogma, may be considered the founder of the philosophy of religion with Christianity, whereas the philosophy of religion in the 'narrow sense' begins with the *Lectures* of Hegel (Hoffmeister, 1955: 525–526). In a similar fashion, the renowned theologian Johannes Baptist Metz (1963) wrote that, since philosophy *per se* is a self-reflexive and methodical act through which man understands himself, the philosophy of religion in its initial and non-thematicised form is present from the outset within philosophy. But it did not become constituted as an autonomous field of philosophy until the era of philosophical rationalism, starting with Spinoza (Metz, 1963: 1191).

Among the more recent publications, one might mention the monograph of Eugen T. Long (2000). Even though the author conceded that philosophical thought devoted to the area of religion is as old as philosophy itself, the 'philosophy of religion' as a distinct discipline did not emerge until the modern era, arising out of the work of Hume, Kant and Hegel (Long, 2000: 1).

When in 1935 Karl Popper formulated the problem of demarcation within the philosophy of science, concentrating on the distinction between the empirical sciences on the one hand, and mathematics, logic and the 'metaphysical systems' on the other, he put most effort into solving the problem of the essence of scientific

knowledge and the methods that produced it, not being happy with the way these questions had been posed by the neo-positivists of the Vienna Circle. My personal approach to this problem has a more modest goal, consisting of trying to understand why, despite everything, the philosophy of religion does not simply become identified with everything from which it is not normally otherwise distinguished. Given the fact that the origin of this particular problem is found within the philosophy of science, I shall look to the sciences for analogies.

The fact of considering the philosophy of religion as the 'first chapter' for the study of religions, as Yablokov (2000) proposes, allows it to be located as deriving from those fields associated with research into religion rather than from religion itself. That said, including the philosophy of religion within the science of religions would equate to affirming by analogy that the principal problems addressed by the philosophy of science – the constitution of scientific knowledge, the laws governing its development, the methods guiding scientific research – equally form the 'first chapter' for the study of science (including the sociology of sciences), to which could be added chapters on statistics (total roll-call of scientists, scientific journals, institutes of science etc.), along with others on the organisation, planning and financing of scientific endeavour, on international co-operation between scientists and so on. And this 'first chapter' is of a nature to influence these following chapters, which are very mixed.[2]

The use of the conjunctions 'and', 'as well as' and 'or', by which Kimilev, but also the Western authors mentioned bring together under the authority of a single discipline 'the whole range of philosophical ideas' touching upon the nature and functions of religion, upon 'philosophical justifications' for the existence of God and of his attributes, or further, upon 'the philosophical discussion around God *and* religion', is even more aberrant. Behind these assertions lies the conviction that religious philosophy and the philosophy of religion can, with total equality of rights, be the objects of a single and same philosophical discipline. As for the justification put forward by Kimilev (1998: 10) according to which in both domains it is effectively a case of 'religious knowledge', that is no more convincing than the process of bringing together gardening and botany into a single type of activity, since both can be said to deal with the 'knowledge of plants'. Resuming the scientific analogy, it can be asserted that this position is tantamount to a philosopher of science wanting to include within his discipline the philosophical standpoints of scientists of all times, from Pythagoras up to today's Nobel Prize winners for physics, as well as the models for the way scientific knowledge is transformed that arise out of the dynamic (Popper), paradigmatic (Thomas Kuhn) and programmatic (Imre Lakatos) schools.

Although many representatives of the philosophical tradition to which Alston belongs define *a priori* (and, contrary to Kimilev, without any justification) the object of the philosophy of religion as both 'gardening' and 'botany' at once, the fact that Alston designates the philosophy of religion as a 'philosophical theology' (without commitment) does without any doubt establish a clear line of demarcation. But despite this, we are still faced with some areas of imprecision. Firstly, we have seen that the epistemology of religious belief (in itself a legitimate domain of the philosophy of religion, but in no way of religious philosophy) cannot be reduced to the status of a 'philosophical theology'. Secondly, the very concept of 'philosophical

theology' is not, as it is drawn, an unequivocal one. In Plato and Aristotle, the discourse on philosophico-theological matters has no confessional basis. In contrast, in the works of Christian authors, it corresponds to a natural theology (*theologia naturalis*) postulated since Tertullian (2nd–3rd centuries CE) as a path leading to revealed theology (*theologia revelata*). This discourse formed part of the system of theological sciences, becoming associated with apologetics (and often becoming inseparable from it) and in the final instance became an integral part of a theological approach which it is difficult to imagine how it could be other than confessional. Thirdly, the two equations 'philosophy of religion = philosophical theology' and 'philosophical theology = natural theology' (the latter being accepted by Alston and many other analytical philosophers of religion) run counter to the stance of William of Ockham of not multiplying entities without good reason. There would therefore be no reason to introduce a 'philosophy of reason' functioning alongside the rational knowledge of God.

If we were to take our analogy with the area of sciences further, we would need to recognise that the fact of requiring the philosophy of religion to set out the proofs for the existence of God and to establish arguments relating to the attributes of the deity or to the problem of the theodicy would correspond to the process of requiring that the philosophy of science solve problems of astrophysics, of the physics of solid bodies, of microbiology and so on. To be sure, just as there is little chance of becoming a good philosopher of science if one has no scientific knowledge at all, so there is little chance of having a good philosopher of religion who has not the slightest religious experience and is totally ignorant of what religion can represent in the concrete realities of life. Nevertheless, the competencies involved are different, and one should not confuse them.

One can also apply other analogies, borrowed from the realm of cultural history, to the dual genesis of the philosophy of religion. To put side by side the earliest thinking about the presence of the divine in the world, about the place of man within that world and about what happens to him after death with the findings of philosophers who have elaborated a 'philosophical science of religion' would equate to describing the beginnings of comparative linguistics by putting on the same plane the pioneer works of comparatists and the collected evidence about the languages they were studying. It would be the same as addressing the origins of aesthetics by putting on the same plane the *Poetics* of Aristotle and primitive rock art, or else of treating as of the same order the first treatises on politics with the facts of the history of inter-state relations in order to describe the initial stages in the emergence of political science. If the equation of religious philosophy with the philosophy of religion was acceptable in the time of Immanuel Berger (1800), it manifestly no longer is so today.

As for the attempts to establish a chronology for the development of the philosophy of religion in the 'narrow' sense, the main flaw in the schema of Pfeiderer and the Western and Russian authors who follow close upon him is to be found in the contradiction it introduces between a logical approach and a historical approach. From Kirchner and Eisler onwards, these authors, in their efforts to define with a high degree of exactitude what a philosophy of religion must be, fail to observe that there is no trace of a philosophy of religion among the early philosophers of the modern era. Any identification of these latter as philosophers of religion by basing

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this purely on their convictions and their visions of the world means going nowhere with the specificity of the foundational discourse of the philosophy of religion. As for the levels of thematisation and analysis of religion in Plato's *Euthyphro* or in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas (II, 2, Q80 s.), they have to do with the history of the philosophical analysis of religion even more than the ideas contained in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of Spinoza.

When certain Russian authors distinguish two separate points of origin for the philosophy of religion in Spinoza and in Hegel, they are essentially looking to reinsure themselves. Nevertheless, behind this imprecision due to psychological factors is concealed a correct perception of the difficulties associated with the constitution of this discipline. By starting from the definition of the philosophy of religion as being purely a philosophy 'about' religion and in no way a 'religious philosophy', one can resolve the question of its origin, which indeed does turn out to be single and without the slightest duality, even though it came together over several stages.

One can categorise as *prehistory* of philosophical thought on religion the period during which the characteristic features of this thought were already emerging through a *thematisation* of the religious phenomenon, but without concomitantly reaching the level of a self-conscious discourse which distinguished itself from others through its object. The virtual anthology of this initial stage would incorporate a whole variety of texts. Among these would be the *Euthyphro*, where Plato proceeds to examine the fundamental categories of the 'human–divine relationship' and poses the equally fundamental problem of establishing whether, within the religious conscience, what constitutes piety is determined by an 'objective' goodness or whether it is the other way round. Next, Cicero's treatise *De Natura Deorum* (The Nature of the Gods), which seeks to make a distinction between the concepts of 'religion' (*religio*) and 'superstition' (*superstitio*), and which discusses the responsibility of philosophy towards religion. Thirdly, Part II, 2 of the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas, where Aquinas expounds the arguments for considering 'religion' as a virtue (*virtus*): it is the synthetic expression of a plurality of virtues yet does not lose its specific identity and that relationship which is peculiar to it between natural reason and revealed reason. Other texts to be included could be: (i) certain passages of the *On Conjectures* of Nicholas of Kues which foreshadow a contemporary conception of 'religion' and which to a certain degree mark the beginnings of the anthropological approach to the religious, (ii) passages from the *De veritate* of Herbert of Cherbury which discuss the links existing between the 'common notion' of religion and the individual religious experience, (iii) passages from the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in which Spinoza examines the relationships between philosophy and religion and analyses the association between informative function and injunctive function in religious propositions, (iv) passages from the *Leviathan* and the *Elements* of Hobbes, where a general characterisation of religion is attempted, and where questions are raised on religion's theological, social and psychological sources, and the relation between outer and inner piety is explored. But this profusion ought not to be limited to works of European origin. It is possible to establish anthologies which transcend the boundaries of the monotheistic religions. Consequently, one might recall the interpretation given by Buddhist philosophers of the relationships between the three principal *dharma* by which religion is constituted – righteous behaviour (*shîla* in Sanskrit, *sîla*

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in Pâli), wisdom (*prajñâ/paññâ*) and meditation (*dhyâna / jhâna*) – or the co-ordination between the 'negative' (the rejection of worldly attachments) and 'positive' (attachment to the ideal) dimensions of religious practice or *brahmacarya*.[3]

The initial period of the philosophy of religion marks its beginning with the emergence of its capacity for self-conceptualisation as a specialised discourse with respect to its object. The works which marked this phase include the following: Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed* (1736); Andrew Michael Ramsay, *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1748); David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (1752–1755); *Thoughts on Religion* (1749) and *A Philosophical Examination of the Christian Religion* (1761–1764) by a disciple of Wolff and Baumgartner, Georg Friedrich Meier; *Thoughts on the Value of Feeling in Christianity* by the Swedish-born German theologian and philosopher Johannes Spalding; *The Truth of the Christian Religion* by Gottfried Less (in 1776, the work was already into its fourth edition); and finally the *Books on the Philosophy of Natural Religion* by Abraham Ruckersfelder, published in 1770. The links between the natural and supernatural sources of religious knowledge, the transcendent and socio-psychological roots of religious consciousness, the theoretical and practical elements constituting the religious experience of human beings, the principal forms of religious concepts and the correlation between their origins, reason and religious feeling, the relationship between religion and morality; such were, at that stage of development, the objects of the *problematisation* which was already in process as contrasted with the first philosophico-religious doctrines.

The publication of Ruckersfelder's work was in all probability the stimulus for the Jesuit Sigmund von Storchenau (1731–1798), professor of philosophy in Vienna, to compose in 1772 his *Philosophy of Religion* (Jaeschke, 1992: 748). Storchenau's tome comprised three main parts. The first embraced a theology in the specific sense, that is to say a doctrine concerning God, his existence and his attributes. The second was a treatise of psycho-physical anthropology or dualism, with arguments both for the immortality of the soul and against its denial. The third part was devoted to ethics – both to the distinction between good and evil as well as to instruction in man's moral obligations – but also to the concept of natural religion, which was considered as lacking the power to compel man to act in conformity with the truths of which he had knowledge. It was within the context of this part, and after subjecting to examination the main aspects of natural theology, that Storchenau put forward the idea (which subsequently took on a fundamental importance for the institutionalisation of this new discipline) that it was not these aspects, but religion itself which represented the proper object of study for this particular domain of knowledge to which the name the philosophy of religion could be given. Immediately thereupon, he set out the central theme that it would be the vocation of the philosophy of religion to render explicit: by examining the ontological correlation, that must necessarily be present within a faith perspective, between the Creator and his creatures, he brought to attention that it is precisely therein that may be found 'the essence of religion *per se*' (*das Wesen der Religion überhaupt*; Storchenau, 1810: 42). The importance of this moment in seeking to establish the first tangible manifestations of the 'philosophy of religion' can scarcely be exaggerated.

Once it had begun to develop a self-awareness as a discrete discipline, the philosophy of religion rapidly expanded to cover a relatively broad spectrum of visions of

the world. They included the apologetic orthodoxy of the abbé Nonotte (*Dictionnaire philosophique de la religion* 1778), the deistic moralism of Carl Leonhard Reinhold (*Letters on the Philosophy of Kant*, 1786–1787), Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792), Immanuel Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), Friedrich Karl Forberg's *The Development of the Concept of Religion* (1798), and the phenomenological apologetics of Friedrich Schleiermacher (*On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 1799). These authors variously recognised the 'philosophy of religion' as forming a distinct domain of philosophical discourse. Moreover, in one of Reinhold's *Letters*, the philosophy of religion was already being referred to as a separate 'field (*Gebiet*) of philosophy'; Johann Friedrich Kleuker wrote a treatise of which one part incorporates 'a critique of the most recent philosophy of religion' (1789); Johann Christoph Schaumann published *The Philosophy of Religion in General and of Christianity in Particular* (1793) and Karl Pölitz his *Articles for a Critique of the Philosophy of Religion and an Exegesis for our Time* (1795). This process of 'legitimation' culminated in 1800 with the publication of Johann Gottfried Berger's *History of the Philosophy of Religion*: the fact that a history of a field of philosophy can be written is a dependable sign that this field has gained recognition by the philosophic community (Shokhin, 2007a: 81–88).

Philosophical thought around religion has not yet been confronted, in Russia, with the necessity to distinguish itself from the other disciplines involved with religion and 'studies of the soul'. But, in order that this particular field of philosophy might follow a normal path of development, and so that all misunderstanding might be removed, it will have to define its tasks in terms of an identity which it must imperatively define. The need for such a line of demarcation is more urgently applicable here than with respect to many other fields of knowledge.

In faithful accordance with this principle, the philosopher of religion must yield to the philosophical theologian the task of laying out the proofs for the existence of God, of giving organisational coherence to the system of divine attributes and of bolstering arguments as to immortality and the theodicy. He must also leave to the religious philosopher the 'construction' of the Absolute which takes human existence as its starting-point, and to the specialist in religions the description and interpretation of the religious experience as applied to both individuals and societies. Furthermore, it will not be within the scope of the philosopher of religion to give priority consideration to those fields in which one would do little more than transpose to the religious domain problematics belonging to other philosophical disciplines, such as general epistemology, philosophy of language, the phenomenology of consciousness, ethics, aesthetics, political philosophy and so on. By applying the method of 'deduction by elimination' practised beyond the boundaries of European logic,[4] there remains to the philosophy of religion only the option of a critical and meta-theoretical discourse directed, on the one hand, towards the eidetic characteristics of religion and religiosity, and, on the other hand, towards the propositions and concepts particular to other religious discourses as well as to the sciences of religions.[5]

The study of the eidetic (that is, essential or intrinsic) characteristics of the religious phenomenon must take the form of a critical self-reflection by the philosophy of religion, building on the prior experiences of philosophy-on-religion. These in effect bring out the different forms of reductionism which have marked the way by

which religion has been conceived, notably through the attempts to bring an organic unity to one of the constituent parts (thus, for Kant, Reinhold and the younger Fichte, religion manifests itself as a broader scale system of ethics, for Hegel it is a broader scale philosophy, for Feuerbach a conception of humanity on a broader scale, for Marx a broader scale ideology, for Cassirer a broader scale form of symbolism etc.). Added to which is the need to elucidate the idea according to which religion represents an organic whole within which the different visions of the world, the conceptions of morality and the perceptions of a mystico-cultural nature would correspond to the knowledge, will and experience of the individual subject himself engaged on the religious plane.

One can illustrate through the use of examples the manner by which the philosophy of religion is able to take on critical and meta-theoretical functions with regard to the natural theology which is so often taken as a philosophy of religion. Although neither the further elaboration of already existing proofs for the existence of God, nor the discovery of new proofs, falls within the ambit of the philosophy of religion, nevertheless this latter may well bring forth a certain number of questions with regard to these subjects. It may firstly ask if these 'proofs' are of a truly deductive nature (and if they correspond to that which, since Aristotle, has been understood to constitute a 'proof'), or whether they are not rather dialectic arguments proceeding by induction, verisimilitude or analogy, and governed by the rhetorical principle of the most satisfying explanation. This I believe to be precisely the case, and that it would be better to avoid using the term 'proofs' altogether in this context.

As regards the attributes of the divine, the philosopher of religion, in contrast to the natural theologian, has less interest in defending divine intemporality against the process theology which refutes it (as do, for example, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann), than in analysing the fundamental thrust of this modernist current of thought which holds that classical metaphysics has become desperately outmoded for contemporary man. He might equally pose the question of a comparative, and intercultural, natural theology by pointing out that almost all of its facets (including rational psychology[6]) have parallels as well in Islam and Judaism and in the Hindu *ishvaravâda*. Naturally, one would need to take into account how universals are organised within the different traditions.

As far as the extent of the study of religions goes, the work of the philosopher must above all be devoted to rendering explicit those concepts when tend to see their meaning attenuated as their circulation spreads. What is meant by a 'world religion'? Does this refer to those religions which have spread their missionary activity across the whole world, or those which have brought a decisive contribution to the culture of those regions in which they have become implanted, or perhaps those which meet both these characteristics? Furthermore, what should be understood by the reference to 'marginal', 'non-traditional' or 'new' religions, which, according to specialist estimates, now number in the tens of thousands across the world? What is the time threshold for a 'non-traditional' or 'new' religion to emerge, and what are the criteria by which it might be so determined? Or further, how can one distinguish between 'quasi-religions' and these new religions and what is the rational range of this concept? As one seeks answers to these questions, it is crucial not to lose sight of the central question concerning the basic elements which allow a religion to be

identified as such. As well as that, as an ever greater value comes to be accorded to religious tolerance, it becomes all the more important to establish clearly the criteria for recognising what constitutes intolerance: does it simply mean the use of coercion in relationships between religions, or does it also include the conviction that proselytism in favour of one's own faith is an obligation? And if the latter is the case, can a genuinely religious conscience ever be tolerant in any form at all?[7] Other widely used terms are seeing their meaning becoming blurred. One need only think of 'religious fundamentalism' and 'religious dialogue': the first has a universally negative connotation, and the second a universally positive one. May one legitimately consider as being already a form of fundamentalism the simple attachment to a tradition? If such is indeed the case, on what level must one set the 'fundamentalist' threshold of this attachment? On the other hand, should one consider any inter-religious relationship as being more or less respectable as a dialogue? Indeed, herein lies one of the responsibilities of the specialists of this field.

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Notes

1. Cf. also the contents of such publications as Charles Taliaferro's *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell, 1998) or Louis P. Pojman and Michael Rea's *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (Thomson Wadworth, 2008).
2. As a result, I find it very difficult to clarify for myself how the boundary is conceived here between 'philosophy of religion' and 'phenomenology of religion', especially when Yablokov (2000: 14–15) cites, in relation to this latter, philosophers of religion, with specific reference to those who continued in the lines of thought of Husserl and Heidegger.
3. Cf. for example the discussion in the Pâli text *Kathâvatthu* (I.3) and in the anonymous commentary *Kathâvatthu-athakathâ* (c. 5th century CE).
4. In the Nyâya School of Indian philosophy, which is the most coherent from the methodological point of view, an example of inference by elimination (*sheshavat*) is represented by the demonstration of the fact that sound constitutes an attribute because it can be neither a substance nor a movement (*Nyâya-sutra-bhâshya* of Vâtsyâyana I, 1.5.)
5. These functions were mentioned in the philosophical dictionaries of Eisler and Hoffmeister. Subsequently, Dalferth (1981: 21–22) indicated that the explicitation of the meta-religious and meta-theological senses of the 'discourse on God' made the task of this discipline. Among the more recent mentions made of the 'meta-theoretical hypotheses and implications' can be cited that of Dupré (1994: 7). Although each author interprets these 'hypotheses and implications' differently, what is significant is the very fact of their being recognised as signs of a philosophy of religion.
6. The fact that the arguments in favour of the immortality of the soul which are based on a mind–body-dualism (without necessarily being reduced to that), belong in the monotheistic religions to the sphere of theology, might be understandable while bearing in mind that these arguments assume the teleological argument for the existence of God (as guarantor, in Kantian terms, of the 'kingdom of the ends' in the created world), the attribute of absolute divine goodness and the characterisation of man as a creature created in the image and resemblance of God.
7. It is all the more appropriate in this context to correct certain disparities of judgement found in specialists of religious sciences as reputed as John Hick or Harold Coward, who justify the idea of an inherent intolerance within monotheistic religions as compared to 'almost wholly tolerant' Buddhism,

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or Hans Küng who refers to a specific intolerance on the part of Christianity, including in comparison with the other monotheistic religions (Shokhin 2005).

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