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George Macdonald and the Heritage of John Scotus Eriugena: Between Celtic and Eastern Christian Traditions

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George MacDonald didn't routinely use direct notes and references when he quoted anybody. For example, a problem with Origen is well known: it must be strongly supposed that MacDonald was familiar with him but no direct evidence has been preserved showing that the author of *Unspoken Sermons* had ever read Origen or discussed him with F. D. Maurice who was one of MacDonald's closest friends in 1860s. For instance, MacDonald just once in his life mentioned Origen directly. It should also be pointed that MacDonald's library was dispersed after his death – it does not exist as a whole collection of books nowadays and it is often impossible to define what books he actually read. Thus, his special interest in Origen or Alexandrian theology as a whole cannot be definitely proven exactly. Though, in his lectures on Dante's purgatory there are clearly recognisable traces of the Alexandrian school.

The same can be said about MacDonald's relation to the Celtic philosopher and theologian – John Scotus Eriugena. No references to the first and most prominent Celtic philosopher of medieval Europe are found in MacDonald's works. While, there is no direct evidence as to whether George MacDonald had ever read Eriugena's works but there are some indirect arguments in favor of this hypothesis that will be discussed below.

First of all, it should be mentioned that Eriugena's main treatise, *De divisione Naturae*, was published in three consequent editions in Latin in 1838, 1853 and in 1865 (we should add an earlier Oxford edition in 1681) and since that time was easily available for anyone who could read Latin (the first English translations date from 1976 and 1987). Nevertheless the other important treatise, *De Divina Praedestinatione*, was first published in Migne's Patrology in 1845 (and only translated into English in 1998).¹ On that basis it can be supposed that MacDonald would have discussed new editions of Eriugena's writings with F. D. Maurice (who was an outstanding expert on the Church Fathers). In 1873 Maurice published his own study of the roots

¹ Raul Corazzon, *The Works of Eriugena: Editions and Translations* <<https://www.ontology.co/pdf/eriukena-editions.pdf>> [accessed 1 May 2018].

of Eriugena's philosophy connecting it to the Church Fathers.² Moreover, MacDonald who was a great admirer of German Romantics knew very well their special appreciation of Eriugena, for example, in Friedrich Schlegel's *Philosophy of History*.³

The two Celtic authors were distanced one from another by one thousand years. However, their theological paradigms seem to be quite similar. MacDonald contrasted the Celtic 'mode' of the theology and philosophy with the 'Germanic' one, and he did it more consequentially than, for example, Thomas Carlyle.⁴ Eriugena may be considered as the founder of this 'Celtic mode' of thought in Medieval and Modern Christian philosophy and theology. According to Grigory V. Bondarenko, it is better to speak not about 'Celtic Christianity' but about a Goidelic or Gaelic Christian spiritual tradition that embraces Ireland and Scotland and includes Eriugena as well as MacDonald.⁵

To our point of view, MacDonald's polemics against Calvinism was based on the hidden opposition between 'God of love' and 'God of power'. It was not a dualistic opposition and it certainly did not mean that every Scottish thinker belonged to the 'Celtic' spiritual tradition: for example, Radical Calvinists certainly did not, and even Thomas Carlyle was still quite far from George MacDonald's 'theology of Love' due to his strong accent on the ethics of hard work and his pessimistic view on God of retribution while MacDonald tried to discard this kind of theology and return to the old 'Celtic' line of Eriugena and St Francis of Aberdeen. G. K. Chesterton emphasised it already in 1924:

It is a measure of the very real power and even popularity of Puritanism in Scotland that Carlyle never lost the Puritan mood even when he lost the whole of the Puritan theology. If an escape from the bias of environment be the test of originality, Carlyle never completely escaped, and George MacDonald did. He evolved out of his own mystical

² Frederick D. Maurice, *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy* (London, 1873), I, 467–501.

³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte* (Wien, 1829), pp. 128, 159; cf. Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scotus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 84.

⁴ Chesterton, Gilbert K., 'George MacDonald', in Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (London, 1924) <<http://www.chesterton.org/george-macdonald/>> [accessed 1 May 2018]

⁵ Grigoriy V. Bondarenko, *Mify i obschestvo Drevney Irlandii* (Moscow, 2015), 369–70; id., *Studies in Irish Mythology* (Berlin, 2014), 287.

meditations a complete alternative theology leading to a completely contrary mood.⁶

It was John Scotus Eriugena who was the prominent link in the “golden chain” of this theological tradition in Scotland that began as early as in the fifth century AD, the link between Eastern Orthodox, Greek theology and the Goidelic world. The comparison of some theological concepts of Eriugena and George MacDonald may help us to prove that the Scottish author of *Unspoken Sermons* can be considered as the one of the last links of the same chain side by side with Northern Irishman Clive Staples Lewis.

Among the main features of this tradition connecting Eriugena and MacDonald there is an inclination to panentheism, in some aspects even to emanationism (though viewed with references to the Bible and especially to St Paul’s epistles) that may be interpreted in terms of *apokatastasis*. It does not necessarily mean the total denying the concept of eternal punishment because there was another notion of the eternity itself. In Romano-German, European scholastic tradition eternity was considered as indefinitely long period while the Greek notion of *aion* was rather described as something ‘perpendicular’ to the linear time. For Eriugena, the Greek sources were the main pattern, and in some degree this can be said of MacDonald, too.

The public debate between Eriugena and Pardulus of Laon was organised in 849 AD by archbishop Hinkmar of Reims and was connected with Eriugena’s treatise *De Divina Praedestinatione* where he argued that the freedom of will means the free choice of the good and the final *apokatastasis*.⁷ It is especially important that Eriugena’s opponent Gottschalk of Orbais was the Saxon predecessor of Calvin’s teaching of predestination. As Carlos Steel said, ‘Eriugena launched a direct attack on Augustine’s doctrine’.⁸ Dermot Moran considers that according to John Scotus Eriugena, God does not predestine anyone to death, since God is life and the source of life in all living things.⁹

It may hardly be striking that nineteenth century Western European philosophers and theologians did not usually mention John Scotus Eriugena

⁶ Chesterton, *ibid*.

⁷ Vladimir V. Sokolov, *Srednevekovaya filosofiya* (Moscow, 1979), 111.

⁸ Carlos Steel, ‘The Return of the Body into the Soul: Philosophical Musings on the Resurrection’, in *History and Eschatology in John Scotus Eriugena and His Time: Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference for the Promotion of Eriugenian Studies*, ed. Michael Dunne, James McEvoy (Leuven, 2002), 584.

⁹ Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scotus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 27–34; cf. Sokolov, 120–1.

at all. But there also existed an Eastern Christian tradition. Vladimir Solovyov mentions Eriugena occasionally but Professor Alexander Sokolov devotes two special studies to him in 1898 and 1899. Alexander Brilliantov gives a special footnote to F. D. Maurice, and convincingly demonstrates that on the early stage of *De Praedestinatione* John Scotus Eriugena was influenced by St Augustine and St Gregory of Nyssa while in the later stage of *De Divisione Naturae* the influences of Dionysios the Areopagite and St Maximus the Confessor dominated, though Eriugena's thought was undoubtedly original in its main features.¹⁰ But Brilliantov analysed only the second period of John Scotus and paid little attention his teaching about the sins, eternal punishment and *apokatasasis*.¹¹

Nevertheless, Eriugena was not well known among Russian Theologians even at the very beginning of the twentieth century. For instance, the only reference to Eriugena in the fundamental work of the twentieth century Russian Orthodox theology and philosophy can be found only in Pavel Florensky's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914). But it is a significant reference.¹² In the fourth letter titled 'The Light of Truth', Florensky argues that the singular God cannot be Love; only the relations between Father God, Son God and the Holy Spirit make the Holy Trinity themselves the Love. Side by side with St Augustine and the texts of Orthodox liturgy the philosopher quotes Eriugena in Latin (from Migne's Patrology):

Amor est connexio aut vinculum quo omnium rerum universitas ineffabili amicitia insolubilique unitate copulatur. [...] Amor est naturalis motus omnium rerum, quae in motu sunt, finis quietaque statio, ultra quam nullus creaturae progreditur motus ('The Love is connection or the fetters, with them all the things are combined in unspeakable friendship and indissoluble unity. [...] Love is the natural movement of all things that are in motion, the end and quiet station beyond which no motion of any creature goes ahead').¹³

¹⁰ Alexander I. Brilliantov, *K voprosu o filosofii Erigeny*, 2nd edn (Saint-Petersburg, 2006), 51–6; Id., *Vliyaniye vostochnogo bogosloviya na zapadnoye v proizvedeniyakh Ioanna Skota Erigeny*, 2nd edn (Moscow, 1998), 40.

¹¹ Brilliantov, *Vliyaniye vostochnogo bogosloviya*, 384–98.

¹² Pavel Florensky, *Stolp i utverzhdeniye istiny: opyt pravoslavnoy teoditsei* (Moscow, 2005), 99, 501.

¹³ *Patrologiae cursus completus, Seria Latina*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol 122 (Paris, 1865), col. 519b. English translation by Maksim Medovarov.

This quote expresses the view of MacDonald no less than of Florensky. There is a key common feature between them and Eriugena: God is Love – and it does not mean pink sentimentality but the Love as the Consuming Fire.

More can be said about the problem of hell and *apokatastasis* in MacDonald's writings. He knew very well that all churches and their branches strictly repudiate Origen's idea of *apokatastasis* as leaving all human life and virtues without any sense and reward. Nevertheless, MacDonald definitely rejected the idea of the eternal punishment in hell and found it awful.¹⁴ It was certainly the common feature of some Liberal variants of nineteenth century theology. One should remember that the most prominent Russian philosopher of the century, Vladimir Solovyov came to the same conclusion when in 1875 in London he made the acquaintance of Thomas Carlyle, James Anthony Froude and other British intellectuals of that age; later, in 1893, Solovyov briefly visited Scotland. But already in 1875 he strongly supported the idea of *apokatastasis* and rejected the eternal punishment. It's highly unlikely that Solovyov could have known MacDonald's first series of *Unspoken Sermons* (1867) but both of them independently come to the same conclusion, probably under the influence of Alexandrian theology and of John Scotus as well (because Solovyov quoted Eriugenain his dissertation in 1877 and named him the first medieval philosopher).¹⁵

Thus the problem was marked: what is the fate of great sinners after death? In Russian Orthodox thought this question was not solved for some years after Solovyov's death. It was eventually solved by Florensky in his *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*. It is striking that his solution based on Alexandrian tradition and Eriugena coincides in its main features, sometimes even at the level of special terms and phrases, with George MacDonald's solution. One should remember that MacDonald insisted that God does not punish except to amend and that he uses hell-fire if necessary to heal the hardened sinner. MacDonald declared:

I believe that no hell will be lacking which would help the just mercy of God to redeem his children. When we say that God is Love, do we teach men that their fear of Him is groundless? No. As much as they fear will come upon them, possibly far more [...] The wrath will

¹⁴ Onesimus, *Four Views on Hell, Part One: The Case for Eternal Conscious Torment* (2017) <<http://www.worksofmacdonald.com/the-hell-you-say/2016/3/26/four-views-on-hell-part-one-the-case-for-eternal-conscious-torment>> [accessed on 1 May 2018]

¹⁵ Vladimir Solovyov, *Sochineniya*, 2 vols (Moscow, 1988), II, 8.

consume what they *call* themselves; so that the selves God made shall appear.¹⁶

The view expressed here is indeed the weak form of *apokatastasis*: MacDonald recognises that some sinners refuse to be transfigured by what he perceived to be the fiery operation of God's love. This interpretation however seemed to be unlikely by MacDonald himself (though a similar opinion was later expressed in C. S. Lewis' fiction such as *The Great Divorce*).

The exact parallel to this idea of 'fiery operation of God's love' one can find in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* where Eriugena's doctrine of love becomes the key to the whole structure of Florensky's theology. His book consists of twelve 'letters'. The third, fourth and fifth letters are devoted to the Holy Trinity and the mystery of Love inside God and between God and human. The eighth letter 'Sin' and the ninth letter 'Gehenna' are devoted to the problem of hell and the punishment of sins.

Florensky insists that the both statements – '*apokatastasis* is possible' and '*apokatastasis* is impossible' – are true simultaneously. It is a paradox, antinomy – but there is no mercy without retribution and there is no retribution without forgiveness: the two sides of God are inseparable. Some people can freely choose to reject God, and He cannot make them be good by force. The solution of this contradiction is that hell is closed from inside only, not from outside. The hardened evil sinners hate God and their hatred is finally turned against themselves. Their 'self' becomes closed in itself, its reality becomes unreality because only the Light of God is the true source of reality and objectivity. Florensky emphasises: 'no sacrament can make the sin not to be sin: God does not justify the injustice'.¹⁷ But it makes the sin close in on itself, turns it into the 'ring' and makes it safe for the soul. Thus the hell-fire is indeed the Light of God. The just men simply perceive it as a Light of Love and warmth while the deadly sinners perceive it as torturous hell-fire of Gehenna. Florensky says, 'This is Gehenna – the *only* reality in their own conscience, and *nothing* – in the conscience of God and just men'.¹⁸

Florensky shows that the liturgical texts of Eastern Orthodox Church define the Body of Christ and Light of God as the day for saints and the night for sinners, as the purifying fire for the first and the deadly fire for the last of them. Interpreting St Paul thoroughly, Florensky argues that the very essence

¹⁶ George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons* (Hazleton, PA, 2012), 23.

¹⁷ Florensky, 191.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

of every man will be rescued in any case, and *apokatastasis* is inevitable in this sense only; but all the attributes of sinners' souls will be tortured forever in the Light that becomes the eternal hell for them.¹⁹ It is exactly the same fiery operation of Godly Love that MacDonald writes about in *Unspoken Sermons*, as will be demonstrated below. The reason of this situation is that God himself is a consuming fire, he is fear for some people and love for others – anyone can choose what he wants. *Omnes igne salietur*, 'Everybody will be salted by fire' (Mark 9:49) – this phrase is the epigraph to the chapter 'Gehenna' in Florensky's book, and it seems to be quite similar to MacDonald's doctrine. It is worth mentioning that at the end of this chapter Florensky accuses the Alexandrian school, including Origen, and St Clement, and the Cappadocian Fathers, including St Gregory of Nyssa and St Gregory of Nazianzus, of having a view of *apokatastasis* which is 'too optimistic' and 'pink'. It is unacceptable as well as the contrary 'pessimistic' view of all-damnation. Florensky concluded: 'If you ask me, would the perpetual torment be, I'll say "Yes". But if you ask me more, would the common recovery in beatitude be, I'll answer "Yes" again'.²⁰ Florensky calls it an antinomy, that is the situation when the both statements are true at the same time.

This idea seemed to be new in the early twentieth century but indeed Florensky just repeats Eriugena's arguments. His *De Praedestinatione* is not so widely known as *De divisione Naturae* but it is the first treatise that devoted to the perpetual torment and sin.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of *De Praedestinatione* John Scotus Eriugena argues that God does not inflict any punishment but sinners are tormented by their own iniquity. The same divine fire includes the just who find beatitude in it, and the wicked, who find punishment there. God, who has created neither sin nor death, is not the author of any punishment. The punishment is rather caused by sin itself. God has indeed created the substantial nature of sinners and righteous people alike, and he never abandons it, whereas he rejects the sin, of which he is not the creator. According to Eriugena, side by side with Origen and St Gregory of Nyssa – and Florensky, too – the substantial nature of sinners will never be annihilated; this is why God has established the limit of growing of evilness in every sinner, and he did it to avoid that this may increase grow *ad infinitum*. Eriugena insisted that God does not predestine anyone to damnation and, what is more, does not allow even the impious to perish. No substantial nature can perish or even 'be

¹⁹ Ibid., 207–14.

²⁰ Ibid., 216.

punished and be in misery'.²¹ Punishment will afflict the evil will (according to Florensky – not will but sin itself) but all natures will enjoy 'a wonderful joy'.²² Dermot Moran says:

No nature, for Eriugena, has the power to punish another nature. Punishment is simply the essence of beatitude, and the sinful soul remains trapped after death in the region of fire, the fourth element of material world. The good soul also dwells in this realm but it does not feel the fire as painful because to the healthy eye the sun is cheerful whereas to the unhealthy eye it is dazzling and painful.²³

Thus, for Eriugena, God did not create hell or evilness but human sinfulness is responsible for creating its own hell and being subjected to its own torment.

Eriugena called the torment by evil itself *occultissima operatio*, that is the most mysterious operation of God's providence, since due to it the final *reditus* of sinners to God will take place. In the universal *apokatastasis* sinners will not be deprived either of their ontological subsistence or of happiness that they preserve in their own nature or memory: only their evil will shall suffer and be destroyed. They will remember the good and will want to reach it. While the substance of sinners created by God will live eternally, the evilness derived from their perverted will shall perish in the other world and not remain eternally. Thus the sinners' evilness, according to Eriugena, will be annihilated (while according to Florensky, it will be closed in itself); only their substance restored into God will finally remain of them.²⁴

Eriugena and archbishop Hinkmar of Reims won the debate in the ninth century. But later their tradition was oppressed in Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and was revived by George MacDonald who in his later years said almost the same that Eriugena in his doctrine of hell and punishment. In his sermon *Consuming Fire* (1867) he describes the fiery inexorable Love that

²¹ Robert Crouse, 'Predestination, Human Freedom and the Augustinian Theology of History in Eriugena's *De Divine Praedestinatione*', in *History and Eschatology*, 303–11.

²² Paul A. Dietrich and Donald D. Duclo, 'Hell and Damnation in Eriugena', *ibid.*, 347–66; Avital Wohlman, *L'homme, le monde sensible et le péché dans la philosophie de Jean Scot Érigène* (Paris, 1987), 112; Gian Luca Potestà, 'Ordine ed eresia nella controversia sulla predestinazione', in *Giovanni Scotto nel suo tempo. L'organizzazione del sapere in età carolingia*, Atti del XXIV Convegno internazionale (Todi, 11–14 ottobre 1987) (Spoleto, 1989), 383–411.

²³ Moran, 32.

²⁴ Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden, 2013), 784–85; Moran, 27–34.

revealed to Moses and to the Apostles in terror, fire and fear. The saint sees farther into the meaning of fire than the trembling sinner, and he knows better what it will do to him. God loves sinners so He will burn them clean. ‘Can the cleansing of the fire appear to them anything beyond what it must always, more or less, be – a process of torture?’, MacDonald asked.²⁵

They do not want to be clean, and they cannot bear to be tortured [...] For that which cannot be shaken shall remain. That which is immortal in God shall remain in man. The death that is in them shall be consumed. [...] All that is destructible shall be destroyed.²⁶

It must be burned out of the immortal essence before it can partake of eternal life. Here MacDonald returns to the theory of purifying fire echoing the doctrines of both Eriugena and Florensky. Then MacDonald explains what happens after the stage of this fire:

When that is all burnt away and gone, then it has eternal life. Or rather, when the fire of the eternal life has possessed a man, then the destructible has gone utterly and he is pure. Many a man’s work must be burned, that by the very burning he may be saved – so as by fire.²⁷

The God is against sinners only in that degree in which their sin and themselves are the one: they just must be salted by fire. So the fear of God is not opposed to his love – it is the same light. Here one of the most important parts of MacDonald’s theology starts – that is his doctrine of consuming fire as a necessary and inevitable tool of correcting the human nature corrupted by sin.

The man who loves God, and is not yet pure, courts the burning of God. Nor is it always torture. The fire shows itself sometimes only as light – still it will be fire of purifying. The consuming fire is just the original, the active form of Purity, – that which makes pure, that which is indeed Love, the creative energy of God. [...] That which is not pure is corruptible, and corruption cannot inherit incorruption. The man whose deeds are evil, fears the burning. But the burning will not come the less that he fears it or denies it. Escape is hopeless. For Love

²⁵ MacDonald, 21.

²⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁷ Ibid., 24.

is inexorable. Our God is a consuming fire. He shall not come out till he has paid the uttermost farthing. If the man resists the burning of God, the consuming fire of Love, a terrible doom awaits him, and its day will come. He shall be cast into the outer darkness who hates the fire of God.²⁸

This quote from MacDonald's sermon 'Consuming Fire' may be a sufficient though indirect proof that he continued the great Goidelic tradition of Eriugena.

Moreover, MacDonald returned to this problem again in his sermon 'Justice' in 1889:

For sin there could be no mercy. [...] God does punish sin, but there is no opposition between punishment and forgiveness. The one may be essential to the possibility of the other. [...] If sin demands punishment, and the righteous punishment is given, then the man is free. [...] Punishment, deserved suffering, is no equipoise to sin.²⁹

It is important to draw attention to his conclusion there:

God is not bound to *punish* sin; he is bound to *destroy* sin... God does destroy sin; he is always destroying sin. In him I trust that he is destroying sin in me. He is always saving the sinner from his sins, and that is destroying sin. But vengeance on the sinner, the law of a tooth for a tooth, is not in the heart of God, neither in his hand. If the sinner and the sin in him, are the concrete object of the divine wrath, then indeed there can be no mercy.³⁰

It is the key point of MacDonald's anthropology, that there is the fundamental difference between the human person or 'self' and its corruption by sin. The notions of suffering, punishment, torment and even hell apply to the sin only. Otherwise one would not have find any place for the notions of forgiveness, mercy and even redemption. It would certainly be so if the divine wrath should persecute the sinner himself. But it is not really so. MacDonald clarifies:

²⁸ Ibid., 24.

²⁹ Ibid., 317.

³⁰ Ibid.

The only vengeance worth having on sin is to make the sinner himself its executioner. Sin and punishment are in no antagonism to each other in man, any more than pardon and punishment are in God; they can perfectly co-exist. The one naturally follows the other, punishment being born of sin, because evil exists only by the life of good, and has no life of its own, being in itself death. Sin and suffering are not natural opposites; the opposite of evil is good, not suffering; the opposite of sin is not suffering, but righteousness.³¹

So in the quoted sermon MacDonald comes to the conclusion about the *theosis* (deification) as the goal of atonement – ‘not satisfaction but an obedient return to the Father’.³² The connection between the purifying fire and the doctrine of *theosis* is direct in MacDonald’s writings: deification of man is the immediate logical result of the procedure of self-purification and self-torment of the former sinner.

In the next sermon, ‘Light’, MacDonald continues:

To fear the light is to be untrue, or at least it comes of untruth. No being, for himself or for another, needs fear the light of God. Nothing can be in light inimical to our nature, which is of God, or to anything in us that is worthy... It may sound paradoxical, but no man is condemned for anything he has done; he is condemned for continuing to do wrong. He is condemned for not coming out of the darkness, for not coming to the light.³³

Thus, MacDonald repeated Florensky’s idea that there is a full and true antinomy (though he actually does not use this Kantian term). Eriugena thought the same when he argued that all sins and punishment are just projections of human inability and reluctance to turn their own conscience to the Mercy of God.³⁴

Now there can be made an attempt to briefly summarise the common teaching about the hell, sin and divine fire in treatises of John Scotus Eriugena (*De Praedestinatione* and *De divisione Naturae*), George MacDonald (*Unspoken Sermons*) and Pavel Florensky (*The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*). According

³¹ Ibid., 318–19; cf. also 162 (*Man’s Difficulty Concerning Prayer*).

³² Ibid., 327.

³³ Ibid., 342.

³⁴ *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol 122, col. 426–30.

to Eriugena, the substantial nature of sinners will never be annihilated, can perish or even 'be punished and be in misery'; while the substance of sinners created by God will live eternally, the evilness derived from their perverted will shall perish in the other world and not remain eternally.³⁵ The souls corrupted by sin do feel the region of Godly fire as painful hell and torment while the righteous souls feel it as a light of God; the sin finally will be destroyed not punished by God – though punished by sinners themselves; this punishment will afflict the evil will but not the human nature. The final goal, for Eriugena, is *reditus* (return and reconciliation) of all men to and with God – the doctrine of *theosis* (deification of man). MacDonald also indicates the final reconciliation and *theosis* as a goal of human life. In his opinion, everyone will be cleansed by fire because God is consuming fire; this fire will consume the death and sin in men but their immortal nature will be saved 'so as from fire' (1 Cor. 3:15). The Light of God is felt as a torment and fire by sinners and as inexorable love by righteous people and saints. They are the sinners who punish themselves by not coming to the Light, it is not the 'guilt' of God. Florensky shared with Eriugena and MacDonald the same final goal of human life as *theosis*, the deification of man. He also explained in detail that the 'self' of sinners will never be annihilated.³⁶ However their attributes including sins shall perish. God cannot forgive those who reject forgiveness, so that everyone will be salted by fire (Mark 9:49); the souls of sinners feel God as fire of Gehenna, as painful hell and torment while the righteous and saint souls feel it as a warm and lovely light of God. In this way punishment will afflict the sin but not the human nature; as a result the sin after confession becomes closed in itself and it cannot do harm anymore. At the same time the substance or 'self' of the sinners will be restored in God, and finally this substance only will remain of them.

So many coincidences cannot be explained by common sources (including the Bible, Church Fathers, etc.) used by the three theologians, nor by similarity of their mode of thinking. The same structure of argumentation and the sequence of considerations in *Unspoken Sermons* and *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* closely resemble the logical chain of the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of *De Praedestinatione* and the fifth book of *De Divisione Naturae* (already analysed by Maurice and Brilliantov). The similar pattern of thought just might have helped MacDonald and (independently) Florensky to add some new accents in their argumentation on the topic of anthropology and

³⁵ Ibid., col. 418–9, 436.

³⁶ Florensky, 200–7.

their concepts of sin and hell. It is especially worth mentioning that from Florensky's point of view Eriugena was more correct speaking about the topic of *apokatastasis* than some of the Church Fathers who according to Florensky sometimes had vague ideas of it. This tradition continued in Scotland and Ireland till the times of St Francis of Aberdeen, Reformation and English conquest in the seventeenth century. The problem of its representatives in the age of Jacobite wars is still under discussion. Even if this chain of 'Goidelic' Christian theology was really interrupted it seems to be clear that George MacDonald and later C. S. Lewis may be considered as its successors. From our point of view, it became possible due to the growing interest to Eriugena in the nineteenth century and the edition of his full collected writings in 1865. However, the parallel tradition existed in the Slavic and Baltic world being represented by Florensky and some other theologians mentioned below.

The Baltic theological tradition is little known now even among specialists so it seems to be useful to draw more attention to it in comparison with the theology of Eriugena and MacDonald. Represented by Lithuanian religious thought in the twentieth century, it was quite near to the Slavic and Celtic thought though it was often underestimated and almost forgotten. Lithuanian theology is not widely known up to the present day, however it is especially interesting due to the combination of its Roman Catholic background and influences of modern German philosophy with the openness to the Eastern Orthodox tradition (from the Fathers of Church to modern Russian religious thought). We do not pretend here to solve the problem of full comparison of Lithuanian theology with MacDonald or Eriugena but to put his question and to outline contours for its further investigation. Two persons can be named here, both representing amazing parallels to George MacDonald's approach: Antanas Maceina and Algis Uždavinys. The former was the prominent representative of Lithuanian Catholicism who nevertheless supported the special Eastern Orthodox attention to the unity of the Holy Trinity in love in his *Sheep of God* (1966),³⁷ while Algis Uždavinys worked for years in England and became known mostly for his investigations in the spirituality of Ancient Egypt, Late Antiquity, Neo-Platonism and the Alexandrian school as well. Uždavinys was not himself a Christian – in the end, he was converted to Islam by Martin Lings, one of the most outstanding Oxford students of C. S. Lewis and later a Sufi sheikh. But Uždavinys cannot be imagined without a huge Christian theological background behind his intellectual position. It is

³⁷ Antanas Maceina, 'Dievo Avinėlis', in *Raštai*, in 14 vols (Vilnius, 1994), IV, 495–569; id., *Agnėis Božijy* (Saint-Petersburg, 2002), 312.

sufficiently to look at the numerous references to the Fathers of Church in his main writings for coming to this conclusion.

There is a common feature that Uždavinys shares with MacDonald: the process of *theosis*, or deification, was considered by both of them as the way of return of the son to the Father, ‘the inexpressible miracle is to turn into God’, as Eriugena said.³⁸ The same idea of that return was dialectically described by him though it has been presented in Christianity implicitly since its very beginning, especially by the Cappadocian Fathers or in Areopagitics or St Maximus the Confessor.³⁹ But this return for any human being must be the way through death to rebirth. It was the main intuition of MacDonald from his youth to the striking pages of *Lilith*. The difference between the simple physical death and the true spiritual death that can open the way to the resurrection in the eternal life is deeply rooted in the Alexandrian school as Uždavinys shows in his most prominent book *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth*, in the chapter ‘Philosophy and the Power of Faith: Towards the Final Union’. The famous words of St Clement of Alexandria, ‘The Word of God speaks, having become man, in order that you may learn from man how man can become god’ (Protrepticus 8:4) – lie in the long row of Plato’s, Plotinus’, and Porphyry’s teachings, as Uždavinys argues, though the Christian theology highlighted here some other aspects than Neo-Platonists did.⁴⁰ Uždavinys said, ‘The philosophical life is also the life of loving, according to Proclus’.⁴¹ But the full sense of that life of loving may be revealed in Christianity, first of all in the teaching about the Holy Trinity, and especially in the mystery of love between the Father and the Son, as Eriugena and MacDonald, Florensky and Maceina have shown. Finally one can add that Eriugena’s statement that

³⁸ See: *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol 122, col. 876b. In Latin: Mutatio itaque humanae naturae in Deum non substantiae interitus aestimanda est, sed in pristinum statum, quem praevaricando perdiderat, mirabilis atque ineffabilis reversio. Cf. the interpretation of that phrase in: Giovanni Reale, Dario Antiseri, *História da Filosofia. Antigüidade e Idade Média* (São Paulo, 1990), 491.

³⁹ For St Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzus see St Maximus’s *Scholia in Gregorium Theologum* that was published as an appendix in the first edition of Eriugena’s writings (Oxford, 1681) and quoted by S.T. Coleridge in 1809: ‘Deus omnia sit et omnia Deus sint’ See Samuel T. Coleridge, ‘The Friend’, in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton, 1969), vol 4, part 2, 80. For St Dionysios the Areopagite see Eriugena’s commentaries to him in *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol 122, col. 126–282, 1023–1192, and for St Maximus the Confessor himself see col. 1193–1220.

⁴⁰ Algis Uždavinys, *Philosophy as a Rite of Rebirth: From Ancient Egypt to Neoplatonism* (Dilton Marsh, 2008), 74.

⁴¹ Uždavinys, 79.

true philosophy is true religion and vice versa was fully accepted by Uždavins throughout his life.⁴² Anybody can ascend to Heaven through philosophy alone, Eriugena said,⁴³ and is it not in exactly this fashion that MacDonald had been building his own Christian theology?

Thus, comparing MacDonald's theology with some examples of Russian and Lithuanian theology of the nineteenth–twentieth centuries influenced by the Greek tradition (and by John Scotus himself), we can conclude that the spiritual evolution of MacDonald developed side by side, in parallel courses with that of the Eastern Christian tradition. The coincidence between Eriugena, MacDonald and Florensky in the sequence of argumentation on the problem of sin, eternal torment, hell and divine fire seems astounding and can be explained only by attentive reading of *De Praedestinatione* by the two latter authors. Indeed, it should not be so striking because the 'Celtic Christianity', from its very origins, adopted many theological ideas of Early Eastern Christianity, even though coloured in a specific hue by Irish or Scottish national character.

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⁴² *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol 122, col. 357d; see also: Sokolov, 112.

⁴³ Hilary Ann-Marie Mooney, *Theophany: The Appearing of God According to the Writings of Johannes Scotus Eriugena* (Tübingen, 2009), 181.