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Of all the distinguished churchmen exiled by the Bolshevik regime, there are few whose thought deserves greater interest, or has received less, than Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944).¹ This prodigal son, who began his career as a Marxist professor of economics, gradually returned to the Church as Russia moved closer to Marxism, and in 1918, at the age of 47, entered the Orthodox priesthood. Five years later, he paid the price of banishment for his faith. Upon leaving Russia he headed first to Constantinople, where he visited Hagia Sophia; and in 1925 became Dean of the Russian Orthodox Theological Academy at Paris. There, in the intervals left him by a busy schedule of teaching, pastoral care, and ecumenical work, he developed a theology which, he claimed, was inspired by the "last, silent revelation of the Greek genius, bequeathed to the ages, concerning Sophia, the Wisdom of God."²

More directly, this Russian "sophiology" was sparked by Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900), a philosopher who mingled patristic doctrine with German idealism in a system animated, from first to last, by a mystical devotion to the figure of Sophia.³ That devotion, however, was not without gnostic and erotic overtones. Fr. Bulgakov, together with his colleague Fr. Pavel Florensky (1882-1943),⁴ sought to place the doctrine of Sophia in an irreproachably Orthodox context. He

¹ For a concise biography see Nicholas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper, 1963), pp. 138-50.

² Sergius Bulgakov, *The Wisdom of God: A Brief Summary of Sophiology* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1937), p. 14. This work will henceforth be cited in the text as "WG."

³ See his *Russia and the Universal Church*, 1889, trans. H. Rees (London: Bles, 1948); D. Strémooukhoff, *Vladimir Soloviev et son oeuvre messianique* (Paris, 1935); and especially the mystical poem "Three Meetings," trans. Ralph Koprince, in *The Silver Age of Russian Culture*, ed. Carl and Ellendea Proffier (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1971), pp. 128-34.

⁴ Pavel Florensky, *La Colonne et le fondement de la vérité: Essai d'une théodicée orthodoxe en douze lettres* (1914), trans. Constantin Andronikof (Lausanne: Editions l'Age d'Homme, 1975).

saw himself not as an innovator, but as one who came "to sweep away the dust of ages and to decipher the sacred script, to reinstate the tradition of the Church, in this instance all but broken, as a *living tradition*" (WG, 18). This hopeful claim, in light of contemporary events, opens a new perspective on Fr. Bulgakov and the movement he represents. It is a claim to continuity in the face of radical change; for after the "Third Rome" had fallen, the Great Church in captivity turned to the crowning symbol of the Second—the Great Church of Byzantium—for renewal.

The hierarchy, however, did not take kindly to this development. In 1935 Sergius, Metropolitan of Moscow, issued an ukase condemning Fr. Bulgakov's teaching, and the Synod at Karlovcy pronounced it heretical.⁵ These condemnations called forth a storm of controversy, and their force was eventually mitigated, although the charge of heresy was not withdrawn. But since Fr. Bulgakov's death in 1944, his theological works have been virtually ignored. Only the first two volumes of his trilogy, *The Divine Wisdom and Godmanhood*, have been translated (into French).⁶ Although the author was a founding member of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, and even published a *summa* of his doctrine in English for the Anglican Church, he has been almost totally neglected by English theologians and scholars.⁷ The present article is an attempt to remedy that defect.

Our purpose is, first of all, to set forth the salient points of Fr. Bulgakov's doctrine concerning Sophia, with a view to evaluating his orthodoxy and the charges against him. Secondly, by way of background but with no pretense to completeness, we will sketch a broad outline of the theme of Divine Wisdom in the Orthodox tradition. The "mysterious and elusive symbolism" to which Fr. Bulgakov refers, alluding to sophianic icons and liturgies, must be set beside the less mysterious but more influential patristic background if we wish to understand this little-known tradition.

The sophianic viewpoint embraces both theology proper, the doctrine of God, and economy, the doctrine of God in and for the

⁵ The documents can be found in *O Sofii, Premudrosti Bozhiei* (Paris, 1935) and *Novoe uchenie o Sofii Premudrosti Bozhiei* (Sofia, 1935). For a detailed history of this affair see Dom C. Lialine, "Le Débat Sophiologique," *Irénikon* (1936), pp. 168-206, 328-29, and 704-05.

⁶ *La Sagesse Divine et la Théanthropie*, trans. Constantin Andronikof: I, *Du Verbe Incarné (Agnus Dei)*, and II, *Le Paraclet* (Paris: Aubier, 1943 and 1946). These works will be cited in the text as "I" and "II." The third and final volume, untranslated, is *Nevesta Agncha (The Bride of the Lamb)* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1945).

⁷ One exception is Evgeny Lampert, *The Divine Realm* (London: Faber, 1944), a consistent development of Fr. Bulgakov's thought.

world. It is this latter that is most characteristic of Fr. Bulgakov's concerns:

Anyone who has visited the church of St. Sophia in Constantinople and fallen under the spell of that which it reveals, will find himself permanently enriched by a new apprehension of the world in God, that is, of the Divine Sophia . . . An ocean of light pours in from above and dominates the whole space below—it enchants, convinces, as it seems to say: I am in the world and the world is in me . . . Heaven stoops toward earth; the world is not only a world in itself, it is also the world in God, and God abides not only in heaven but also on earth with man. (WG, 13, 34)

This statement, despite its aesthetic flavor, is meant to bear its full theological weight. But since the import of "the world in God" depends on the doctrine of God, we must begin at the beginning.

The Divine Sophia and the Trinity

The catholic faith, in the words of the Athanasian Creed, is to acknowledge one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. "For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But one is the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, equal the glory, the majesty co-eternal." To the divine nature (*ousia*) so described, the one substance of the three persons, Fr. Bulgakov gives the name of Sophia.

It is of Sophia that he writes, "the tri-hypostatic God possesses His nature as the tri-unique and uni-trinitarian act of love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the *unique* nature of three hypostases" (I, 20). Implied in this definition is the patristic concept of *perichoresis*, the co-inherence or indwelling of the divine persons in one another. Because God is Love, His nature can be conceived as the active and dynamic interchange of divine love between the persons, who are wholly transparent to each other. Again, because "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (I Jn. 1:5), there can be nothing opaque or unrealized in the divine nature, nothing which is not fully manifest in and for each of the three hypostases. God in His essence, for Fr. Bulgakov, is not the God of the Neo-Platonists, but the living and personal God of the Bible. Sophia, conceived as the essence of divine life, is thus "the world of God existing in God and for God, eternal and uncreated, whereby God lives in the Holy

Trinity" (I, 23). She is the living unity of the Three who are One and "the whole fullness of deity," the Pleroma. This approach to the *ousia* as "divine world" or Pleroma is a way of describing the total self-revelation of God the Father through the Son and the Holy Spirit, under the aspect of all-embracing oneness. "The divine Sophia, then, is none other than the nature of God, His *ousia*, not only in the sense of power and of depth, but in the sense of content bursting forth, of *All-Unity*" (I, 22).

Although theologians have traditionally spoken of the *ousia* in abstract and, most often, apophatic terms, Fr. Bulgakov will not tolerate any suggestion of the impersonal in his doctrine of God. At this point, therefore, he faces a dilemma: either accept the "promise" of an impersonal essence or allow Sophia to become a fourth hypostasis, as it were, and so vitiate the whole trinitarian dogma. Significantly, he at first chose the latter alternative.⁸ But in response to vigorous criticism, he corrected and refined his doctrine by developing the notion of "hypostaseity" (*ipostasnost*).⁹ This term, as applied to the divine Sophia, denotes a Being which is not hypostatic, but "hypostasized"; personal, but not a person. There must be some sense in which, as divine reality, Sophia can be said to "love" the triune God and be loved of Him in return. She not only is Love but loves, giving Herself wholly to each of the divine persons as His life and beatitude, in a self-yielding which can be described as passive or, analogically, "feminine." Fr. Bulgakov considers this "hypostasized" love as the prototype of that by which, in the created world, "the heavens declare the glory of God" and show forth their love for Him (WG, 58n). This concept of Sophia as *ipostasnost* and as divine world, the feminine aspect of God, suggests the further analogy of the "spiritual body". Sophia is to the divine subject, immortally and immaterially, what the human body is to the soul (WG, 89; I, 38).

The principal novelties in Fr. Bulgakov's doctrine, thus far, are his cataphatic treatment of the *ousia* and his use of "Sophia" as a synonym for the divine essence. Each of these points has drawn considerable criticism. In the first place, trinitarian doctrine in both East and West has focused primarily on the persons, using the one nature only as a safeguard for the full divinity of the Son (and later of the Holy Spirit). As a theological symbol in its own right, Fr. Bulgakov claims, the *ousia* has not been sufficiently explored; and he intends to fill this gap by means of sophiology (WG, 84n). But theologians like Vladimir Lossky, appalled by this self-styled "holy audacity,"

⁸ In *Svet nevechernie* (*The Light Unfading*; Moscow, 1917).

⁹ "Ipostas i ipostasnost," in *Sbornik statei posvyashchennykh P. B. Struve* (Prague, 1925), p. 333ff.

protest that apophatic theology alone can dare to approach the divine Mystery.¹⁰ Fr. Bulgakov, Lossky claims, ignores the fundamental distinction between God's essence and His energies, as developed by the Cappadocians and refined by St. Gregory Palamas.

For Palamas, the *energeiai* of God are His uncreated activities or powers. Although His essence is incommunicable, He yet communicates and manifests Himself by grace through His energies. Their number is infinite, but God Himself remains one, simple, and undivided, so that He always reveals Himself fully and not in part. Therefore, "as God complete is present in each of the divine energies, each [including Divine Wisdom] serves as His name."¹¹ Thus the substance is not divided: the *Deus absconditus*, the gracious God Who reveals Himself, and the revealing and deifying grace are one. Fr. Bulgakov claims to accept this Palamite viewpoint, assimilating it to his own theology of the "Relative Absolute."

In his dogmatic language, St. Gregory Palamas expresses this antinomy of the Godhead when he speaks of the being of God, His *ousia*, inaccessible and hidden to the creature, which he distinguishes from His accessible and revealed *energeia*. . . . Thus, the fundamental scheme of Palamas is the idea of God as Relative Absolute; he includes relationship (but not, to be sure, relativity) in the very definition of God. (I, 42, n. 1)¹²

In this sense, the self-revealing energy of Wisdom can indeed "serve as [God's] name." But this does not mean, as Palamas himself avers, that it is an adequate synonym for the *ousia*. The hesychast asks (countering Nicephorus Gregoras, who like Fr. Bulgakov had identified Sophia with the divine nature),¹³ "Is the Wisdom of God which manifests itself in creatures, the essence of God?" No, Palamas replies, because "the latter is always imparticipable and simple, whereas the divine Wisdom allows itself to be shared."¹⁴

¹⁰ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (1944; English ed. London: Clarke, 1957), pp. 80-81 et passim.

¹¹ Gregory Palamas, *Les Triades pour la défense des saints hésychastes*, III, 2, 7, ed. and trans. J. Meyendorff (Louvain: Université catholique, 1959), II, 657.

¹² For a very similar understanding of Palamas by a Lutheran church historian, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom 600-1700* (University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 268.

¹³ *Historia XXX*; PG 149, col. 294ff.

¹⁴ *Apology*, Coisl. 99, fol. 14; cited in J. Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (1959; English ed. London: Faith Press, 1964), p. 22.

Moreover, Lossky charges, modern sophiology aims to "determine" the Godhead not only by the sum of His energies, but by a single one, the attribute of Wisdom. This critique, however, takes no account of Fr. Bulgakov's peculiar use of the name of Sophia. For him, Divine Wisdom connotes not a single energy but the divine nature *in toto*. He draws special attention to this unconventional usage:

God not only possesses in Sophia the principle of his self-revelation, but it is this Sophia which is his eternal divine life, the sum and unity of all his attributes. And here we must once for all remove the common scholastic misunderstanding which makes of Wisdom no more than a particular "property" or quality, comprised in the definition of God, and therefore devoid of proper subsistence. (WG, 87)

If this is Fr. Bulgakov's meaning, his language seems to court misunderstanding, for to identify Divine Wisdom with the "sum and unity" of God's attributes, much less His nature, invites confusion. But the archpriest felt he had good reason for this bold theological step. In the first place, he had inherited the doctrine of Sophia from Soloviev, and was obliged to "rescue" the divine name from that thinker's eccentricities. But more important, as we have already remarked, he found the crucial dogma of the one substance (*una divinitas*) in need of development. Soloviev had already identified the two concepts (*ousia*, Sophia),¹⁵ and Fr. Bulgakov believed he could muster sufficient evidence, from Scripture and tradition alike, to support this novelty. Above all, he could not endure the presence of a sterile, "scholastic" concept in the doctrine of the living God. By glossing the dry and colorless term *ousia* with the radiant name of Sophia, he thought to infuse a new fervor and vitality into dogma, without loss to orthodoxy.

In Fr. Bulgakov's lifetime, his doctrine of Sophia achieved notoriety on rather different grounds, less subtle but more spectacular than Lossky's critique. He was charged with gnosticism, the very error that he so vehemently rejected in Soloviev;¹⁶ and this charge too was provoked by his terminology. For several forms of gnostic speculation, particularly the Valentinian gnosis, made use of a complex mythology of redemption revolving around the figure of Sophia. This myth, which may aptly be termed "The Folly of Wisdom," had

¹⁵ *Russia and the Universal Church*, p. 156.

¹⁶ See J. Danzas, "Les reminiscences gnostiques dans la philosophie religieuse russe moderne," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 25 (1936), 658-85.

countless refinements which space will not permit us to discuss here.¹⁷ St. Irenaeus, among others, devoted considerable time and energy to refuting it, but the gospel of the *Pistis Sophia* died hard. We may suppose that the persistent gnostic threat to the early Church had no small impact on her theology. Although the Old Testament contains a number of texts devoted to the Divine Sophia,¹⁸ many of them in the feminine gender, the gnostic Sophia myths would have cast suspicion over any attempt to found a theology on this material.¹⁹ Accordingly, the text of I Cor. 1:24, "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God," was taken as the definitive key to these Old Testament passages, despite the grammatical and theological difficulties sometimes caused by this approach. As we shall see, Fr. Bulgakov does not reject the bond between christology and sophiology; but he does refuse to limit the latter to the former. To understand the novelty of his position more clearly, we must take a closer look at the theme of Holy Wisdom in the early Church.

Sophia and Patristic Christology

Not surprisingly, the conception of the Wisdom of God developed, in the course of the first Christian centuries, from the fluidity of the pre-Nicene period toward increasing precision and exclusivity of meaning. The long pre-history of the name and notion of Sophia, both in Hellenism and in late Judaism culminating in Philo, cannot concern us here.²⁰ But when we turn to Christian writings of the second and third centuries, although we find the term used in various ways, it figures most significantly as a designation for the Logos or Son of God. The early Fathers, in fact, used sophiology to shape christology. For once Christ had been identified with the eternal Wisdom of God, this equation could serve as a primary line of defense against the assertion that the Son was a creature. It was apparently Origen, anticipating both sides of the Arian controversy, who first made this logic explicit. Because Christ is the inseparable Wisdom of God, he argued, "there never was when He was not."

¹⁷ A classic study is Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The message of the alien God and the beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958). See especially Chapter 8.

¹⁸ Prov. 8:1-9:6; Job 28:12-28; Wisd. Sol. 6:12-9:18; Eccles., *passim*.

¹⁹ A similar hypothesis is advanced by Robert M. Grant, ed. and trans., *Theophilus of Antioch: Ad Autolycum* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), p. xvi.

²⁰ See Burton Mack, *Logos und Sophia: Untersuchungen zur Weisheits-theologie in hellenistischen Judentum* (diss. Göttingen, 1967).

How, then, can it be asserted that there was once a time when He was not the Son? For that is nothing else than to say that there was once a time when He was not the Truth, nor the Wisdom, nor the Life, although in all these He is judged to be the perfect essence of God the Father; for these things cannot be severed from Him, or ever be separated from His essence.²¹

Such reasoning, based on the simplicity of God together with the accepted equation, Logos-Sophia-Son of God, was widely employed against the Arians. Citations to the same effect could be multiplied, but a syllogism ascribed to St. Basil sums up the theme in a nutshell. "If Christ is the power and the wisdom of God, but these are uncreated and coeternal with God (for He was never foolish or impotent), then Christ too is uncreated and coeternal with God."²²

Yet this line of thought, for all its facility, has a major flaw. On the one hand, Divine Wisdom is considered as an attribute of God; on the other, as the second person of the Trinity. In the greater precision of post-Nicene theology, these overlapping points of view could engender much confusion. St. Athanasius' so-called Fourth Discourse against the Arians illustrates the degree of complexity, not to say casuistry, occasioned by this apparently simple argument. He is defending Nicene christology against a number of heresies, to prove that the Son can be neither a second ἀρχή, nor a creature, nor an attribute divorced from God's essence, thus compounding His simplicity. Rather, He must be essential and subsistent, consubstantial and coeternal with the Father. The whole argument hinges on His names of Logos and Sophia, once again conjoined with that of the Son.

Since were He not essential Wisdom and substantive Word, and Son existing, but simply Wisdom and Word and Son in the Father, then the Father Himself would have a nature compounded of Wisdom and Word. But if so . . . He will be His own Father, and the Son begetting and begotten by Himself; or Word, Wisdom, Son, is a name only, and He does not subsist who owns, or rather who is, these titles. If then He does not subsist, the names are idle and empty, unless we say that God is Very Wisdom and Very Word.

²¹ *De principiis*, IV, 1, 28 ed. Koetschau, Griechische Christliche Schriftsteller (= GCS) 22 (1913), p. 350.

²² *Adversus Eunomium*, IV, 1; PG 29, col. 689B.

But if so, He is His own Father and Son . . . the absurdity of Sabellius.²³

In short, Athanasius claims, we must either confound the persons like Sabellius or divide the substance like Arius, unless we agree that the Son is "essential Wisdom and substantive Word." But in that case, it might appear that the Father and the Holy Spirit in themselves lack Wisdom, which has now been identified with the person of the Son. On this point Fr. Bulgakov poses a strongly worded challenge to the "Arian and anti-Arian" concept of Sophia.

If the Logos alone is Wisdom, that would signify (in spite of the tradition of the Church and the Fathers) that the other persons are strangers to Wisdom. If Wisdom belongs only to a single person, the divine tri-unity is fragmented and a tritheism affirmed. Moreover, on this pseudo-christian Olympus, the gods appear divided according to their speciality, as on the pagan Olympus. For that very reason the unique nature, along with the unique life and self-revelation, are abrogated; so that to deny the Divine Sophia, making it merely an attribute of the Logos, is an anti-trinitarian heresy from the start, as well (as we shall see later) as a christological one. (I, 31, n. 2)

Fr. Bulgakov here indicates the logical consequence of a "unitarian" sophiology—without, however, claiming that the Fathers actually made a pantheon of the Trinity. Indeed, a few saw this very danger and took pains to avoid it. Epiphanius, for instance, stresses the fact that all the attributes of God pertain to all His hypostases, first to the Father and then to the Son Who is the stamp of His essence.

Now if God the Father is light, then the Son is light from light, and therefore "dwells in light inaccessible" (I Tim. 6:16). God is wholly power; therefore He [the Son] is "Lord of powers." God is wholly wisdom, therefore the Son is wisdom from wisdom, in Whom "all the treasures of wisdom are hidden" (Col. 2:3).²⁴

Elsewhere the same writer says that although there are many kinds of "wisdom," loosely speaking, yet "the subsistent Wisdom of the Father, God the hypostatic Word," is unique.²⁵ But he adds, "it is

²³ *Oratio IV contra Arianos*, 2; PG 26, col. 469A-B.

²⁴ *Ancoratus* 70; ed. K. Holl, GCS 25 (1915), pp. 87-88.

²⁵ *Panarion (Adv. Haer.)*, Haer. 69, 21, ed. K. Holl, GCS 37 (1931), p. 171.

not absolutely necessary that I apply this word [Sophia] to the Son of God. For [Solomon] has not made this clear; none of the Apostles has mentioned it, and neither has the Gospel." An exclusive identification of the Word and Wisdom, then, is recognized as a convention read into rather than out of the sacred text. Thus it is equally proper, if less common, to call the Father Wisdom. In the liturgy of the Apostolic Constitutions (ca. 375), for example, He is addressed as "eternal knowledge, everlasting sight, unbegotten hearing, untaught wisdom" and Father of "the only begotten Son, God the Word, the living Wisdom."²⁵ Likewise Didymus the Blind, arguing for the deity of the Holy Spirit, calls Him "holy, . . . incorruptible, good, charity, wisdom, understanding, and also God."²⁷ In brief, the fact that Christ chiefly is and is called "the power of God and the wisdom of God" by no means implies that the Father or the Holy Spirit was "ever foolish or impotent." Theoretically, patristic christology thus allows for a broader interpretation of the Wisdom of God than the one which, in practice, was most frequently employed.

Sophia, Logos, and Pneuma

Two of the early Fathers, in fact, related the Old Testament figure of Sophia to the Holy Spirit rather than the Word. St. Irenaeus, arch-enemy of the gnostics, did so consistently—an indication that Fr. Bulgakov's refusal to equate Sophia with Christ is no proof of gnosticism. Irenaeus regarded the Word as the Son of God, and Wisdom or the Spirit as His likeness, thus describing the Trinity: "His offspring and His similitude do minister to Him in every respect; that is, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Word and Wisdom, whom all the angels serve, and to whom they are subject."²⁸ The Word and Wisdom are the "hands" by which God made the world, "establishing all things by His Word and binding them together by His Wisdom." The Logos provides the foundation of all creatures, the Spirit "adorns" them—a conception not unlike Fr. Bulgakov's idea of the role of Sophia in creation.

Theophilus of Antioch, the author of a lost commentary on Proverbs, links the Wisdom manifest in creation with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He too defines the Trinity as "God, and His Word, and His Wisdom." His theology is not exact, however, and the second and third persons are apt to be confused in a fashion unacceptable to post-Nicene dogma.

²⁵ *Const. Ap. VIII*, 12; PG 1, col. 1093A.

²⁷ *De Trinitate*, II, 6, 19; PG 39, col. 552-53.

²⁸ *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 7, 4 and III, 24, 2; PG 7, col. 993 and 967.

He [the Word] is called Beginning (ἀρχὴ) because he leads and dominates (ἀρχεῖ) everything fashioned through him. It was he, Spirit of God, and Beginning, and Sophia, and power of the Most High, who came down into the prophets and spoke through them about the creation of the world and all the rest. For the prophets did not exist when the world came into existence; there were the Sophia of God which is in him and his holy Logos which is always present with him.²⁹

Is it possible to accept the traditional bond between Sophia and Christ, as well as the insight of Irenaeus, without reverting to this confusion of terms? Such vagueness can be avoided, according to Fr. Bulgakov, only by means of an explicit doctrine concerning the nature of God—the divine Sophia—belonging to all three persons of the Trinity. His own teaching, which we can now set forth in fuller detail, is developed along these lines.

Because of the emphasis he lays on the *ousia*, Fr. Bulgakov consistently explores the dogma of the Trinity as a revelation of the One God. His concept of the divine tri-unity, or Sophia, embraces the "dyadic unities" of the Father and the Only-Begotten, the Father and the Eternally Proceeding, but above all, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Logos and Pneuma, Who mutually reveal the Father. Thus in the divine co-inherence, the persons of the Trinity are seen to be united not only by virtue of their single nature, but also hypostatically, each in relation to each. This dyad of the Son and the Holy Spirit, as a manifestation of the divine Sophia, replaces in Fr. Bulgakov's system what he calls the "false problematic" of Filioquism (II, 139).

As his starting point, he takes the great Johannine affirmations: God is Spirit and Light and Love. For this reason, the principles of self-knowledge, self-revelation, and self-giving characterize the life of the Trinity *in se*, the divine Sophia. The Wisdom of God, as the Father's nature, can be regarded as His full expression, total revelation and perfect gift of Himself through the Son and the Holy Spirit. If the Father, the transcendent Mystery, possesses Her as His hidden nature, the Son and the Holy Spirit possess Her as the manifest nature of the Father, and hence their own nature (I, 17; II, 171ff.). This thought leads Fr. Bulgakov to a daring extension of the idea of kenosis: the Father "empties Himself" in begetting the Son, and the Son in equally sacrificial love renounces Himself, content to be the Word of His Father only. "Being rich, He strips Himself bare, He is silent in the bosom of the Father" (I, 18). Regarded as Logos, however, He is Sophia in the strict sense: the revealed Wisdom of the

²⁹ *Ad Autolycum*, II, Ch. 15 and 10, ed. Grant, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-41.

Father, "the Divine Thought thinking itself," and thereby the "content" of the divine world in its all-unity (κόσμος νοητός). It is "in Him" that "all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). All that is implicit in the Father is manifest in the Son, and the paternal Silence is fully expressed in the filial Word.

Whereas the Word is the Lamb of God, slain from before the foundation of the world (I Pet. 1:20), the Holy Spirit is the Comforter Who transforms this eternally sacrificial Love into fullness of joy. She is (following an ancient notion, implicit in the name itself) the Breath of God by which the silent Word is pronounced—hence the truth realized in beauty, the fulfilled union of Begetter and Begotten. "The Holy Spirit is the Life which triumphs out of the kenotic sacrifice, the resurrection after the kenotic annihilation, the triumph of vivifying Love" (II, 173). The sacrifice offered by the Son is accepted and, so to speak, transmuted in the Spirit: "She renders it tangible, precious, desirable, joyous, full and sufficient" (I, 30). As the Giver of Life (Ζωοποιόν Πνεῦμα), the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests on the Son (Jn. 1:32, 15:26), and also proceeds through the Son back to the Father, that each might be glorified in each. In a sense the Holy Spirit is Glory, the glory of the Father translucent in the Son. She has Her own proper kenosis: "a suppression of self: by Her procession from the Father upon the Son, She loses Herself, She is no more than the copula, the living bridge of love between the Father and the Son, a hypostatic *Between*" (II, 175).

The divine beauty of the Spirit is, for Fr. Bulgakov, also Sophia in the aspect of the Shekinah. It is the Holy Spirit Who appears under the theophanic forms of the pillar of cloud, the radiant Ark of the Covenant, and so forth. While the Father is the primordial subject of Sophia and the Son Her rational (λογικός) content, the Spirit is Her manifest splendor. Expressed in a formula, "Wisdom is the matter of Glory, Glory the form of Wisdom" (WG, 80), and both in their unity constitute Sophia as the dyad of Word and Spirit revealing the Father. This inter-hypostatic union of two persons in one nature, which is the Father's, lends itself to a dogmatic statement echoing Chalcedon: "Sophia is one, but there are two sophianic hypostases which reveal a single subject, although doubly: in a manner at the same time single and dyadic, without separation and without confusion" (II, 177).

The reader will have noticed that, throughout this discussion, we have referred to the Holy Spirit with feminine pronouns. This usage is essential to Fr. Bulgakov's doctrine of the divine Sophia and

the Trinity,³⁰ for he takes the patristic theme of the divine image (Gen. 1:27) as a hint of divine androgyny. In Sophia, the "eternal theanthropy" in whose image male and female were created, he sees the distinction-in-unity of Logos (masculine) and Pneuma (feminine). These poles of immortal nature, he claims, appear mutually exclusive to us only on account of the Fall.

These masculine and feminine principles, in which is imprinted the image of the divine Sophia, of prototypical humanity, are in created language the distinction and unity of the Logos and the Holy Spirit in Sophia. . . . The Holy Spirit rests on the Logos, and the Logos abides in Her bosom. The Holy Spirit is the life, and the love, and the reality of the Word, just as the Logos is for Her the determining content, the sense, thought, and meaning, the Truth and existence in the Truth . . . All these correlations have a *parallel* (neither more nor less) in that "bi-unity" of the spirit of man in which the masculine, solar principle of thought, of the logos, is united with the feminine principle of reception, of creative fulfillment, of beauty. The sophianic spirit of man is androgynous, although in fact each person, each individual, is merely masculine or feminine . . . (II, 179)

This conception of Divine Wisdom as androgyny appears to derive from Jacob Boehme via Soloviev.³¹ But the idea was not entirely unknown to the Fathers.

Significantly, the Hebrew *Ruach* and its Syriac equivalent are feminine; the Greek *Pneuma*, neuter; the Latin *Spiritus* and its derivatives, masculine. These grammatical variants have had a powerful, if seldom recognized, effect on theology. As the Greek tradition supplanted the Syriac and the Latin diverged from the Greek, there developed an increasingly "androcentric" view of the Holy Spirit, parallel to the christocentric understanding of Old Testament passages concerning Divine Wisdom. It is well-known that a number of early Christian writings (*The Gospel of the Hebrews*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Aphraates' treatise *On Virginity*) employ feminine images

³⁰ The English translator of *The Wisdom of God* (the Russian original was never published) employs the pronoun "He" throughout, choosing to follow the grammar of the Russian (in which "Spirit" is masculine) rather than the apparent sense.

³¹ Nicholas Berdiaeff, "La Doctrine de la Sophia et de l'androgynie: Jacob Boehme et les courants sophiologiques russes," introduction to the author's translation of Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum* (Paris: Aubier, 1945), pp. 29-45.

for the Holy Spirit.³³ One of the more striking texts of this sort occurs in the apocryphal *Clementine Homilies*, where we find this exegesis of Gen. 1:26.

One is He who said to His Wisdom, "Let us make a man." But His Wisdom was that with which He Himself always rejoiced as with His own Spirit. It is united as soul to God, but it is extended by Him, as hand, fashioning the universe. On this account, also, one man was made, and from him went forth also the female. And being a unity generically, it is yet a duality, for by expansion and contraction the unity is thought to be a duality. So that I act rightly in offering up all the honor to one God as to parents.³⁴

The bi-unity of Wisdom, conceived as "spirit" and as "hand" (the immanent and the economic being of God), leads to the acknowledgement of a single God as Father and as Mother, mirrored in the creation of male and female from a single archetype. Thus the pseudo-Clement glosses the first chapter of Genesis by means of the eighth chapter of Proverbs, christological bias aside. In this, despite the crudity of his language, his thought bears comparison with that of Fr. Bulgakov. Beginning with the same passages of Scripture, the two theologians are both led from sophiology to anthropology. This train of thought evokes a whole cluster of theological questions, which we cannot here discuss;³⁵ suffice it to say that, in any revival of Fr. Bulgakov's theology, such questions could not escape notice.

The Creaturely Sophia

Where the doctrine of creation is concerned, the sophianic outlook has still another radical consequence. Always striving to see God in the world and the world in God, Fr. Bulgakov seems to end by making the two consubstantial. But this extreme, not to say heretical, position does not spring from avowed pantheism. Rather, it is the ultimate point in the development of what is intended for an orthodox pan-entheism. Fr. Bulgakov's doctrine of the "creaturely Sophia"

³³ Fr. Bulgakov alludes to several of these passages in a footnote (II, 180, n. 1), without comment on their theological value.

³⁴ *Homilia* 16, 12; ed. B. Rehm, GCS 42 (1953), pp. 223-24.

³⁵ For instance, the procession of the Holy Spirit may be treated analogically as an expression of Divine Motherhood (I, 36). In the use of exclusively masculine pronouns for God, the transcendence of divinity can be confused with the limitations of theology.

rests, no less than his trinitarian doctrine, on irreproachable grounds. In this case, the bases of his teaching are the Biblical *in principio* and the patristic *ex nihilo*. As he interprets the Scriptures, the beginning or ἀρχή (Gen. 1:1, Jn. 1:1) in which all things were made, is none other than the divine Sophia; and the *nihil* out of which they were made is non-being in the aspect of μηδὲν, or becoming. Creation can most simply be described as the divine nature projected onto the void, the "Relative-Absolute" plunged with utter freedom into becoming. Its converse, the state of creatureliness, is the void in process of receiving the Pleroma.³⁶

Once again, this doctrine grows out of the exuberant confidence that God is Love—love which by nature gives itself for another. By the "free necessity" of love, it has pleased God to transcend even the limit of His own absolute nature. In creation, Fr. Bulgakov teaches, He kenotically renounces His own essence by granting it existence in itself, apart from His hypostases. But since there can be no existence at all outside of God, nothingness itself springs toward being by reason of this inconceivable gift. Thus the divine Sophia, "released" from the triune God, appears as the "creaturely Sophia," the entelechy and telos of the emerging world. As entelechy, she is the World-Soul, the living plenitude of creation in its all-unity. This ideal Pleroma is also the κόσμος νοητός, constituted by the Word and accomplished by the life-giving Spirit. But, whereas the divine Sophia fulfills this revelation *in actu*, the creaturely Sophia possesses it only *in potentia*, in becoming. Unity is expressed in created terms as a progress toward union. Thus the sophianic foundation of the world can be seen, not only in its present order and beauty, but also in its evolution toward a predestined end. Sophia as telos is the transfigured world, the new heaven and new earth, creation reunited with the divine Sophia, in Whom God shall be all in all.³⁷

The paradox of distinction-in-unity, which lies at the heart of trinitarian and christological dogma, also marks this doctrine of creation. The world is both created and uncreated, consubstantial with God and independent of Him, in every sense a *coincidentia oppositorum* (WG, 115).³⁸ The "two faces" of Sophia subsist in one unique nature, just as the two natures of Christ co-inhere in one

³⁶ For what follows see I, 39-51; II, 182-204; and WG, 87-121.

³⁷ There are many striking similarities between Fr. Bulgakov's vision of the transfigured world and that of Fr. Teilhard de Chardin—which met with much the same reaction from the Roman hierarchy. This would be a most rewarding area for future research.

³⁸ For the phrase as well as the thought cf. Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* and *De sapientia*.

person.³⁸ To stress this distinction, Fr. Bulgakov identifies the ἀρχή of St. John ("In the beginning was the Word") with the divine Sophia, and the ἀρχή of Genesis ("In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth") with the creaturely Sophia. All the same, there is but one beginning.

The beginning, ἀρχή, of the prologue of the Gospel according to St. John is the eternal Divine Wisdom, the divine world before creation, as its foundation. Turned toward the Godhead, it contains in itself the life of the Trinity. . . . The "beginning" in the Book of Genesis contains the revelation of the same Wisdom, but already turned toward creation. . . . Wisdom eternal in God, and the same Wisdom as beginning of creation, are not two different beginnings, but one and the same Beginning, ἀρχή, turned toward God and toward the world.³⁹

Although the world was created "in the beginning," in Sophia, it was created by the personal will of God. Fr. Bulgakov thus distinguishes between personal or "hypostatic," and natural or "sophianic" revelation. While Sophia is the world's ontological ground, God the Father is its Creator, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the patristic phrase, serve as His "hands." "In short, the world is immediately created through the will of the Father by means of the Logos in Sophia" (II, 184). It is the Son by Whose Word all things were made (Jn. 1:3), for in Him are the σπερματικοὶ λόγοι or "seminal reasons" of all creatures. But the role of the Word as demiurge must be completed by that of the Holy Spirit as "cosmo-urge." It is She Who broods over the face of the waters, infusing the breath of life into the heavens and the earth. This designation of the Spirit as cosmo-urge reminds us that, as λογικός is to Logos, so is κοσμητικός to cosmos.⁴⁰ The Spirit glorifies the world with beauty, for She is "the realization of its content, just as the Son is its being by essence. . . The joy and the beauty of the world are the Comforter" (I, 50).

But until the Incarnation, the Logos and the Holy Spirit were

³⁸ The analogy is dangerous, for if the divine nature is strictly consubstantial with the created, then there is but one nature in existence, and a monophysite christology must result. This charge is made by A. Litva, S.J., "La 'Sophia' dans la création, selon la doctrine de S. Bulgakov," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 16 (1950), 75.

³⁹ S. Bulgakov, *Jacob's Ladder* (in Russian, 1929), p. 40; cited in Litva, "La 'Sophia,'" p. 66, n. 3.

⁴⁰ Cf. Diodorus of Tarsus, *Fragmenta in Gen.* 1:26, "κοσμητικὸν γὰρ τῶν ὄντων τὸ Πνεῦμα"; PG 33, col. 1563D.

present in the world by nature only, not by hypostasis. Hence, in accordance with the idea of "hypostaseity," the creaturely Sophia requires a created hypostasis, its subject in the world. This is the dignity conferred on man—and the sense in which Fr. Bulgakov understands the divine image. Humanity in its wholeness, male and female, constitutes the subject of the creaturely Sophia. We can even borrow the phrase of Leontius of Byzantium and say that Sophia is "enhypos-tasized" in man, just as human nature is in the Word. But although man's sophianic nature is thus divine and uncreated, Fr. Bulgakov hastens to add that his personal hypostasis, or ego, is a created spirit. The fact that God has bestowed His own substance on beings who were created out of nothing is a mark of His incomprehensible love, by which we become and indeed already are partakers of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4).

God's love toward creation is so boundless . . . that He has ceded His place to the creature with regard to Sophia, even *qua* hypostasis. He has, after a fashion, separated Sophia . . . from His hypostases, and given her to the created hypostasis. . . . He has called to life the image of Himself . . . man, and cedes to him His throne in creation. He has made him the hypostasis of the hypostaseity of the world, the world-soul, and gives him the destiny of having dominion over the world, as God has dominion over Sophia, His glory.⁴¹

Because of this very pre-eminence, man in his fall dragged the whole of the cosmos with him (Rom. 8:19-23). And in the world corrupted by sin, nature became man's mistress instead of his handmaid, and still takes on the lineaments of "the fallen Sophia . . . an anti-Sophia, Achamoth" (I, 78).⁴² Falling away from its fallen master, it slides into the fragmentation of chaos—or worse, assumes a false hypostasis and becomes the instrument of demons. But despite its treacherous charms and real miseries, the world remains not only redeemable, but divine in its essence. Beneath its crust of ugliness and evil, the nascent Wisdom of God waits on His patience and the creature's freedom for her full and final incarnation. In the creaturely Sophia, even in her fallen state, the σπερματικός λόγος still dwells in the womb of the archetypal Mother of God who is the Spiritbearer,

⁴¹ "Ἰποστάσις ἡ ἰποστάσις," p. 364; cited in Litva, p. 72.

⁴² *Achamoth*, derived from the Hebrew *Chokmah* (= Sophia), in the gnostic lexicon denotes the "abortion" or "lower Sophia" born to the fallen Aeon after her exile from the Pleroma. See Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, I, 2, 2.

but also—Fr. Bulgakov cites Dostoevsky—"the Mother, the moist earth" (II, 191).⁴³

Given this outline, it is no wonder that Fr. Bulgakov's system has been called a metaphysical poem after the manner of Origen.⁴⁴ Certainly its sweep, its audacity, its cosmic optimism recall the Alexandrian master. However, before we call Fr. Bulgakov an Origenist, we will do well to see how Origen himself, and a number of the later patristic writers, treated this theme of Divine Wisdom in the created world.

Wisdom in Creation: the Patristic Background

To be sure, Fr. Bulgakov follows Origen in referring the Biblical ἀρχή to Sophia. In fact Origen affirms that "Christ is the Creator . . . inasmuch as He is Wisdom, and is called the beginning because He is Wisdom."⁴⁵ The Logos is not Himself the ἀρχή but is *in* the ἀρχή, that is, in Sophia, through Whom all things were made. This Wisdom, Origen continues, "is anterior to all the thoughts that are expressed in the titles of the first-born of every creature" (*viz.* Christ). Moreover God, having created "ensouled wisdom," entrusted to Her the creation of all actual and material forms, "from the types which were in her." This is, of course, a recollection of Plato's κόσμος νοητός which Origen ascribes first to Sophia and afterwards to the Logos.

The Platonic concept of celestial prototypes (παροδελγυατα) of the created world was widely accepted by the Fathers. Fr. Bulgakov cites Sts. Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen, John of Damascus, and Maximus, *inter alia*, in support of this "so-
phological point of view" (WG, 100-01, n. 1-5). We will quote only Gregory the Theologian, who uses the κόσμος νοητός to answer the celebrated question, "What was God doing before He made the world?"

The object of his contemplation then was the adorable radiance of his own goodness and intelligence, and the equal perfection of glory of all the thrice-radiant Godhead, no less truly so to himself in his solitude than to those unto whom he has now revealed it. And likewise that mind

⁴³ Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*, I, 4, 5.

⁴⁴ By Metropolitan Sergius of Moscow. See E. Behr-Sigel, "La Sophiologie du Père S. Boulgakoff," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, 19 (1939), 155-56.

⁴⁵ *Comment. in Ioan.* I: 22; ed. E. Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), p. 23.

whence the world is begotten then dwelt in the depth of his mind upon how he should give shape to that world which was afterwards brought into being, and which even then was thus present to God.⁴⁶

Gregory's theological poem envisions the archetype of the created world as coeternal with the divine world, the glory of God. This of course does not imply the actual existence of the world from eternity, a heresy condemned by the Fifth Council. Fr. Bulgakov in effect paraphrases Gregory when he says that while the world, from its own standpoint, had a beginning in time, its beginning in God "with Whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas. 1:17) must be eternal (I, 43). This co-inherence of time and eternity corresponds to the relationship between the creaturely and the divine Sophia. In Platonic terms, one is the moving image of the other.

Another patristic commonplace, apart from the doctrine of παροδελγυατα is the concept of "participated Wisdom." Prov. 8:22ff. embarrassed the anti-Arian doctors because (at least in the Septuagint)⁴⁷ it speaks of Wisdom as created, whereas they wished to identify Sophia with the eternal Son. Accordingly, this passage encouraged the notion of two wisdoms, one pertaining to God and the other to creatures. The latter, understood as a participation in the former, could resolve the problem of the one and the many, and also explain why creatures, all alike created in Wisdom, nonetheless possessed it in varying degrees. Origen, again, was among the first to express this idea.

Whoever is able to conceive a bodiless existence (ὑπόστασιν) manifold speculations which extend to the rationale (τοὺς λόγους) of all existing things, living and, as it were, ensouled, he will see how well the Wisdom of God which is above every creature speaks of herself, when she says: "God created me the beginning of His ways, for His works."

By this creating act the whole creation was enabled to exist, not being unresponsive of that divine wisdom according to which it was brought into being; for God, according to the prophet David, made all things in wisdom (Ps. 104:24). But many things came into being by the help (μετοχή) of wisdom, which concerns themselves, but of that which has

⁴⁶ *Carmina Mystica*; PG 37, col. 420-21. The translation, taken from WG, 100-01, n. 5, is somewhat free.

⁴⁷ The Septuagint reading is "Κύριος ἐκτίσέ με" (The Lord created me); but Origen's *Hexapla* gives three alternative texts in which the verb is ἐκτίσarro, "possessed."

to do with many things besides, namely, of Christ who is the whole of wisdom. But each of the sages, in proportion as he embraces wisdom, partakes to that extent of Christ, in that He is wisdom.⁴⁸

This text establishes a crucial distinction among the degrees of participation in Wisdom. All creatures partake of Divine Wisdom by their mere existence, for it is the ground of creation; but only a few also participate by attaining to wisdom themselves, and it is these who are sharers in the Logos. Origen's reasoning is analogous to the familiar distinction between the divine image, which is given to the creature, and the divine likeness which it must achieve. Both expressions of this idea contribute to Fr. Bulgakov's discussion of Sophia as entelechy and as telos (WG, 121). Again, a similar distinction can be established between the fundamental, sophianic unity of creation and the fulfilled unity of the Church in Christ, the incarnate Wisdom.⁴⁹

The specifically cognitive dimension of this Wisdom is treated by the pseudo-Dionysius, who seeks to resolve the problem of divine unity vis-à-vis created multiplicity. Distinguishing "the All-wise (and more than Wise) Cause" from the energy of "Very Wisdom" and the wisdom of creatures, he remarks, "the Divine Wisdom in knowing Itself will know all things: will in that very Oneness know and produce material things immaterially, divisible things indivisibly, manifold things under the form of Unity."⁵⁰ Through created wisdom, these manifold things attain to a fuller union with their cause, whether by the circumscribed working of sensation and discursive reason, or by the intuition of angels. Even demonic minds, *qua* minds, participate in the Divine Wisdom, for there is no other. Conceived as all-unity, this Wisdom is that which "hath made all things and ever ordereth them all, and is the Cause of the indissoluble harmony and order of all things . . . producing the one fair agreement and concord of the whole." Fr. Bulgakov, although he blurs the Areopagite's careful distinction between essence and energy, expresses much the same idea when he reconciles the unity of Divine Wisdom with the Pleroma.

The simplicity of God's spiritual essence is not mere unifor-

⁴⁸ *Comment. in Ioan.* I, 34 (39); GCS 10, p. 43.

⁴⁹ Somewhat unfairly, Vladimir Lossky ignores this distinction when he calls Fr. Bulgakov's doctrine "an ecclesiology gone astray" and accuses him of confounding the Church with the cosmos (*Mystical Theology*, p. 112).

⁵⁰ *De divinitus nominis*, VII; PG 3, col. 868-72, trans. C. E. Rolt, *On the Divine Names and The Mystical Theology* (London: SPCK, 1920), pp. 148-53.

mity, any more than the divine unity excludes multiplicity. On the contrary, simplicity precisely implies fulness, a fulness in which all qualities meet in one. (WG, 93)

Elsewhere Dionysius seeks to harmonize the "manifold wisdom of God" revealed in the Church (Eph. 3:10) with the divine simplicity by recourse to a doctrine of nature and providence. Wisdom itself is simple, he says, because the divine nature cannot be compound. But our great High Priest, having compassion on our infirmities, has revealed His Wisdom in "many kinds of knowledge . . . so that the Wisdom of God is called simple according to nature, but manifold according to providence."⁵¹ Fr. Bulgakov would add a third term to this schema. As nature, Divine Wisdom is the underlying cause of the world; as telos, its overarching goal; and as providence, the indwelling grace which enlightens all creatures and propels them toward God. Thus the creaturely Sophia, in the aspect of providence, furnishes a link between the created world and the transfigured world. Her activity in creation prepares for and, in the end, merges with the deifying activity of grace. It is in fact *gratia naturalis*. On this account Fr. Bulgakov dares to say that the faculty for communion with God "pertains precisely to the natural essence of man, which is created singularly to be the receptacle of grace" (II, 203).

But this "manifold wisdom" of providence entails something more vital and irresistible than knowledge. The Wisdom of God in creation is the *natura naturans*, the power by which the $\sigma\tau\epsilon\mu\mu\alpha\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\iota\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\iota$ implanted in the cosmos germinate in the vivifying Spirit. Such dynamism belongs less to the grand but static cosmology of the pseudo-Dionysius than to another Christian Platonist—Methodius of Olympus. That author's treatment of the divine Sophia, which is closer to Fr. Bulgakov's than anything we have yet seen, leads us back to the etymologies of "nature" and "providence." Divine Wisdom for Methodius is the Birth-Giver of creatures, who also foresees and foreknows their maturity. She is the divine and nurturing motherhood, the God who gives the growth (I Cor. 3:7).

For [Solomon] knew that the first-born Wisdom of God, the bearer and artificer of all things, brings everything forth into the world. The ancients also called her nature and providence, because ever foreseeing and providing, she gives all things to be born and to grow. For "my Father works until now," says [Wisdom], "and I also work" (Jn. 5:17). Wherefore Solomon called her the artificer of all; as there is

⁵¹ *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, XV, 4; PG 3, col. 353A.

no poverty in God, but He is abundantly able to create, fashion, and adorn all things and give them growth.⁵²

Methodius likewise anticipates Fr. Bulgakov's vision of Wisdom as beauty and glory. In his *Convivium Virginum*, one of the maidens observes:

We have all come into this world, O virgins, endowed with singular beauty, which has a relationship and affinity to divine wisdom. For the souls of men do then most accurately resemble Him who begat and formed them, when, reflecting the unsullied representation of His likeness, and the features of that countenance, to which God looking formed them to have an immortal and indestructible shape, they remain such.⁵³

Divine Wisdom here fills the place of that "model" followed by Plato's demiurge in creation (*Timaeus*, 28-29). In this context, the congruence of natural and spiritual beauty finds its explanation in their common source and end.

St. Athanasius, on the other hand, draws a firm distinction between uncreated Wisdom, which signifies Christ, and that which the Lord "created as the beginning of His ways for His works" (Prov. 8:22). Because the Septuagint reading of ἐκτίσθαι (created) for ἐκτίσθαι (possessed) in that verse precludes its direct application to Christ, the defense against the Arians virtually compelled Athanasius to take this line. Thus the dichotomy "created/uncreated" prevails over the idea of participation in Wisdom. While the speaker in the wisdom literature is identified as Christ, He speaks not of Himself but of created wisdom, "as if" of Himself.

But if, as the Son of Sirach says, "He poured [Wisdom] out upon all His works; she is with all flesh according to His gift, and He hath given her to them that love Him" (Ecclus. 1:9-10), and this outpouring is a note, *not of the Essence of the Very Wisdom and Only-begotten*, but of that wisdom which is imaged in the world, how is it incredible that the All-framing and true Wisdom Itself, whose impress is the wisdom and knowledge poured out in the world, should say . . . as if of Itself, "The Lord created me

⁵² *De resurrectione mortuorum*, II, 9; ed. G. N. Bonwetsch, GCS 27 (1917), pp. 348-49.

⁵³ *Convivium virginum (Symposium)*, Discourse VI, 1; GCS 27, p. 64.

for His works"? For the wisdom in the world is *not creative*, but is that which is created in the works, according to which "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork." (Ps. 19:1; emphasis added)⁵⁴

The concept of Divine Wisdom, then, can lead either to a pantheist view of creation, or to the more discreet position here represented by Athanasius. Fr. Bulgakov clearly follows the first school of thought. In seeking an ontological ground for creation, however, he exceeds the bounds of orthodoxy by reducing the unity of God and the world to a unity of substance. Yet this apparent monism is but an untoward, perhaps even unintentional fruit of his attempt to base an entire theology on the mystery of Love. Characteristically, he defends his doctrine of the world, the identity of the divine and the creaturely Sophia, by attacking an alternative view of creation as unworthy of God.

By diminishing the significance of the world for God, reducing it to a mere contingency with no internal bond with God, we diminish the Godhead even as we desire to magnify it at the expense of the world; for we impoverish divine love, we transform it into an abstraction, and even blaspheme against it. For to love nothing is essential or contingent . . . and God loves the world with the same divine love by which He loves His Divinity. (I, 42)

Under formal scrutiny, Fr. Bulgakov's doctrine is indeed monistic; but in spirit, it is no more nor less than an endeavor to read the book of Genesis through the eyes of St. John.

Sophia and the Transfigured World

From the postulates of pan-entheism ("I am in the world and the world is in Me") and theosis ("God became man that man might become God"), Fr. Bulgakov arrives at "pan-entheosis," the bold eschatology which fulfills and in fact, underlies his teaching on creation. What we have called his cosmic optimism relegates the traditional scheme of salvation history—Creation, Fall, and Redemption—to the status of a subplot in the universal drama. We can do fuller justice to his approach by considering the Incarnation, together with the chief eschatological feasts (Ascension, Pentecost, and Assumption) under the single heading of the transfigured world: the

⁵⁴ *Oratio II contra Arianos*, 79; PG 26, col. 313.

reunion of the creaturely Sophia with the divine, "the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now made manifest" (Col. 1:26).

By the divine Sophia, we have said, Fr. Bulgakov understands the self-revelation of God the Father in the Logos and the Holy Spirit. Transfiguration, as he conceives it, is the same triune and everlasting act accomplished in creation. The world was created in the beginning, in Sophia, the divine essence divorced from the tri-hypostatic God and conjoined to the $\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\upsilon$, the realm of transition between void and Pleroma. It is transfigured in time by God's hypostatic presence, reclaiming His essence without prejudice to the creature's freedom. As He gave Himself by nature in the world's creation, for its transfiguration He gives Himself in person. By the mysteries of the economy, this end is fulfilled and the divine Sophia is revealed, not only as *ipostasnost*, but in its eternal hypostases united to human nature.

Such, for Fr. Bulgakov, is the primary sense of the Incarnation. He stresses the primordial and eschatological character of this act of love, as well as its redemptive nature. God did not become man because man fell, but created man that He might assume flesh. Rejecting the "felix culpa" theory, which makes the advent of Christ contingent on the sin of Adam, Fr. Bulgakov subsumes the redemption under the aegis of creation. Commenting on the Nicene Creed, he says that the Word became flesh first of all "for us men," that is, for our glorification (I Cor. 2:7), and only in the second place "for our salvation."

The Incarnation was accomplished in the totality of its meaning, as it had been eternally established in the counsel of God; but it was accomplished for the sake of fallen man.

In consequence of the fall, it appeared *above all* as the means of salvation and redemption, yet retaining all the fullness of its meaning, even beyond the redemption, for the latter by no means exhausts it. The *casus irrealis* here consists in admitting that God could have not been incarnate if man had not sinned. (I, 95-96)

Such a doctrine has been taught by various Eastern fathers, notably Sts. Maximus and Isaac the Syrian, and is also known in the West through Duns Scotus. In Fr. Bulgakov's system, the accent on "at-one-ment" as expressed in Colossians and Ephesians, rather than "atonement" in the sense of satisfaction for sin, is fully in keeping with his pan-entheistic outlook.

A second peculiar feature of his teaching on the Incarnate Word derives from his emphasis on the dyad of Logos and Pneuma. Every act of the divine economy, he insists, is at once dual and triune: the

Son does nothing without His Father's Spirit, and the Spirit reveals the Father's glory in the Son. Since the divine Sophia is fully manifest only in the Word and the Holy Spirit together, both these persons in their unity must enter this world for its redemption. At the Incarnation, the Word is made flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit; and conversely, at Pentecost the Comforter is sent from the Father by the prayer of the Son. But this epiphany does not occur without the co-operation of the creature. Redeemed humanity reflects the dyadic unity of the divine Sophia not in one, but in two perfect hypostases. They are the Logos and the Theotokos: the immortal Man inhumanized, and the mortal woman divinized.

If one considers the full breadth and power of this event, the Incarnation cannot be reduced to the mere birth of Christ, the incarnate Logos; it necessarily implies not only the incarnation, but the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Virgin Mary. We see the complete image of the Incarnation only in this double unity: the incarnate Christ, and Mary, His hypostatic humanity, the Virgin Mother of God, illumined by the Holy Spirit. (I, 128-29)

Only by virtue of being Pneumatophoros, the Spirit-bearer, can Mary become Theotokos, the God-bearer. As the Holy Spirit is the life and reality of the Word, our Lady in accepting the archangel's greeting is overshadowed by the hypostatic (yet not incarnate) presence of the Spirit, and so conceives the Logos in the flesh.

This is the first of the acts of union—the Creator's condescension for the creature's exaltation—by which the two faces of Sophia are reconciled and revealed as one. Christ, Who possesses the fullness of Divine Wisdom in His own person, assumes the fullness of human nature in its pure, sophianic state from His holy mother,⁵⁵ and so re-unites these two aspects of Sophia in Himself. Mary, on the other hand, also represents the Wisdom of God in a double, yet different sense. As Theotokos, she is the Bearer of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit: the divine Sophia, in both its hypostases, shines forth *through* her. Moreover, by this perfect transparency to God in body and spirit, Mary is the consummate image of the creaturely Sophia, which attains fulfillment *in* her.

She *is* created Wisdom, for she is creation glorified. In her is realized the purpose of creation, the complete penetra-

⁵⁵ This is not the Roman dogma of the immaculate conception. Following the Orthodox consensus, Fr. Bulgakov teaches that our Lady, although personally sinless, is mortal and thus shares in the inheritance of Adam (WG, 174).

tion of the creature by wisdom, the full accord of the created type with its Prototype, its entire accomplishment. . . . In her God is already all in all. (WG, 188)

Christ and Mary thus represent two complementary (though by no means equal) aspects of Sophia as Godmanhood, eternal and created theanthropy. The divine humility glorifies the creature, making her the Mother of God; but Mary's own humility ("Ecce ancilla Domini") magnifies the Lord. Such is the double revelation of Sophia, the Mother and the Son.

In this respect, however, the Incarnation is but the beginning of the End. The creaturely Sophia, which in our Lord and our Lady has become completely transparent to the divine, must be transfigured in its breadth as well as its depth. This is accomplished through the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, no longer on the Virgin alone but on "all flesh," and no longer in Her gifts only (which were present from the beginning), but in Her own hypostasis. Through this personal descent, the Holy Spirit fulfills the mission of Christ, revealing Him to those who have not seen Him in His abiding presence. But this work of the Spirit is more than a witness to the Christ Who came; it is a continual incarnation of the Christ to come. Just as the Mother of God conceived the Body of Christ through the power of His Spirit, so the Spirit-bearing community receives and becomes His Body. For this reason Mary, the first God-bearer, is the feminine head of the Church and the universal Mother. The humanity which Christ took from her and deified is "the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). In the Church, the Body of Christ vivified by the Holy Spirit, the whole of humanity and indeed, "heaven and earth" are filled with the manifold Wisdom of God. "The Church is the heart and essence of the world, its hidden final cause" (WG, 208), and Mary is the heart of the Church. Hence she is also revered as the Queen of Heaven: *regina caelorum, magistra angelorum*.

Pentecost, the birthday of the Church in the Holy Spirit, perpetuates the Incarnation, the birth of the Lord from the Virgin. These two feasts together commemorate the fullness of the divine condensation: not one but two persons of the Blessed Trinity have "come down from heaven." Conversely, the feasts of the Ascension and the Assumption represent the first-fruits of the transfigured world. They are not to be equated, of course; while the one marks the end of Christ's humiliation, the other displays the beginning of the creature's glorification. Yet each prefigures the destiny for which mankind was created and redeemed. In the Ascension Christ, having completed the course of His obedience "even unto death on a cross," trium-

phantly resumes His glory; redeemed human nature takes its seat at the right hand of the Father. In the Assumption Mary, after her life of perfect humility, receives the gift of immortality which her Son has bestowed on the human race. Thus "in the resurrection and assumption of our Lady the creation of the world may be said to be completed, and its end achieved: 'wisdom is justified of her children' (Mt. 11:19)" (WG, 180). The cycle of revelation, redemption, and reunion, which began with the descent of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation, is completed by the Assumption of the Mother into heaven. This in turn prefigures the full transfiguration which shall be accomplished at the Parousia, when the entire Church receives the glory that was first conferred on the Theotokos. In the meantime, "the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'"

Because the revelation of the divine Sophia is always dual, the second advent of Christ must also involve an epiphany of the Holy Spirit. At present, in spite of Her descent at Pentecost, the hypostasis of the Spirit remains hidden from us. With regard to this concealed presence, Fr. Bulgakov compares our half-knowledge to that of the Old Testament prophets who awaited the Messiah. Now we know in part, we experience the grace of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, "but then we shall see face to face." In a flight of audacious speculation, Fr. Bulgakov suggests that at the end of time the person of the Holy Spirit will be manifest in the face of the Virgin, and the "beauty of holiness" will transfigure the world. Meanwhile, "the image of the Most Pure and Most Blessed in her state of glory," i.e., her icon, already inspires us with the hope of this last revelation.

That image of an infinite sweetness, a humility, an immeasurable love and tenderness, which breathes forth "spiritual beauty," *the beauty of holiness, is invincible*. Before her, if she appeared to the world and became accessible to it, no man's heart would *persevere* in its hardness but would melt, and know itself transfigured by the fiery dart of love. "Beauty"—but the beauty of Holiness—will save the world. (II, 267; original emphasis)

Does this mean that Fr. Bulgakov teaches universal salvation? He does: Even the devil and his angels, when they beheld the divine Sophia made fully translucent in creation through the Mother of God, will remember the lost beauty of Paradise and repent.⁵⁶ Such a hope

⁵⁶ *Nevesta Agncha*, Addendum I; cited in Charles L. Graves, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Sergius Bulgakov*, diss. Basel (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1972), pp. 118-19, n. 3.

is justified by the assurance that evil has no ontological base on which to stand.

The freedom of the rebellious creature cannot stand out to the end against the divine Wisdom on the empty resources of its own nothingness. For in reality there is but one true existence, the divine. There is only the one God in his divine Wisdom, and outside him nothing whatever. What is not God is *nothing*. Yet he does not constrain freedom; he convinces it... (WG, 219)

Whatever the nature of this freedom, which Fr. Bulgakov defines as the "mode" rather than the "content" of life, universalism must follow from the sophianic view of creation. If God and the world are substantial, if the divine Sophia is the one foundation of the cosmos, it cannot possibly fail of its end. Thus the doctrine of "pan-entheosis" is sufficiently close to the *apokatastasis* taught by Origen, although the metaphysical setting and the form of expression differ. That idea was formally condemned at Constantinople in 553; but while rejected as positive dogma, it has never vanished from the horizon of Christian hope.

Apart from this, the most remarkable aspect of Fr. Bulgakov's teaching is his insistence on the double epiphany of Sophia in Christ and Mary, as expressed through the cycle of the Church year. This fertile vein opens the very interesting question of Hagia Sophia in Orthodox worship—the sphere of liturgy, iconography, hymnography, and church dedication. It is here especially, as Jaroslav Pelikan has observed,⁵⁷ that we will discover the importance of the Theotokos in the life of the Church. In seeking to determine how far the cult of our Lady is related to that of Sophia, we must consider the evidence of practice as well as dogmatics. But because of the ambiguous nature of that evidence, the question of a "sophianic cult" became a *cause célèbre* in the controversy surrounding Fr. Bulgakov. The difficulty is increased by the fact that in the Russian Church, while the early centuries produced no systematic theology, a rich liturgical growth overlaid (or as some might say, overwhelmed) the deposit of faith received from Byzantium. We can here mark a few of the key points in this development, as it relates to the cult of Sophia in the light of mariology.

⁵⁷ *Spirit of Eastern Christendom*, pp. 139-41.

Hagia Sophia, the House of Wisdom, and the Theotokos

From the third century onwards, the celebrated figure of the house of Wisdom (Prov. 9:1) was applied to the Body of Christ in the womb of Mary. Texts to this effect from St. Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, St. Athanasius and others have been assembled by John Meyendorff.⁵⁸ We may add a passage from Didymus, which succinctly expresses this classic exegesis of "Wisdom has built herself a house."

Concerning the same one of whom John said, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14), created wisdom says, "Wisdom has built herself a house, and set up her seven pillars" (Prov. 9:1). Of this house the Lord himself says: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn. 2:19).⁵⁹

St. Athanasius supplements the christological approach to the house of Wisdom with its application to the Church, the Body of Christ "whose house are we" (Heb. 3:6).⁶⁰ This double sense of incarnate Wisdom acquires a further meaning from the eucharistic figure of Prov. 9:5: "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine I have mixed." The entire passage encouraged elaborate allegories of Christ and the Church, and because of its dogmatic as well as pictorial qualities, became a favorite iconographic motif. "The image of Wisdom coming to dwell in an earthly house and inviting men to partake of her feast was thus understood as a *dynamic image of the Incarnation*, the house representing essentially the *receptacle* of that divine act: the flesh in general, the Virgin and, finally, the Church."⁶¹ Along these lines, Philip Sherrard suggests a further analogy between the Church as the Body of Christ and the church building as a type of Mary, "the material and animated house of the Logos."⁶²

When Justinian dedicated his new church of Hagia Sophia in 537, the meaning of its consecration was plain. This, the cathedral of the Only-Begotten Son and Word of God, was fittingly opened to

⁵⁸ "L'Iconographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la tradition byzantine," *Cahiers archéologiques*, 10 (1958), 259-77.

⁵⁹ *De Trinitate*, III, 3; PG 39, col. 812B.

⁶⁰ *Oratio IV contra Arianos*, 34; PG 39, col. 520B.

⁶¹ Meyendorff, "L'Iconographie," p. 261.

⁶² Philip Sherrard, *Constantinople: Iconography of a Sacred City* (Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 32.

the light on Christmas Day.⁶³ The Incarnation, however, could just as rightly be celebrated on the feast of the Annunciation; and it is with that event that the most famous of all Byzantine hymns is connected. The *Hymnos Akathistos* (now widely ascribed to Romanos, a contemporary of Justinian)⁶⁴ sings the praises of our Lady in tones that well befit the Church of the Holy Wisdom.

Hail, O Container of God's wisdom;
hail, O Treasury of His providence!
Hail, O reproof of foolish philosophers;
hail, O confusion of speechless wise men!
Hail, for you perplexed the inquisitive minds;
hail, for you dried up the inventors of myths
Hail, for you ripped the Athenians' meshes;
hail for you filled the Fishermen's nets!⁶⁵

In short, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world" (I Cor. 1:20) through His Wisdom incarnate by Mary? This rejection of the worldly-wise finds a positive corollary in the image of Mary, Mother of Light, "for having kindled the Immaterial Light, she leads men to the knowledge of God and fills their minds with radiance." The Blessed Virgin, Bearer of the Wisdom of God, merits this title herself as the human embodiment and bestower of wisdom—in effect, the "creaturally Sophia." A prayer of St. Sophronius of Jerusalem (fl. ca. 630) entreats her: "O Thou who alone gavest birth to the hypostatic Wisdom of God, make me wise, I beseech, that I may escape the snares, assaults and deceptions of the cunning worker of malice, O unwed Virgin Mother of God, strong refuge of the faithful."⁶⁶

Because Mary was the special defender of the Queen of Cities, and Hagia Sophia its central shrine, a certain identification between our Lady and the patron of the Great Church was almost inevitable. She was the protector of Church and Empire against all their foes, whether armies or heresies. In this latter aspect, Mary stood as the champion of Divine Wisdom against its blasphemers, and devotion to her was an assurance of victorious faith. After the triumph of Orthodoxy, the first mosaic to be unveiled in Hagia Sophia (867) was

⁶³ For the dedication see Paul the Silentary, *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae*, PG 86, col. 2119-58.

⁶⁴ Egon Wellesz, "The Akathistos," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 9-10 (1956), 143-74.

⁶⁵ *Der Hymnos Akathistos*, ed. Meersseman (Freiburg, 1958), Vol. I. The translation is from Joseph Raya and José de Vinck, *Byzantine Daily Worship* (Altleu Press, 1969).

⁶⁶ *Triodion*, PG 87, III, col. 3880A.

the image of the Virgin Hodegetria, "She Who Guides," in the half-dome above the sanctuary.⁶⁷ Shortly thereafter, over the imperial doors (the spot reserved for the image of the patron), was executed a mosaic of the emperor Leo VI the Wise in proskynesis before Christ, the enthroned Wisdom of God flanked by medallions of the Theotokos and the angel Gabriel. André Grabar has related this work to a homily of Leo VI on the Annunciation, seeing in it an image of the Virgin, the Church, and the Empire as related embodiments of the house of Wisdom.⁶⁸

The ambivalence (or as Fr. Bulgakov would say, "bi-unity") of the symbol of Sophia, applied both to Christ and to Mary, shifted toward the side of our Lady when the faith was transplanted to Russia. At the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev, constructed in 1037, the titular feast is observed on the date of the Nativity of Mary, not that of Christ. Somewhat later, at St. Sophia of Novgorod (1045) and other churches of that name, the date was transferred to the consummate Marian feast, the Assumption.⁶⁹ This apparently puzzling change, which finds one explanation in Fr. Bulgakov's sophianic interpretation of the Church year, runs parallel to a trend in Byzantine iconography. By the mid-twelfth century, artists had developed an iconic scheme in which the image of the Assumption (Κοίμησις) echoes that of the Nativity and thus underlines the relationship between these two feasts, the Alpha and Omega in the Christian cycle.

In the Nativity icon, the Virgin reclines in the hollow of a cave, surrounded by a swathe of fabric like a mandorla, beside her Child wrapped in swaddling clothes. Above, angels contemplate the star whose descending beam reveals the incarnate Word. The Koimesis icon combines this imagery with that of the Lamentation of Christ, suggesting a unity of spirit underlying all these events of the redemption. Here Mary lies on her deathbed, which resembles her childbed, mourned by the apostles. Behind the dying Virgin sits her resurrected Son holding a child in swaddling clothes—His Mother's spirit. Angels hover overhead, waiting to receive her into heaven. The similarity of these two icons, apparent at a glance, proclaims most strikingly that this death is also a birth: the epiphany which begins with the

⁶⁷ See Francis Dvornik, "The Patriarch Photius and Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 7 (1953), 82; and Cyril Mango and J. Hawkins, "The Apse Mosaics at St. Sophia in Istanbul," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 19 (1965), 115-48.

⁶⁸ André Grabar, *L'Iconoclisme byzantin: Dossier archéologique* (Paris, 1957), pp. 234-36.

⁶⁹ This date was not fixed until 1479, and provoked considerable controversy at the time. See Zenobius, "What is Sophia, the Wisdom of God?" (in Russian), ed. G. D. Filimonov (Moscow, 1876).

birth of Christ is completed in the death and transfiguration of Mary, the daughter of her Son. The Holy Spirit descending to earth and the human spirit ascending to heaven comprise two aspects of a single revelation. If we interpret the double feast of St. Sophia on December 25 and August 15 in the light of this iconographic link between Christmas and the Assumption, the dedication of St. Sophia at Novgorod no longer seems such a far cry from the Byzantine usage. There is a traditional basis for Fr. Bulgakov's dyadic conception of Sophia, reflected in the liturgical year.

With the symbolic icons of Sophia, current in Russia from the fifteenth century, we are on shakier ground. The existence of such icons⁷⁰ has been taken by Fr. Florensky and his school to indicate the presence of a sophianic cult in Russia, closely related to yet distinct from that of Christ and the Virgin.⁷¹ Iconographically, the images in question are diverse and often highly complex. We shall here discuss only two, which reflect very different tendencies in the depiction of Divine Wisdom. The first, reproduced by Fr. Meyendorff, is a classic illustration of Prov. 9:1-5. In the center stands a pulpit whence Solomon preaches the text, "Wisdom has built herself a house," and in the foreground below, her servants distribute the eucharistic feast. To their left, the figure of Sophia is seated in a medallion, proffering her chalice (Prov. 9:5). The meaning of this image is interpreted by a similar medallion above and to the right, in which a Virgin and Child are seated. Finally, the house of Wisdom (Body of Christ) is represented aloft as the Church, in the form of a domed building whose arcades house the fathers of the seven Councils. This image is reinforced by seven medallions above the temple, which enclose seven angels holding scrolls. In sum, the house of Wisdom is simultaneously depicted as the Child of Mary, the Eucharist, and the Orthodox Church. The clue to this iconography can be found in Cosmas of Maiouma's canon for Holy Thursday, which is inscribed on a scroll in its author's hands at the right side of the icon. "The Wisdom of God, cause of all things and creator of life, has built herself a house taken from a mother most pure."

The celebrated "Sophia of Novgorod," reproduced by Fr. Florensky and Th. Spasskij,⁷² departs from this narrative tradition and

⁷⁰ Reproduced in Meyendorff, "L'Iconographie"; Florensky, *La Colonne et le fondement de la vérité*; and Alexis van der Mensbrugghe, *From Dyad to Triad* (London: Faith Press, 1935).

⁷¹ For early, tentative evidence of such a cult, see the voyage of Archbishop Anthony of Novgorod to Constantinople in 1200, in *Itinéraires russes en Orient*, ed. and trans. Sofia Khitrovo (Geneva: Fick, 1889).

⁷² Th. Spasskij, "L'office liturgique slave de la 'Sagesse de Dieu,'" *Irénikon*, 30 (1957), 185.

depicts the Divine Wisdom in a purely symbolic manner. She is represented as an angel with a virginal face and wings of fire, crowned and clad in golden vestments, bearing a sceptre in her right hand and a closed scroll in her left. Her feet rest upon a rock, and around her throne is an aureole with seven rays. Above her the Christ Pantokrator (or God the Father?), encircled by an identical glory, extends both hands in benediction. On either side stand the praying figures of the Virgin and John the Baptist, in the fashion of a Byzantine deesis, except that the Virgin is holding her Child. The infant Christ radiates yet another type of the seven-pointed glory. Above the Pantokrator is shown the vault of heaven from which six angels point toward a central altar, whereon rest a Gospel book and instruments of the Passion.

This icon has been a subject of controversy almost from its first appearance. In the face of the mid-sixteenth century vogue for such new dogmatic images, the Muscovite Council of the Hundred Chapters (1551) sought to suppress these novelties and return to more ancient patterns, but without success. As to the meaning of the icon, its exceptional fusion of motifs has inspired diverse explanations. Fr. Florovsky gives one interpretation, current in the seventeenth century, according to which the three figures in identical aureoles represent Christ under three aspects: the Pantokrator, the Holy Child, and the Divine Wisdom (endowed with the royal crown, the priestly robe, and the prophetic scroll).⁷³ However, at about the same time, Prince Symeon Shachovskoi composed a liturgical office for St. Sophia of Novgorod, to which he affixed an allegorical reading of this icon as "the purity of the inexpressible virginity of the most holy Mother of God."⁷⁴ In the same document he recounts a Byzantine legend about the building of Hagia Sophia, telling how the guardian angel of that church appeared to a boy in the guise of a eunuch and revealed the divine name by which the temple should be called. All these images of Sophia—the Theotokos, the angel, and the eunuch—signify Virginity and, in their conjunction, recall the sophiology of Jacob Boehme. Fr. Florovsky relates such "ascetic-erotic" ideas to the influence of medieval German and Flemish engravings on our icon, and so finds it of doubtful orthodoxy. Archbishop Seraphim, in his condemnation of Fr. Bulgakov, cited this verdict and took the theologian's argument from iconography as a further proof of his heresy.⁷⁵

⁷³ "The Veneration of Sophia, the Wisdom of God in Byzantium and Russia" (in Russian, 1932); cited in Danzas, "Les Reminiscences gnostiques," p. 682.

⁷⁴ Spasskij, "L'office liturgique," p. 184.

⁷⁵ Danzas, p. 682.

Prince Symeon's liturgy of St. Sophia, which doubles as an office for the Assumption, is just as ambiguous. The office opens with Justinian's troparion, the *Μονογενής*, and celebrates both the Incarnation and the Dormition. In it the title "Wisdom of God which is called Sophia" is ascribed to both the Incarnate Word and the Theotokos, while its lections are the classic Marian texts, Gen. 28:10-17 (Jacob's ladder), Ezek. 43:27-44:4 (the closed gate of the temple), and Prov. 9:1-11 (the house of Wisdom). A great many of the sophianic themes here discussed—the Wisdom of God manifest in creation, in providence, in the Mother and the Son, in the Church—are evoked, together with legends of the Great Church and the icon of Sophia of Novgorod. The overall tone of the liturgy, eclectic and exultant, is epitomized in these troparia:

The Wisdom of God is well beloved, and She is the mystery of the economy for all men; there is nothing like Her under heaven. Let us keep Her as the apple of our eyes, and She will give us rest on the day of judgement.

God, Who ordered all things by His Word in His ineffable Wisdom, has in His generosity named Her *Sophia*, so that we might proclaim Her from the heights, and by Her might find grace and mercy on the day of judgement.⁷⁵

This liturgy, however, was not exactly proclaimed from the heights. Despite several redactions, it failed to win the approval of the hierarchy and never became part of the Typicon. Yet the office of St. Sophia continued to be celebrated on occasion at certain churches of Moscow and Novgorod. Both in its content and its history, it reflects the lively but non-canonical status of the Russian cult of Sophia.

Conclusions

In light of this review of the Orthodox tradition, where can we place Fr. Bulgakov's theology of the Divine Wisdom and Godmanhood? Clearly, he does not stand in the mainstream of patristic thought; and certain points of his doctrine (the identification of Sophia with the divine essence; the quasi-monistic view of creation; the idea of pan-en-theosis) are indeed heterodox. However, the charge of gnosticism pressed by some of his critics appears hasty and unfounded, and on the whole, "heresy" is too harsh a word for his bold, but frankly speculative and pioneering theological system. On the positive

⁷⁵ Spasskij, p. 186.

side, he has rediscovered many forgotten insights of the Fathers, and shows a real affinity for the Orthodox spirit as expressed, albeit obscurely, in the dedication of churches and the forms of popular devotion. His theology, read as a whole and not in isolated excerpts, displays an unmistakable reverence and love for Christ and His Church, together with a fresh and provocative approach to the classic problems of dogmatics. It is most unfortunate that the events of 1935, compounded by the neglect of his Anglican colleagues, have left his work almost totally unknown to the English-speaking world. In future years, we may hope that the revelation epitomized by the dome of Hagia Sophia will again receive the attention it deserves.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ One hopeful sign is the recent publication of *A Bulgakov Anthology*, ed. James Pain and Nicholas Zernov (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).