The Soul of The Human Race:
The Mother of God In The Theology of Sergius Bulgakov

by

Walter Nunzio Sisto

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of the Mother of God in Sergius Bulgakov’s Sophiology. It places Bulgakov’s Mariology within the contexts of the Russian Religious Renaissance and Russian Sophiology. With respect to Russian Sophiology, Bulgakov systematically develops the insights on Mary proffered by Vladimir Solov’ev and Pavel Florensky. I demonstrate that his The Burning Bush (1926) should be seen as the fullest development of Sophianic Mariology initiated by Solov’ev. The influence of the Russian Religious Renaissance is evident in his emphasis on sexuality. Bulgakov incorporates the popular theory from this movement that each person consists of a “spiritual bisexuality” into his Mariology. Like many of his peers, Bulgakov was an essentialist who interprets the human experience in terms of sexuality. Within this anthropological vision, Mary has a unique importance because she is the fullest manifestation of the feminine potential in humankind. I argue that the pneumatological context of his Mariology reveals the liberating and inclusive role of the feminine. Mary reveals the vocation of Christian disciples to become “Spirit-Bearers” or “Divine Mothers,” to give birth to Christ in all their thoughts, words, and actions that entail a creative engagement with the world. We are all called to be prophets like Mary. Given Bulgakov’s essentialism, this means that discipleship entails the actualization of our femininity. This actualization involves our adoption into the life and mission of the Holy Spirit, Who is the archetype for our feminine potential. The result is an anthropologically-centered vision of Mary that places Mary firmly within the human race. Mary is the fullest expression of Sophia from the perspective of humankind. This study ends with a critical evaluation of Bulgakov’s thought from the feminist and Neo-Patristic perspectives.
Abbreviations


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Introduction

The past two decades may be described as a Bulgakov renaissance. Sergius Bulgakov’s works are now available in various translations and the number of studies and articles written on his thought is growing. However, with a few exceptions, no one has yet examined the role of Mary in Bulgakov’s thought in detail. 1 Since Bulgakov’s death in 1944, there has only been one short study published on his Mariology, Divina Maternitas Mariae in Sergio Bulgakov (1953) by A. Legisa. Nearly sixty years since Legisa’s work, 2 only three studies have been published on this topic by Andrew Louth, Robert Slesinski, and Bernard Schultze. Aidan Nichols’ chapter on Mary in his Wisdom from Above and sections from Charles Graves’ dissertation, “The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Sergius Bulgakov,” should also be added to this list. The lack of attention to Mary in Bulgakov’s thought by scholars is alarming given the importance of the Mother of God to Bulgakov. As Lev Zander noted, Mary is “the alpha and the omega of his entire religious understanding and perception of the world.” 3 Within his Sophiological corpus, his reflections on Sophia begin and end with Mary: Mary is the subject of his first major

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1 Rowan Williams observed in his book, Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology, that no secondary source has yet adequately treated Sergius Bulgakov’s Mariology. (Rowan Williams, “General Introduction” in Sergius Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology, pp. 1-19, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 19.) Since Williams made this observation, Bulgakov’s Mariology has received little attention from scholars.


theological reflection on Sophia, *The Burning Bush* (1926), as well as the subject of his final reflection on Sophia in his *The Bride of the Lamb* (1946). His reflections on Mary are not limited to these works, as she permeates his Sophiology. Mary’s centrality in his thought follows from Bulgakov’s Russian theological tradition that links Mary to Sophia in liturgical worship and popular devotion. Consequently Bulgakov’s Sophiology, which is his attempt to explain Russian Orthodox devotion to Sophia, is also an attempt to explain Russian Orthodox devotion to Mary. Mariology is an integral facet of his Sophiology. Bulgakov theologizes what is already present in the worship and devotion of his Christian tradition.

Moreover, his Mariology is not limited to his Sophiology, as Mary is the subject of various articles written throughout his theological period (1925-1944) and even a prominent figure within his ecumenical work. Bulgakov was singlehandedly responsible for bringing Mary to the forefront of the *Faith and Order* dialogue. He was insistent that the veneration of Mary “is the central, though hidden nerve of the whole movement towards reconciliation among the divided confessions.” Only a clear understanding of the role of Mary in salvation history can guarantee proper consideration of the hypostatic union. In particular, the dogma of the Theotokos, properly understood, guards against *de facto* heretical conceptions of Christ, e.g. Nestorianism or Monophysitism. Only after this has been established can authentic dialogue between divided churches begin. Agreement on Mary will entail the agreement in thought and expression on the most important dogma of our faith, the Incarnation.

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4 The link between Mary and Sophia is a notable departure from the earlier Greek tradition that linked Christ to Sophia. This shift can be traced to the cathedrals in Kiev and Novgorod that are dedicated to Sophia, but have Marian titular feasts. (Donald M. Fiene, “What is the Appearance of Divine Sophia?,” *Slavic Review* 48 (1989): pp. 449-476, p. 452.)

Given the renewal of interest in Mary, especially within the contemporary ecumenical movement, my study is timely as Bulgakov provides not only a Mariology from an Orthodox perspective, but one that is ecumenically sensitive and relevant. For Bulgakov Mary is the pneumatophoric hypostasis: she is the Holy Spirit’s creaturely hypostatic vessel; through Mary the Holy Spirit acts in the world. I will demonstrate that Bulgakov’s pneumatological interpretation of Mary not only allows him to retain the hyperdulia that the Orthodox Church gives to Mary, but also to place Mary squarely within the Church. Though he presents an idealized image of Mary, Mary is always connected to the human race and reveals the vocation of every Christian. Yet Mary is not the Redeemer, but rather the first member of the redeemed community who completes “what is lacking in regards to Christ’s afflictions.” (Col 1:24)

Bulgakov’s Mariology, to use the term proffered by the recent ecumenical statement Mary: Grace and Hope by ARCIC, is an “anticipated eschatology.” She is the penultimate expression of human activity under the influence of grace. She is a model for the disciples of Christ to follow, for she reveals what discipleship entails both on earth and in heaven. Mary is a prophetess who inspires us to challenge the status quo and act creatively, which for Bulgakov means to become a Spirit-Bearer or Divine Mother, to unite with the Holy Spirit in its mission to give birth to Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Given his essentialism, Mary reveals that discipleship involves the embrace of our feminine potential. As “the soul of the human race”

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6 The ecumenical movement recently bore witness to important agreed statements on Mary including the US Lutheran-Catholic statement, The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary (1990) and the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission statement, Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ (2005). Although the Orthodox churches have not participated in any dialogue on Mary, she has been addressed in joint ecumenical statements published by the Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue. (Cf. The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984)

Mary is not only our advocate and intercessor before God, but also she is intimately close to each
human being and inspires them to follow the Gospel.

My study of his Mariology that will be limited primarily to his minor and major trilogy
provides the context, central tenets of Bulgakov’s Mariology, and critical evaluation of his ideas.
It is divided into six main chapters. Bearing in mind that the focus of this dissertation is the
Mariology developed by Sergius Bulgakov, Chapters One and Two presents salient features of
his biography and the intellectual and spiritual currents that, in my estimation, shaped his
thinking about the Mother of God. To that end, Chapter One provides a biographical sketch of
Bulgakov. Especially noteworthy are his participation in the Russian Religious Renaissance and
the ensuing discussion about sexuality and his religious experience at Dresden. Chapter Two
examines the Mariology of Vladimir Solov’ev and Pavel Florensky, both of whom were
instrumental in the formation of Bulgakov’s perspective on Mary. Chapter Three focuses on
Bulgakov’s Sophiology and theological methodology. This chapter also begins my discussion of
his Mariology as it explores the context of his Mariology, the methods he employs, and
important liturgical and scripture texts he uses. Chapter Four examines Bulgakov’s anthropology
and doctrines of sin and grace. It is a preliminary chapter that provides the necessary background
for comprehending many themes that I discuss in Chapter Five. The fourth chapter focuses on his
usage of the sexual binary in his elucidation of the image of God, his Trinitarian understanding
of humankind, and the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation history. This chapter also introduces
Mary’s role in the human race, her relationship to the Holy Spirit, and her sinlessness. Chapter
Five elucidates the tenets of his Mariology. This is the largest chapter of my dissertation, which
is divided into four subsections on Bulgakov’s Mariology and discusses these themes:
Bulgakov’s Mariology in the context of his polemic with Catholic Mariology, Mary’s life on
earth, Mary’s role in the afterlife, and finally, Mary’s role in discipleship. Chapter Six offers a
critical evaluation of Bulgakov’s Mariology, specifically the reception of his thought within the Russian émigré community in Paris and among feminist theologians. I examine the reception of his Mariology by Vladimir Lossky and Georges Florovsky, who represent the neo-patristic school, and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, who represents the feminist school. To provide a thorough evaluation of his thought I also examine John Maximovitch and Elizabeth Johnson, who are not members of the émigré community. Their ideas and methods will supplement the critiques made by the émigré theologians. Chapter Seven concludes my study.

My study primarily examines Bulgakov’s six books on Sophiology: the minor trilogy, *The Burning Bush* (1926), *The Friend of the Bridegroom* (1927), *Jacob’s Ladder* (1929), and the major trilogy, *The Lamb of God* (1933), *The Comforter* (1936), *The Bride of Lamb* (1946). My examination of Bulgakov’s Mariology employs these three methods of analysis: biographical analysis, textual analysis, and feminist theory. I use biographical analysis in Chapters One and Two because this interpretive method introduces Bulgakov and reveals the external motivations that influenced his Mariology. Textual analysis is the main method I use in this dissertation as it allows me to accurately portray Bulgakov’s teaching on Mary, since I closely examine what he says about Mary and address the pneumatological implications of these statements. The main texts I analyze are his Mariological work, *The Burning Bush* and his pneumatological work, *The Comforter*.

Given the importance of feminism in contemporary theology and the central role the sexual binary and his typology of women play in his Mariology, feminist theory must be applied to Bulgakov’s thought to determine if his Mariology meets contemporary standards of theology, and if his theology is relevant today. I evaluate his thought primarily through the methods and
criticisms proffered by Elizabeth Johnson in her book, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*. 
Chapter One: Early Life and Theological Genesis

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will be divided into three sections. Section one will briefly detail pertinent aspects of Bulgakov’s life. Sections two and three will discuss important events/movements that shaped his Mariology. Section two will focus on his religious experiences involving the Mother of God. Section three will address the role of the Russian Religious Renaissance in the development of Bulgakov’s anthropology that is an important tenet of his Mariology.

1.2 Section One: Background

Sergius Bulgakov was born in Livny in the Orel province of Russia in 1871. Following in the levitical tradition of his family, which stretched back at least six generations, at the age of fourteen Bulgakov entered the seminary. His zeal for his vocation quickly faded as his teachers were unable to answer his questions. He broke from the Church at the age of sixteen and enrolled in a secular gymnasium. During this thirteen-year hiatus from his ancestral faith, Bulgakov flirted with nihilism, and even at times, suicide. In 1890, he entered Moscow University. Though initially attracted to philology, philosophy, and literature, he felt compelled to pursue a field of study that would help his fellow Russians, “to save his fatherland from

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10 Ibid., p. 103.

11 Ibid., p. 103.
imperial tyranny,” and therefore pursued economics. Bulgakov followed many like-minded Russians and became an avowed Marxist.

However, from 1898 to 1900 during the preparation of his dissertation that was intended to test the universal application of Marx’s theory of capitalist societies, he became disenchanted, discovering that Marx’s universal pretensions about capitalist societies based on the English economy were unfounded. This led Bulgakov to embrace idealism, especially the idealism of Solov’ev and slavophilism.

Although Solov’ev remained an important influence in Bulgakov’s transition from atheistic Marxism to Religious philosophy, it was not until the death of his four-year-old son Ivan and subsequent religious experience that prompted Bulgakov to embrace Solov’ev’s Sophiology. Afterwards, Bulgakov engaged Solov’ev “with his entire being,” using Solov’ev as a scaffolding for his own work. Bulgakov continues the task set out by Solov’ev, to

12 Ibid., pp. 104-105. This is my translation.
13 Later in life Bulgakov described himself as a “theologian of Marxism.” This entailed the defense of three dogmas: 1) man is an accidental conjunction of material atoms; 2) man is a species of monkey, and his ideas are a reflex of economic life; 3) man is led not by personal but by class desire. (Sergius Bulgakov, “From Marxism to Sophiology,” (Review in Religion 1.4 (1937): pp. 361-368), p. 362.)
14 Evtuhov, p. 33-34.
15 The Slavophile movement, though always comprised of a minority of Russian intellectuals, persisted throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. (Evtuhov, p. 7.)
17 Bulgakov, UF, pp. 14-16.
18 Evtuhov, pp. 138-139.
understand God’s relationship to the world and what that entails, i.e. Godhumanhood. Bulgakov appropriates many of Solov’ev’s ideas, including the role of the Mother of God, into his Sophiology.

The influence of Solov’ev is clearly seen in his next major work, *The Philosophy of Economy* [1911]. There Bulgakov applies Solov’ev’s insights to the field of economics, authoring a unique religious interpretation of the subject. Bulgakov’s elaboration of Solov’ev’s ideas continues in *Unfading Light* [1917]. Oddly, *Unfading Light* was Bulgakov’s final word on Sophia for nearly eight years. This gap in his Sophiological and Mariological thought is attributed to the events surrounding the Bolshevik Revolution. Still, the period from 1918 to 1925 was important for his theological development. When he resumed publishing on Sophia, in a 1925 essay entitled “Ipostas’ i ipostasnost’,” his Sophiology, purged of erotic and Gnostic tendencies, becomes even much more rooted in the Orthodox tradition.

His silence on Sophia between 1918 and 1925 corresponds with his flirtation with Catholicism. In Bulgakov’s *From the Memories of the Heart*, he recounts that his “Catholic hypnosis” lasted from 1918 to 1923. Myroslaw Tataryn explains Bulgakov’s hypnosis as

19 The first Russian scholar to treat Godhumanhood as a central idea was Solov’ev. (Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theologians: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov* [MTR], (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), p. 144.) Note that I have opted for a gender inclusive translation of *Bogochelovechestvo.*

20 Cf. Evtuhov, p. 168


premised upon the lack of a viable structure for authority, and not doctrinal difference in Russian Orthodoxy. However, for my study it is important to note that this period was formative for Bulgakov’s theological period (1925-1944). During this time, as T. Allan Smith notes, Bulgakov was preoccupied by Catholic theology, culture, and Church union. Bulgakov was in close contact with Catholics and read Catholic theology voraciously.

Nevertheless, after his exile from Crimea by the Soviet authorities at the end of 1922, Bulgakov’s “hypnosis” begins to dissipate due to his personal struggles as well as his disgust with the under-handed methods of proselytism used by Catholics to convert Orthodox Christians. His religious experience at the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople where “St. Sophia was revealed to my mind as something absolute, self-evident, and irrefutable” finalized his break with Catholicism. Bulgakov’s renewed love for Sophia coincides with his renewed love for his Orthodox faith. He concludes that Sophia and not the Pope could bring about reform and unity, for “[w]isdom is for everyone; she is not national or local, but the universal Church: all people are called under her cupola.” The manifestation of the universal Church was now the Orthodox Church.


Diary entry of January 22, 1923 cited in Tataryn, p. 155.
Given the facts of Bulgakov’s hypnosis, rejection of Catholicism, and his residence in a Catholic country—in 1925 Bulgakov was invited by Metropolitan Evlogy to be a professor of dogmatics and Dean of St. Sergius Institute, a new school in Paris. He remained in Paris until his death in 1944—Bulgakov’s theological publications set out to define Orthodoxy in contrast to Catholicism. The first three publications in Paris polemically engage the Catholic teachings on authority, Mary, and St. Joseph. Bulgakov criticizes Catholic authority in his essay *St. Peter and St John* (1926), Catholic Mariology in *The Burning Bush* (1926), and Catholic devotion to St. Joseph in *The Friend of the Bridegroom* (1927). The next decade will be extremely fruitful for Bulgakov. He authors a major trilogy on Godhumanhood consisting of these books: *The Lamb of God* [1933], *The Comforter* [1936], and the *Bride of the Lamb* [1945]. In these works he continues to engage Catholic teaching in polemics.

In addition to authoring these books and numerous articles, Bulgakov became involved in the ecumenical movement. He participated in the Anglican-Orthodox ecumenical movement and was a founding member and a regular contributor to the *Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius*, later known as *Sobornost*; the journal that was a product of this relationship. During this period, Bulgakov was a leading figure in Orthodoxy’s involvement in ecumenism at the international level; this is evident in his participation in the first two meetings of the *Faith and Order Commission* at Lausanne (1927) and Edinburgh (1937). At both meetings, Bulgakov

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29 Bulgakov’s target here is the Primacy of Peter as understood by Catholic theologians “as the fullness of all the offices—high priestly, the royal, and the prophetic.” (Bulgakov, “St. Peter and St. John” in *A Bulgakov Anthology*, pp. 79-85, p. 84, 80. This essay was recently translated into French in 2010 by YMCA Press under the title *Les deux saints premiers Apôtres Pierre et Jean*.)


31 Bulgakov finished this work in 1939. However due to World War II it was not published until 1945.
made his controversial plea that unity could only be accomplished if the Protestant Churches embraced the Mother of God.\textsuperscript{32}

Although he gained much acclaim in Paris for his holiness, ecumenical work, and Sophiology, his thought was not well-received around the Orthodox world. After the publication of his book, \textit{The Lamb of God}, he was accused of theological error by the Metropolitan of Moscow, Sergius (Stragorodsky), in 1935 and asked to recant his position.\textsuperscript{33} The synod of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) also joined in this condemnation. Letters and statements from the archives of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius disseminated during this period to members of the fellowship reveal that there was suspicion about Metropolitan Sergius’ motivations.\textsuperscript{34} Evlogy set up his own investigation of Bulgakov’s orthodoxy, which reached a preliminary conclusion that his thought was free from heresy.\textsuperscript{35} However, an official conclusion was never reached. Evlogy nevertheless supported Bulgakov’s project to bring Orthodoxy into dialogue with the modern world.\textsuperscript{36} Unfortunately, charges of heresy by the patriarchate of Moscow and ROCOR left Bulgakov’s name irreparably damaged. Moreover, the growing interest in the neo-patristic movement lead by his adversaries Vladimir

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{33} Valliere, MTR, p. 287.
\textsuperscript{34} Cf. Dobbie-Bateman, A. F. \textit{Confidential Note for the Executive}, 21 October 1933, Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius Archives, Oxford UK. The members of the fellowship suspected that the Soviet authorities were behind Met. Sergius’ condemnation of Bulgakov’s thought. Bishop Evlogy, Bulgakov’s bishop, left communion with Met. Sergius in 1930 because he refused to acquiesce to Met. Sergius request to recognize the legitimacy of the Soviet government.
\textsuperscript{36} Valliere, MRT, p. 288.
\end{flushright}
Lossky and Georges Florovsky, who rejected Sophiology, meant that with the exception of a few friends and students in the émigré community, in particular Lev Zander and Nicholas Zernov, after Bulgakov’s death, his thought and legacy was left to obscurity.

Nevertheless, Bulgakov was a prolific theologian who continued to write and publish until his death. His remarkable life came to a fitting end in 1944 when witnesses reported that before his death the glory of God radiated from him. He manifested the glory of Sophia/God that he often referred to as a phenomenon associated with a particular spirit-bearing saint, St. Seraphim of Sarov. Bulgakov, who dedicated a large amount of his efforts to theologizing about the spirit-bearer, the Mother of God, and spirit-bearing, which means to be incorporated by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, bears the Holy Spirit at his death. Only in recent times has Bulgakov been rediscovered by the broader theological community. Brandon Gallaher cautions that this renewed interest in Bulgakov is largely a western, i.e. non-Orthodox, phenomenon. However, there are promising signs that Bulgakov is being rediscovered by the Orthodox Church. For instance, Bishop Hilarion, a member of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Moscow, has mentioned the necessity of rediscovering the insights of Bulgakov.

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38 Brandon Gallaher, “There is Freedom: The Dialectic of Freedom and Necessity in the Trinitarian Theologies of Sergii Bulgakov, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar,” (PhD diss., Oxford University, 2010), p. 45. This statement needs some nuancing since in Russia Bulgakov’s theological thought has been the subject of several important studies. (Cf. N.A. Vaganova, *Sofiologia protoierea Sergiya Bulgakova*, Moscow: PSTGU, 2010.)


40 These remarks by Bishop Hilarion were made at the beginning of the conference in Moscow, March 2001. It is cited in Arjakovsky, “The Sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov,” p. 222.
1.3 Section Two: Religious Experience and the Madonna

Evtuhov correctly observed that Bulgakov’s shifts in ideological and religious orientation are presaged by a transcendental experience.\(^{41}\) Bulgakov’s rejection of Marxism was no exception. His religious experience on the steppes near the Caucasus Mountains and his encounter with Raphael’s Madonna prefaced his “broken faith” in Marxism.\(^{42}\) For this study, it is important to note Bulgakov’s encounter with Raphael’s Madonna in 1898, as it involves his experience with the Mother of God and was formative in his Mariology.\(^{43}\)

During the preparation of his dissertation, Bulgakov traveled through Europe with his wife. For pleasure he visited the Zwinger gallery in Dresden, Germany. There he encountered Raphael’s Sistine Madonna for the first time. He recounts that after looking into the eyes of the Madonna, he experienced the depth of her purity and conscious self-sacrifice that led him to tears of joy and prayer.\(^{44}\) Note that at this time Bulgakov was still an avowed Marxist. Nevertheless, the visage of Mary causes Bulgakov to experience compunction for his sin—this experience directly parallels his description of the function of the Mother of God at the Last Judgment.\(^{45}\)

\(^{41}\) Evtuhov, p. 45.

\(^{42}\) Bulgakov, UF, p. 10.

\(^{43}\) T. Allan Smith writes that this encounter left “a deep imprint on his soul.” (Smith, “Introduction” in The Burning Bush, p. xiii.)


\(^{45}\) Much attention has been paid to the significance of Bulgakov’s “return” to Orthodoxy, but little attention has been given to his departure from Orthodoxy. Note when Bulgakov returns to Orthodoxy the Church that he returns to is a Church in transition. It is a Church that will eventually establish a new council that will restore the patriarch
Bulgakov is quick to note, however, that his experience was “not an aesthetic emotion, no; it was an encounter, new knowledge, a miracle…I was still a Marxist then and I involuntarily called this contemplation a prayer.”\textsuperscript{46} The Mother of God leads Bulgakov for the first time in many years to pray.\textsuperscript{47} This encounter was so influential that in 1924, nearly twenty-six years later, Bulgakov made a special trip to Dresden to see the Sistine Madonna, hoping that Mary would again reveal herself to him. The maturity in his theological thought from 1898 to 1924 is evident in his different response to this image upon seeing it again. Having only recently rejected Catholicism, Bulgakov is appalled by Raphael’s image that for him represented pictorially what was wrong with Western Catholic theology. Whereas his first experience elicited fascination and enthusiasm that is indicative of his fascination with the West, his second experience points to his disenchantment with the West and embrace of Russian Orthodoxy. Now an established Orthodox priest and theologian, Bulgakov accuses Raphael of heresy; he calls the Sistine Madonna “artistic Arianism – a heretical overestimation of the human element in the divine incarnation.”\textsuperscript{48} Raphael’s depiction of the Mother of God presents an overly sensual approach to the deified

\textsuperscript{46} Bulgakov, UF, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 21.
Mother of God,⁴⁹ which is indicative of Western anthropomorphization of God and heaven.⁵⁰ A survey of Bulgakov’s theological thought from 1926 until 1944 reveals that Bulgakov rejects Catholicism precisely on account of this observation. This criticism is evident in Bulgakov’s *The Burning Bush* that he began writing soon after this second visit to Dresden. Bulgakov criticizes the Catholic Mariology for imputing an arbitrary notion of activity to God.⁵¹ God in this account is not an eternal being, but rather a time-contingent, juridical person who acts arbitrarily, exempting Mary from the original sin.

S.S. Averintsev argues that Bulgakov’s rejection of Raphael’s Madonna reveals his new-found insights about art and predilection for iconography. Accordingly, true art corresponds to the heavenly prototype and reminds us of the status of the person that it represents.⁵² Bulgakov describes true art as a depiction that “penetrates into the world’s heavenly fatherland”⁵³ and “contain[s] within themselves the rays of truth of things, their ideas.”⁵⁴ Art is a sacerdotal subject, and the artist has a religious vocation to depict through his/her subjectivity the world of images in the mind of God. In his essay, *Icons and Iconstasis* [1931],⁵⁵ Bulgakov writes that the

⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 225.
⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 225.
⁵⁵ In this work Bulgakov insists that it fails to be an icon because it solely depicts the historical Mary.
task of “art lies not in the real but in the ideal domain.” The goal of art is to reveal the meaning of a thing as opposed to the being of a thing, the thing in reality. Depictions like Raphael’s Madonna that portray the historical Mary are merely pictures and not art, since it is enslaved to matter. Not only does the image fail to portray the Mother of God as She is in the “heavenly fatherland,” but the Mary portrayed is not Miriam of Nazareth but rather Raphael’s Mary that bespeaks of his puerile prejudice and arbitrariness. To objectively recover the historical Mary for artistic depiction is impossible. Playing on the imagery of truth as glory manifested as light, Bulgakov insists that this Madonna is not the light of Orthodoxy but “phosphorescent decay.” Mary the Theotokos, the Spirit-Bearer, Ever-Virgin, who constantly intercedes for humankind, cannot be divorced from the Mary of faith. Interestingly, Bulgakov’s rejection of historical or merely human representations of Mary in art transfers to his theology. His Mariological works are concerned with the Mary of faith, i.e. Mary as she exists in heaven. He makes no attempt at recovering the historical Mary because not only are objective historical representations impossible, but his objective is to better understand the Mother of God whom he encountered at Dresden in 1898 and daily in the liturgical life of the Orthodox faith tradition.

1.4 Section Three: Sexuality and the Russian Religious Renaissance

Bulgakov’s rejection of Raphael’s sensual depiction of Mary was not merely a result of his conservatism associated with Orthodox sexual ethics, but also corresponds to his movement away from erotic Sophia and interest in sexuality that preoccupied his attention earlier in his


57 Bulgakov argues that mirror-reflections of a person or thing are not possible since art always involves the subjectivity of the artist. (Ibid., Ch. 3, Sec. 3, Location 594 of 2657.)

58 Bulgakov, Sous les Remparts de Chersonèse, p. 16.
career. As Kozyrev recently revealed in his publication of Bulgakov’s notes and articles on sexuality, “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe v Bozhestve [Male and Female in the Godhead]” and “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe [Male and Female],” sexuality was an important issue for Bulgakov, especially in the early 1920s. Although Bulgakov downplays erotic elements in his thought on sexuality in his theological works, the role he attributes to gender and his reflection on gender in his mature theological works are directly appropriated from the discussions and popular publications during the first two decades of the twentieth-century that is known as the Russian Religious Renaissance. In particular, Bulgakov’s gender essentialism and ideas on spiritual bisexuality, which play an important role in his anthropology—and for my study offer important implications for his Mariology—share much in common with theories of gender/sexuality that were popular in the Russian Religious Renaissance. There is little doubt that Bulgakov’s emphasis on sexuality, which is not a characteristic of patristic or Orthodox theology, was influenced by the Russian Religious Renaissance.60

Bulgakov’s interest in sex and ideas about human bisexuality shares affinities with popular discussions about sex during the Russian Religious Renaissance. Recent studies by Olga Matich,61 Evgenii Bershstein, and Kristi Goberg62 reveal the widespread fascination with sex and


60 The Russian Religious Renaissance is an important movement within the broader cultural period known as the Silver Age. The time frame usually associated with this is the late 1890s to the end of the Russian Civil War in 1921. Note that Nicholas Zernov was the first to define “The Russian Religious Renaissance” as such. (See his book: Nicholas Zernov, The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century, New York: Harper and Row, 1963.)

gender among the prominent Russian thinkers in this period. One of the most popular theories during this period was the idea that humankind was androgynous or bisexual.\textsuperscript{63} Human androgyny was viewed in both an ontological and psychological/pathological context. The popularity of this doctrine in Russia was undoubtedly due to Solov’ev and his \textit{The Meaning of Love} but also the emerging field of sexual psychopathology. Their language about sex will seem outmoded if not antiquated to a modern reader, since it functions within the male-female binary and gives little emphasis to the context in which sexuality is expressed. For Bulgakov and his peers, this idea was not considered eccentric but rather a valid perspective to be taken seriously. Several scholarly studies published during this time period gave credence to this perspective including Otto Weininger’s book, \textit{Sex and Character},\textsuperscript{64} which provided an extensive study of sexuality and argued for universal bisexuality. Bershtein argues that “popular mania” surrounded this book in Russia so much so that it was considered to be required reading among the intelligentsia.\textsuperscript{65} Preempting the conclusions of the controversial Kinsey report by almost fifty years, Weininger argued against complete sexual differentiation because all people remain

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\textsuperscript{65} Bershtein, p. 212.
bisexual to an extent. Weininger joined a cadre of voices in Europe espousing some form of androgyny. The most notable and influential figures who advocated this theory were Sigmund Freud and Karl Jung. While Freud believed the innate bisexuality needed to be cured, his student and later adversary Karl Jung took a mythical approach to bisexuality that treated bisexuality as the archetypical element in human psychology. Olga Matich summarized Jung’s position as follows:

His *animal animus* theory posits androgyny as the basis of well adjusted behavior. The *anima*, or the unconscious female side of a man, and the *animus*, the male counterpart in a woman, must be integrated into the Self for the person to become an emotionally balanced and effective adult. Without the integration of the contra sexual opposite, there is discord and neurosis.

For Jung, proper psychological development entails the embrace of our bisexuality in a balanced manner. It should not be surprising that given the proliferation of bisexual theories among popular German scholars, whose works were available in Russian translation, many important Russian thinkers with whom Bulgakov was intimately associated adhered to one form of androgyny or another. Besides Vladimir Solov’ev, Bulgakov’s closest associates, including Pavel Florensky, Bulgakov’s best friend and mentor, Nicholas Berdiaev, Andrei Bely, Dmitrii Merezhkovsky, Zinaida Gippius, Fedor Sologub, and Vasilii Vasil’evich Rozanov all embraced an androgynous/bisexual understanding of humankind.

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66 Ibid., p. 213.
68 Florensky is an important figure in the genesis of Bulgakov’s thought because Bulgakov expands upon many of his ideas. (Avril Pyman, *Pavel Florensky: A Quiet Genius*, (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 71.)
Nevertheless, Bulgakov does not employ the human androgyny in any meaningful way until 1917 when he published his *Unfading Light*. One exception was a letter he wrote to Rozanov in 1912. Bulgakov praises Rozanov for his new book, *People of the Moonlight*, which proposes the innate bisexuality of men and women, but criticizes Rozanov for equating sex with sexuality. In *The Burning Bush*, Bulgakov returns to this criticism in the context of explicating his doctrine of the Mother of God that stresses that Mary has sex but no sexuality, for sex is a function of spiritual nature, while sexuality is our expression of this nature that is tainted by original sin.

Finding the source for Bulgakov’s bisexual treatment is dubious since not only was it popular among his peers, academia, and taught by Solov’ev, but also evinced by various authors Bulgakov read including Jacob Boehme and Miester Eckhart. Nevertheless, the issue of sexuality after 1917 was a serious concern for Bulgakov. This is evident in his unpublished essays, “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe v Bozhestve [Male and Female in the Godhead]” and “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe.” In these works, in addition to clarifying his thoughts on sexuality, Bulgakov

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70 Rozanov was involved in the sexual debate that occurred in 1906. His *magnum opus* on this issue was published in 1911 entitled *People of the Moonlight: Metaphysics of Christianity* (*Lyudi lunnogo sveta: metafizika khristiansvta*). In this book he argues for a third sex, the spiritual sodomites. A spiritual sodomite is a person in whom one gender principle has dominance. His underlying anthropology supposes a “notion of universal bisexuality (*dvupolost’*), that is, the idea that every human being is a combination of masculine and feminine elements.” (Bershtein, p. 211.) Although Bulgakov rejects Rozanov in *Unfading Light*, Bulgakov incorporates the “third sex” into his anthropology. (Bulgakov, UF, p. 307.) Saints like the Theotokos and St. Seraphim the Sarov that lack sexual desire for the opposite sex constitute the third sex. They have no “sexual complement.” Bulgakov drops the language of “third sex” from his later theological works.

distances himself from Solov’ev’s erotic and androgynous Sophia\textsuperscript{72} and Anna Schmidt,\textsuperscript{73} who appropriated human sexuality to the Godhead. Schmidt, with whom Bulgakov was fascinated in the previous decade, is violently rejected by Bulgakov. Bulgakov in these works rejects a Gnostic understanding of spiritual bisexuality.\textsuperscript{74} In his theological works he continues to employ the theory of spiritual bisexuality; however, he links his thought to Genesis 1:27.

\subsection{1.5 Conclusion}

Although Bulgakov is one of the most original Orthodox thinkers of the past century, many of his ideas were inspired by social and philosophical ferment in Russia during the decades before the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent exile from Russia. These years are formative for his theology that he will begin to publish in 1925. Incorporating many of the insights of his peers, particularly Vladimir Solov’ev and Pavel Florensky, and his personal religious experience of Mary, Bulgakov will fashion an original and systematic portrait of the Mother of God.

\textsuperscript{74} He rejects the notion that humankind was an original androgyne that split to form the male and female sexes. (Cf. Bulgakov, “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe,” p. 369.)
Chapter Two: The Mariologies of Vladimir Solov’ev and Pavel Florensky

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I briefly mentioned the influence of Vladimir Solov’ev and Pavel Florensky on Bulgakov. Bulgakov openly acknowledges his debt to both men and appropriates their interest in Sophia, which was based on the Russian devotion to Holy Wisdom as the Mother of God. Bulgakov’s Mariology is no exception to this observation; he incorporates their insights about Mary into his Mariology. His Mariology should be placed within the Russian Sophiological tradition initiated by Solov’ev and continued by Florensky. Bulgakov’s The Burning Bush is the fullest expression of Sophianic Mariology. Nevertheless, Bulgakov is reticent about Solov’ev’s and Florensky’s influence and, with the exception of Bernard Schultze’s study, secondary scholarship has largely overlooked this relationship with respect to Bulgakov’s Mariology. Bulgakov’s silence on their influence is not surprising since Bulgakov’s concern is the elaboration of the Orthodox devotion to Mary, not Sophiology per se. The explicit acknowledgement of the influence of Florensky and Solov’ev would not have served this purpose. Still, the uncanny similarities between Bulgakov’s Mariology and that of Florensky and Solov’ev cannot be overlooked. Bulgakov incorporates Solov’ev’s emphasis on Mary’s femininity and relationship to Sophia as well as Florensky’s emphasis on Mary’s virginity, Mary’s manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and her role as the center of creation and the


77 Schultze argues that both Bulgakov and Florensky incorporate Solov’ev’s ideas that Mary is the heart of the Church, the personification of Sophia, and his emphasis on the icon of Novgorod. However, he does not examine Florensky’s influence on Bulgakov. (Bernard Schultze, S.J., “La Mariologie Sophianique Russe,” Maria, Études sur la Sainte Vierge (1961): pp. 215-239, p. 229, 238.)
Church. For the purpose of clarity, this chapter will be divided into three sections. Section one and two will briefly examine the Mariologies of Solov’ev and Florensky, respectively. Section three will briefly compare points of similarities and departures between these authors and Bulgakov as well as conclude this chapter.

2.2 Section One: Vladimir Solov’ev and the Mother of God

Vladimir Solov’ev is widely considered the father of Russian Sophiology. His influence on Sergius Bulgakov is undeniable. In addition to what I have mentioned in the previous chapter, from 1918 to 1927 Bulgakov was a member of Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii [Brotherhood of the Holy Sophia] that continued the discussion on Sophia begun by Solov’ev. Moreover, Bulgakov spends much of his career revising and building upon Solov’ev’s foundation. It would require a second study to demonstrate how much of Solov’ev’s thought Bulgakov expands. Thus, for the sake of brevity and my thesis, it is important to note that Solov’ev’s treatment of the Mother of God is foundational for Bulgakov. Solov’ev, working from the Orthodox tradition, was the first to stress Mary’s relationship with Sophia that was based on popular Russian devotion, iconography, and Marian feasts associated with the Russian Church’s dedication to Sophia. Mary plays a minor role in Solov’ev’s first major Sophiological work, Lectures on Godmanhood (1877-1881), but a much more central role in later works, e.g. Russia and the Universal Church (1889). This link between Mary and Sophia was so pervasive in Solov’ev’s later works that

79 Recently the letters and discussions between the members were published in Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii. Materialy i Dokumenty, Moscow: Russkii Put’; Paris: YMCA Press, 2000.
80 Cf. Schipflinger, p. 250.
Rozanov attributed the spread of the cult of Mary in Russia to Solov’ev. Interestingly, Solov’ev’s growing interest in Mary directly corresponds to his growing interest in Catholicism and Orthodoxy and movement away from his earlier fascination with the occult.

### 2.2.1 The role of Mary in Solov’ev’s Sophiology

To understand Solov’ev’s Mariology, it is important to briefly outline his Sophiology. Sophiology is the conceptual tool Solov’ev employs to make Godhumanhood, or the fundamental correlation between God and humankind, clear. For Solov’ev, God is in some sense human, and humankind is in some sense Divine.

Sophia is differentiated into three parts corresponding to the dialogical relationship between God and humankind. She consists of a higher, middle, and lower part. The higher part is the divine part. As the divine part, Sophia is a center within the Godhead. She is the *prima materia*, the intelligible matter of the Absolute. Sophia is God’s world, replete with ideas. The middle part is the space between Sophia as Divine and Sophia as the World-Soul, or Sophia in her lower part. The middle part allows for causality, space, and time, i.e. for creation to unfold its vocation to be reunited with Sophia, yet the higher and lower remain connected by the middle.

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83 Cf. Zouboff, p. 53.
84 Schipflinger, p. 249.
85 Valliere, MRT, p. 157; 159.
86 Schipflinger, p. 249.
The relationship between the higher and lower part of Sophia unfolds as the economy of salvation.

Following a Gnostic understanding of the original sin, according to Solov’ev, the original sin refers to the separation of the World-Soul from Sophia. 87 Within this account, humankind has a special vocation as the only being capable of reuniting the World-Soul with Sophia. However, humankind fails to realize this possibility and is overcome by the World-Soul. 88 This impotence on the part of humankind sets the stage for the Savior, Christ Jesus. 89

As fully human and divine, Christ stands at the center of human history. 90 Through him the reunion between the World-Soul and Sophia begins. Not only was He free from the negative influence of the World-Soul, but He is God. Corresponding to the hypostatic union, Christ has a dual significance for the World-Soul. In his divinity as the Logos (active Divine Reason), Christ reunites with the World-Soul, which had broken away from Him in its pre-cosmic fall. 91 In his humanity, Christ accomplishes what humankind could not; He reunites the World–Soul with Sophia. 92 However, Christ’s accomplishment is not fully realized until humankind participates in

91 Solov’ev, Lectures on Godmanhood, pp. 174-175.
92 Cf. Gustafson, p. 33.
it. The Church’s primary function is to allow humankind to participate in the Incarnation and reunion of the World-Soul with Sophia.\textsuperscript{93}

For my purpose, it is important to note that the reunion of the World-Soul with Sophia meant no less than the reunion of the male and female sexes. Solov’ev, who is a gender essentialist and circumscribes human activity within a traditional gender binary, argues that in the original harmonious relationship between Sophia and the World-Soul, the sexes were united. Olga Matich, summarizing Solov’ev’s thought, argues that

Solov’ev viewed life’s task as reassembling the sundered body into a whole by reuniting male and female in a collective gender that is beyond sexual difference, a state that he affiliated with the figure of the androgyne.\textsuperscript{94}

The experience of love between men and women confirms this speculation, which he interpreted as an existential desire to overcome their division, to be saved from the disintegration of their original unity that results in death.\textsuperscript{95} Thus, the World-Soul’s goal is to become an “androgy nous godman,” which it was before it separated itself from Sophia.\textsuperscript{96} Solov’ev’s doctrine of the “androgy nous godman” reveals the true meaning of human existence, to

be the higher unity of the two [men and women]. To realize this unity or to create the true human being as the free unity of the masculine and the feminine elements, which preserve their formal separateness but overcome their essential disparity and disruption, is the direct \textit{task} of love.\textsuperscript{97}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{93} Ib\textit{id.}, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{94} Matich, \textit{Erotic Utopia}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{95} Gustafson, p. 44.
\end{footnotes}
In this account, the Incarnation entails the incipient realization of the “androgynous godman.” Christ provides the perfect masculine response that makes this possible. However, the Incarnation is incomplete without Christ’s feminine counterpart.

This account of the economy of salvation sets the stage for Solov’ev’s Mariology. Mary is the archetypical female, whose femininity complements Christ’s masculinity. In other words, “Christ represented the perfect Godman, while the Virgin was his perfect feminine” counterpart. Christ and Mary perfectly manifest the maleness and femaleness in the World-Soul. Together they accomplish the Incarnation and reunion of Sophia and the World-Soul. The Church plays an important role in this account as the realization of their perfect male-female relationship: it is the perfect corporate humanity that allows for the rest of humankind to take part in this relationship.

Christ and Mary are the head and heart of the Church, respectively. Therefore, “the Church, human Society made divine, possesses fundamentally the same substance as the incarnate Person of Christ or His individual Humanity,” which is the humanity of Mary. Therefore, Mary and Christ realize the “androgynous godman” or the World-Soul which humankind is called to

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98 Solov’ev appropriates a traditional understanding of gender. Cf. Solov’ev, Russia and the Universal Church, p. 168; Solovyov, The Meaning of Love, p. 84.

99 Solov’ev interprets femininity and the experience of females through the visage of masculinity that is never really overcome. He writes: “Woman being only the complement of Man, and Society only his extension or total manifestation, there is fundamentally only one human being.” (Solov’ev, Russia and the Universal Church, p. 168.) Solov’ev advocated celibacy on account of his androgyny. He thought that erotic arousal without coitus would help bring about this unity. (Matich, Erotic Utopia, p. 77.)


102 Ibid., p. 216.

103 Solov’ev, Russia and the Universal Church, p. 170.
participate in as a member of the Church. Together, Christ, Mary, and the Church reveal Sophia in its different aspects, as male, female, and the collective or Sophia herself, “the Spouse and Bride of the Divine Word.”

Mary, in Solov’ev’s account, is largely a passive figure. It is her passivity and “self-surrender of her feminine nature” that is most important for Solov’ev. Given his gender essentialism, the Logos, as perfect activity, i.e. maleness, could only incarnate as male, and to become human the Son needed a human nature that could receive his divinity, i.e. a perfectly passive or female nature that must be without sin. Only Mary was capable of providing the human nature necessary for the Incarnation because she gives the perfect feminine response of passivity and receptivity. In Mary, humankind is willing and able to welcome God Incarnate.

The negative effect of Solov’ev’s stress is that he depersonalizes Mary. Mary is not a historical person but rather an idealized woman, who has a natural and essential function. This is evident in Solov’ev’s treatment of woman and nature as synonyms in his *Russia and the Universal Church*. Mary as the “perfect Woman” is “nature made Divine.”

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104 Ibid., p. 169. Solov’ev justifies his threefold interpretation on Sophia based on Orthodox usage of Sophia. (Ibid., p. 169.)


106 Solov’ev, *Russia and the Universal Church*, p. 82; 169.

107 Ibid., p. 82. Mary is a feminine ideal, not a historical person.


the means for man to realize himself.\textsuperscript{110} Mary’s main relevance for Solov’ev is that she is the
greatest expression of passive womanhood that allows man to realize himself perfectly. “[W]hat could not be revealed in Eve or Tamar or Rahab or Ruth or Bathsheba, was one day revealed in
Mary.”\textsuperscript{111} Solov’ev does not consider Mary’s personal holiness and initiative in the Incarnation.
He suggests that Mary’s holiness is a result of the righteous acts of her ancestors that mitigate the
effects of evil and prepare the means of future salvation.

His emphasis on Mary’s passivity corresponds directly to Sophia’s passivity in relation to
God as the “passive medium” through which God creates and redeems by the Logos.\textsuperscript{112} After all, the Theotokos is Sophia’s personal manifestation.\textsuperscript{113}

Mary’s passivity, more specifically, allows Sophia to be manifested in the World-Soul.\textsuperscript{114} Mary prepares the World-Soul for the Incarnation. Only after Mary’s Immaculate Conception and holy life is the World-Soul prepared to receive the Logos, Who in His maleness as Christ incarnate will completely reunite Sophia and the World-Soul.

\textsuperscript{110} Solov’ev, \textit{Russia and the Universal Church}, p. 168.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 173.

\textsuperscript{112} Zouboff, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{113} Solov’ev means that Sophia in her passivity is personally represented in the Mother of God. Unfortunately, Solov’ev does not specify what this means in detail, e.g. when does Mary become Sophia and how are Sophia and Mary different. Moreover, it is not clear how the personality of Sophia is reconciled with the personality of Mary. Note that Sophia, not the Mother of God manifests herself to Solov’ev on three separate occasions. Bulgakov’s Sophianic Mariology, which is based on the insights of Solov’ev, eliminates this tension between the personality of Mary and Sophia by describing Sophia as God’s revealed nature as opposed to a personal being. Mary in Bulgaekov’s account is the hypostasis or personality of Sophia in Sophia creaturely form. In chapter five will discuss this in detail.

\textsuperscript{114} Solov’ev’s excessive stress on Mary’s passivity is not always consistent. (Schultze, “La Mariologie Sophianique Russe,” p. 221; Cf. Solov’ev, \textit{Lectures on Godhumanhood}, p. 178.)
Solov’ev’s stress on the three successive manifestations of Sophia as Christ, Mary, and Church places Mary outside of the Church to an extent. He argues that Mary has greater dignity than the Church and is a fuller manifestation of Sophia. At the same time, Mary is the “heart of the Church.” In Solov’ev’s account, Mary cannot be disassociated from the Church, as the Church is the extension of the Incarnation or Mary’s humanity. However, the Church will participate in her personal manifestation of Sophia to some extent; yet the degree of this realization of Sophia is not possible for any other created person.

2.2.1.1 Solov’ev and the Immaculate Conception

Interestingly, Solov’ev addresses the Mariological debate within Russia surrounding Pope Pius IX’s Ineffabilis Deus that dogmatically defined the Immaculate Conception. In Russia and the Universal Church (1889) Solov’ev does not clearly profess the Immaculate Conception; however, he demonstrates that Orthodoxy is inherently open to this dogma insofar as the Immaculate Conception has not been rejected by any ecumenical council. Moreover, he argues that many Orthodox oppose the authority behind the expression, i.e. the Pope, but not the expression itself. This expression is not necessarily contrary to Orthodoxy since in Orthodoxy the appellation of “immaculate” is continually used for the Mother of God in the Divine Liturgy. Nevertheless, in a letter to Bishop Strossmayer dated September 29, 1886, Solov’ev professes the Immaculate Conception as a sublime truth that is faithful to Orthodox theology.

116 Ibid., p. 221.
117 Solov’ev’s basis for this claim is the Mariological and ecclesiological interpretations of the Women of the book of Wisdom and Revelation. (Solov’ev, Russia and the Universal Church, p. 169.)
118 Ibid., pp. 46-47.
In actuality, Pius IX’s 1854 dogmatic definition served Solov’ev well since he believed that this definition was based on the application of biblical Sophia in the wisdom literature to Mary.\textsuperscript{119} Therefore, it not only gave further sanction to Solov’ev’s Sophiology, but also presented an opportunity to illustrate that the Russian devotion to Sophia is consistent with the Catholic Marian cult.\textsuperscript{120}

Overall, Solov’ev’s Mariology is schematic and unfinished. Solov’ev presents the first attempt to make thematic the relationship of Mary and Sophia that was present in Russian iconography and the liturgical associations of Mary with biblical Lady Wisdom. Thus, the historical Mary, as well as her role in salvation history and devotion, does not receive serious consideration. Moreover, unlike Bulgakov’s pneumatological Mariology, Solov’ev’s Mariology is circumscribed within Christology. Mary’s main significance is her participation in the Incarnation, providing Christ with a perfect feminine nature. She is the expression of the Divine feminine as well as historical females. However, Bulgakov adopts Solov’ev’s theory that Mary is the feminine manifestation of Sophia and that she provides the humanity of Christ. But the immediate beneficiary of Solov’ev’s Mariology was Pavel Florensky.

2.3 Section Two: Pavel Florensky and Bulgakov

Pavel Florensky was one of the most prodigious and prolific scholars of the Russian Silver Age. For his work in theology he was widely known by his contemporaries as the “Theologian of the Silver Age.”\textsuperscript{121} Bulgakov thought highly of his friend and considered him his


\textsuperscript{121} Pyman, p. 81.
teacher. It is widely accepted by scholars that Bulgakov appropriates Florensky’s thought into his own; he gives it a full systematic exposition from the standpoint of speculative theology. Bulgakov’s antinomic basis for his Sophiology is appropriated from Florensky, who develops this epistemology in contrast to Solov’ev’s conciliar, syncretistic system.

Florensky and Bulgakov became acquainted through their participation in the Christian Brotherhood for Struggle around 1905, and became close friends. They worked on a variety of projects together that promoted the study of Sophiology; this included the publication of Anna N. Schmidt’s esoteric works as well as reviews of Sergei Solov’ev’s new edition of Vladimir Solov’ev’s works. Bulgakov even helped prepare Florensky’s revised thesis, The Pillar and Ground of Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theology in Twelve Letters (1913), for publication.

Their work in the Church brought them great notoriety, and with Bulgakov, Florensky was asked to participate in the “All Russian Council of the Russian Orthodox Church” that opened in 1917. Together they participated in two separate sessions: the education and formation of candidates to the priesthood and the imiaslavtsy, the name-worshippers.

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122 Ibid., p. 97.
125 Cf. Johnathan Seiling, “Kant’s Third Antinomy and Spinoza’s Substance in the Sophiology of Florenskii and Bulgakov” [paper presented at the Florensky Conference, Moscow, Russia, October 2005], pp. 1-2.
126 Pyman, p. 97.
127 Ibid., p. 130.
2.3.1 Pavel Florensky and Mary

During the first decade of the twentieth-century in Russia, Solov’ev was a controversial character. Florensky should be seen as among those scholars who recognized Solov’ev’s positive contribution to scholarship. However, Florensky was critical of Solov’ev. Therefore, he cautiously builds on Solov’ev’s foundation and attempts to make Sophiology Orthodox by avoiding Solov’ev’s rationalism that leads to his pantheism and determinism. By stressing the transcendence of God with respect to Sophia, Florensky accomplishes this. Sophia is divine, but not consubstantial with the Trinity. She is a mediating principle between God and creation.

Moreover, Florensky’s Sophiology drops Solov’ev’s esoteric language and places Solov’ev’s speculations squarely within an Orthodox context. The starting point of his Sophiology is not the precosmic fall but rather the two worlds, a visible and invisible world. The title of his first letter “Two Worlds” in his The Pillar and Ground of Truth confirms this. The invisible world is the world of the prototypes, the noumena, which correspond to the visible world; the visible image of these prototypes, the phenomena. Sophia is first and foremost the ideal world; she is not only the prototypes themselves but the world containing these prototypes. She is the “precosmic, hypostatic concentration of divine prototypes.”

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129 Ibid., p. 219.
130 Cf. Seiling, “Kant’s Third Antinomy,” p. 5.
131 Florensky, PGT, p. 107.
Slesinski all things are an expression of Divine Sophia. It is in this sense that Florensky speaks of Sophia’s Divine dimension. Sophia is an all-embracing subject. She is not the realm of the abstract, but points to a God that is Love and seeks to have this love reciprocated. Sophia is more than simply an attribute of God, but God turned towards us. She is the fourth hypostatic, non-consubstantial person or a “love-idea-monad.” After all, as the wisdom of God or logoi of creation, God as Sophia is an “absolute idea of the relative, the idea of God of a particular thing.” The logoi themselves connote a primary condition whereby God empties Godself of God’s absoluteness in order to allow for creation. The logoi are then God’s self-empting love for creatures. Nevertheless, Sophia cannot be equated with God, but only as God-in-dialogue with the world. Sophia is the substance of love produced by the Trinity for the purpose of giving life to created being. God is emptied of God’s absolute qualities to give autonomy and life to creation. What we have here is a form of what Bulgakov labeled his own position: panentheism.

Despite his revisions of Solov’ev’s Sophiology, Florensky largely explicates Solov’ev’s insights on Mary, especially on Mary’s relationship to Sophia. However, Florensky focuses on Mary’s virginity and her role in salvation history as opposed to Solov’ev’s stress on her passivity and role in the Incarnation. Like Solov’ev, Florensky’s Mariology is germinal. If we seek a

133 Ibid., p. 169.
135 Ibid., p. 252.
136 Ibid., p. 324.
rational explanation of Mary’s role in the economy of salvation, we need to look elsewhere, since this is not Florensky’s intent. In fact, he criticized scholastic theology for an overly rational approach to Mary, and the failure to take into account the honor and esteem the Church attributes to the virginity of Mary.¹³⁹

Florensky’s primary Mariological work with which Bulgakov was familiar is Letter Ten of The Pillar and Ground of Truth. In this letter Florensky bases his ideas primarily on the Orthodox liturgical and religious consciousness about Mary and explicates the Mother of God in the context of his Sophiology.¹⁴⁰ Florensky should be viewed as a midway point in the development of Russian Sophiology/Mariology.

For Florensky, Mary is the holiest human person in creation. It is precisely her esteemed place in creation that will allow Florensky to associate her with Sophia, for this entails that Mary personifies Sophia. These three acclamations for Mary summarize Florensky’s teaching on Mary: “creatural beauty personified,” “ever-Virgin Theotokos,” and “bearer of Sophia.”¹⁴¹ All of these terms will prove to be axiomatic for Bulgakov. In what follows I first examine the main


¹⁴⁰ Florensky, PGT, p. 260. In the last section of “Letter Ten,” Florensky provides an important analysis of the different Sophia icons. He distinguishes between three types of Sophia icons: Angel, Church, and Mary. The first type is the Novgorod icon which is generally interpreted christologically, and it depicts the Sophia-angel between Christ, who is above, and the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist, who are below Sophia. Schipflinger argues that this icon is also Mariological because the icon’s feast day corresponds to the Church, St. Sophia, in Novgorod, where it originated who’s feast day is Christmas. Christmas is also a feast day of the Mother of God. (Schipflinger, p. 268.) The second icon type portrays Sophia as the Church that usually entails a depiction of Christ on the cross, representing the Church as proceeding from Christ’s body. Note again that the Mother of God is present at the right of Christ, while John the Baptist is present at his left. The third type, also known as the Kiev type, is explicitly Mariological since it depicts Mary as Sophia in the center of the icon, depicting her intercessory role below Christ in the heavens.

tenets of his Mariology relevant to my study using the three acclamations as a point of departure. I then examine Florensky’s position on the Immaculate Conception.

2.3.2 Three Acclamations

Florensky’s Mariology incorporates theological aesthetics. Knowledge of truth is a holistic affair that integrates cognitive processes with the entire human person which includes the capacity to perceive beauty. Beauty is important because it attends to realities that cannot be portrayed in conceptual terms, precisely because they are living holistic experiences.

Beauty reveals something ontological about the subject of depiction. Beauty is the true essence of the subject. In other words, it is the inner higher form for which the rational capacity cannot logically account, and when it attempts to do so, it encounters an antinomy. However, beauty for Florensky has a spiritual connotation beyond aesthetics. To say something is beautiful is to affirm its holiness, purity, and innocence. Florensky calls this beauty “subjective beauty.” Recognition of “subjective beauty” denotes the saintliness of a subject who reveals its “original creation” separated from its corruption. Subjective beauty also has a pneumatological implication, since, for Florensky, it is the Holy Spirit who manifests Sophia as beauty as well as deifies creation. As Sophia, the Holy Spirit is the spirituality of creation who

144 Florensky, PGT, p. 243.
145 Ibid., p. 243.
“reveals Himself in creation as virginity, inner chasteness, and humble immaculateness.”\textsuperscript{146} Therefore, the beauty a believer experiences at the sight of a Marian image points to the fact that Mary is a “[m]anifestation of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{147} Florensky writes “just as the Spirit is the beauty of the Absolute, so the Mother of God is the Beauty of the Creaturely.”\textsuperscript{148} Mary shares in the hypostatic function of the Holy Spirit; she is the means through whom the Holy Spirit manifests the beauty of Sophia in creation.\textsuperscript{149} Because Mary is the first to embrace the Holy Spirit, her relationship to the Holy Spirit is relevant for eschatology, as we will all take part in a similar relationship to the Holy Spirit after the general resurrection.\textsuperscript{150} Mary reveals the consummation of the world. The implication is that we are all called in some sense to reveal this beauty and take part in a similar manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

This subjective beauty is intimately related to virginity, since virginity refers to the pragmatic living out of beauty. To be beautiful is to be a virgin and vice versa. Virginity in this sense refers to “inner chastity, and humble immaculateness,”\textsuperscript{151} or the lack of lust and selfish will. Florensky argues that acquiring virginity is a necessary condition of salvation, to be pure of heart, not seeing anything else except God.\textsuperscript{152} With respect to Mary, because she reveals the essential beauty of Sophia to the world or she is “creatural beauty personified,” Mary is also the

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 253.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., p. 259.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., p. 257.
\textsuperscript{149} Florensky attributes titles associated with the Holy Spirit to Mary, e.g. “Comfort of Sorrow,” “Joy for All Who Sorrow,” “Guardian Angel of the World.” (Florensky, PGT, p. 257.)
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., p 256.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., p 253.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., p. 254.
Ever-Virgin. Florensky writes: “But the true sign of Mary Full of Grace is Her Virginity, the beauty of Her soul. This is precisely Sophia.”\textsuperscript{153} As the Ever-Virgin, Mary is first and foremost the soul or center of not only the Church but Sophia. Although Florensky accepts the perpetual, historical virginity of Mary, he emphasizes Mary’s spiritual virginity.\textsuperscript{154} Mary, therefore, shares a special relationship with “virgins of the spirit,” which he analogically expresses as “the angels in flesh,”\textsuperscript{155} to those who have undergone the process of ascesis. Like Mary we are all called to acquire a “virginal soul,” which for most of the human race will involve ascesis.\textsuperscript{156} The exception to this is based on the teaching of an important Russian saint canonized during his lifetime, Saint Seraphim of Sarov. Saint Seraphim teaches that there are Christians who are of “Mary’s kind.”\textsuperscript{157} These are saints who, like Mary, have little or no knowledge of the struggles of the flesh.\textsuperscript{158} They are “angels of the flesh” predisposed to virginity of the soul by the Mother of God.\textsuperscript{159} Mary remains an exemplar of holiness for them.\textsuperscript{160}

Florensky’s logic is circular. Because Mary, Sophia, and the Holy Spirit share an intimate relationship, they all share in the same attributes. Thus, just as Florensky appropriates beauty to

\begin{itemize}
\item[Ibid., p. 253.]
\item Florensky’s teaching on Mary’s spiritual virginity is based on the teaching of Clement of Rome. (Cf. Clement of Rome, \textit{Epistles on Virginity}, Epistle 1, Ch. 5, \textit{Tr. Kiev. Dukh. Ak.}, 1869, Vol 2, p. 205 cited in Florensky, PGT, p. 255.)
\item Ibid., p. 258.
\item Ibid., p. 255. To acquire a “virginal soul” means to overcome lust and sinful inclinations.
\item Ibid., p. 258.
\item Ibid., p 258.
\item The correlation that Florensky makes between angels and saints will prove to be indispensable for Bulgakov. Bulgakov in 1929 authors a book on this subject entitled \textit{Jacob’s Ladder}. (Cf. Florensky, PGT, p. 256; Bulgakov, JL, p. 66.)
\item Florensky, PGT, p. 258.
\end{itemize}
Sophia, the Holy Spirit, and Mary, he also appropriates virginity to them. The Holy Spirit is
virginity because the Holy Spirit gives the necessary gifts of inner chastity and humble
immaculateness to Christians for salvation. Sophia is virginity because She is the ideal virginal
state for which we all strive, but also the means by which virginity as a grace is given to the
Christian. 161 It seems that the Holy Spirit works in/through Sophia as the Holy Spirit graces
Christians with this gift. It is on this account that Florensky will assert that the Holy Spirit is
Sophia. 162 Florensky’s stress on Mary’s virginity is indicative of her special relationship to the
Holy Spirit and Sophia. Being “in the strict sense of the word…Virgin full of grace,” 163 the Holy
Spirit completely deifies Mary. It is through Mary’s virginal state that Florensky can speak of her
as the personal center of Sophia or Sophia par excellence. By analogy, since the Church is also
Sophia par excellence, Mary is the preeminent member of the Church; she is the first to live out
churchly existence. Thus, Florensky proclaims her as the “True Church of God,” and, playing on
bodily imagery, he calls her “the True Body of Christ” from which the Body of Christ
proceeds. 164 Mary, as Ever-Virgin, shares in the essential purity of the Church; therefore,
Florensky will freely identify the Church with Mary. 165 Just as she is the heart of Sophia, she is
also the heart of the Church. Mary is the heart of the Church, as opposed to Christ who is the
head of the Church. 166 Similar to Solov’ev, the title “heart of the Church” is not simply an

161 Ibid., p. 253.
163 Florensky, PGT, p. 253.
164 Ibid., p. 253.
166 Ibid., p. 225.
honorary title,¹⁶⁷ but rather reveals something important about Mary. According to Florensky the heart is “the organ for the perception of the heavenly world;” it allows for humankind to perceive their spiritual root that is Sophia.¹⁶⁸ Only pure hearts can see God. Salvation entails acquisition of such a heart where “the ineffable Light of the Trihypostatic Son penetrates into the human consciousness.”¹⁶⁹ Thus, Mary as the heart of the Church is not only a deified being, but also the Church accomplished or the bearer of Sophia, Christian eschatology realized.¹⁷⁰

Her placement within the Church/Sophia as its heart or personal center points more specifically to her role in the salvation of others and their acquisition of a purified heart. Mary is more than just an exemplar of holiness; she is the link between creator and creation and is the “beginning of the world in its purification.”¹⁷¹ What makes possible the salvation of a human person is precisely what the Mother of God gives to that person, the grace necessary to achieve “virginity of soul.”¹⁷² Nevertheless, it is through Mary that people perceive Sophia and are purified of their sins. The invocation for Mary to “save us” in the Divine Liturgy and her symmetric place on the iconostasis to Christ “as though equivalent to the place of the Lord” provides Florensky with evidence for his opinion.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Florensky, PGT, p. 259.
¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 254.
¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 254.
¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 257.
¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 256.
¹⁷² Schultze, “La Mariologie Sophianique Russe,” p. 227; Florensky, PGT, p. 255. For Florensky Mary is the “[d]ispenser of God’s Grace” and the “[l]ife, Eternity, and the gifts of the Spirit.” (Florensky, PGT, p. 256.)
Nevertheless, albeit a member of the Church, Mary is above the Church and all of the saints. She stands in a unique and privileged place above the angels\(^\text{174}\) and at the boundary of creation and God. Her place above the angels is significant because it denotes her unique privilege. Florensky is not deviating from the Orthodox tradition, since his thought here is based on the Theotokion, or hymn of Mary, that Mary is “more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,” which is chanted during liturgical celebrations of the Eastern Orthodox Liturgy. However, in doing so he places Mary outside of redeemed humanity, since in his account of deification, especially after the universal resurrection, deification consists in some kind of unity with one’s prototype or *logos* in Sophia, which are our guardian angels.\(^\text{175}\) The implication is that Mary’s redemption cannot consist simply in union with her prototype/guardian angel, since she is above all the angels even the highest of the angelic court. Florensky does not theologize about Mary’s superiority here.\(^\text{176}\) Nevertheless, as the bearer of Sophia, Mary stands between God and humankind. She is “the center of creaturely life, the point at which earth touches heaven.”\(^\text{177}\)

### 2.3.3 Immaculate Mary

Unlike Solov’ev, Florensky does not accept the Immaculate Conception. He rejects the dogma as “crude and rationalistic” but which nevertheless expresses a truth.\(^\text{178}\) As Schultze demonstrated, Florensky contends that there are various races of humankind, some who retained

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174 Florensky, PGT, p. 259.
175 Ibid., p. 256.
176 Ibid., p. 267.
177 Ibid., p. 260.
178 Ibid., p. 552 n. 640.
the purity of Adam and Even in Eden and some who did not. Florensky writes “[a]ll creation is corrupted, but in some the corruption is deeper than in others.” Mary is a product of this pure race. This does not necessitate that she is sinless, but rather that the original sin’s effects are minimized on her. What exactly this means, and how this can be maintained given the liturgical witness of the Orthodox Church that stresses Mary’s sinlessness is not discussed here. Bulgakov will take up these ambiguities in *The Burning Bush* as well as offer a fuller exposition of her spiritual genealogy.

### 2.4 Section Three: Bulgakov and His Predecessors

#### 2.4.1 Bulgakov and Solov’ev

Bulgakov follows Solov’ev closely in his stress on Mary’s archetypical feminine function. Like Solov’ev, Bulgakov believes that together Christ and Mary reveal the image of God in its fullness as understood as male and female. Bulgakov, however, bases his thought in the Scriptures as opposed to Gnostic speculations about an eschatological reunion of the sexes present in Solov’ev. The biblical verse Bulgakov uses in *The Burning Bush* to justify his position is: “there is neither male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3.28) In his account Mary gives to Christ her feminine principle, which Christ in his perfect masculinity lacks. Note that like Solov’ev, Bulgakov stresses the exclusive masculinity of Christ. This, of course, follows from the interpretive tradition of treating masculinity as activity; since the Logos

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180 Florensky, PGT, p. 259.
181 Cf. Ibid., p. 259.
182 Bulgakov, BB, pp. 82-83.
183 Cf. Ibid., p. 83.
is an active hypostasis and Christ is the Logos incarnate, Christ must incarnate as a male hypostasis. Given Solov’ev’s stress on Christ’s masculinity and his androgynous eschatology, Mary’s relevance is that she represents the passive, feminine humanity, which Christ redeemed. Bulgakov, however, rejects Solov’ev’s eschatological sexual reunion, and stresses instead the actual bisexuality of humanity. Although he retains Solov’ev’s archetypical language about Mary’s femininity, and that Mary realizes the “divine sonship” for women, Mary’s relevance extends beyond the female gender, since all men and women are feminine. In this way Bulgakov avoids Solov’ev’s male chauvinism that defines women as “only the complement of Man.” Nevertheless, Bulgakov’s stress on Christ’s absolute masculinity and the bisexuality of the human race, including Mary, raises theological problems for Bulgakov that deserve a fuller discussion than is possible in the confines of this dissertation.

Another important similarity between Bulgakov and Solov’ev is their mutual insistence on Mary’s role in Christ’s humanity. For Solov’ev, Mary provides an essential function for Christ insofar as she gives to Christ a human nature that is prepared for the Incarnation. In this way Mary is the World-Soul united with Sophia. Likewise, Bulgakov treats Mary as Sophia realized in Sophia’s creaturely form. The manner in which Bulgakov and Solov’ev express how Mary attains this state is different. While Solov’ev takes recourse in the Immaculate Conception and only alludes to a theology of heredity, Bulgakov explains, following Florensky, that her sinlessness was the result of her accomplishment and the accomplishments of her ancestors.

184 Ibid., p. 103.
185 Solov’ev, Russia and the Universal Church, p. 168.
186 I address this problem briefly in footnote 172 in Chapter Four.
However, a significant point of departure is their portrayal of Mary. Unlike Solov’ev who depersonalizes Mary and treats her solely as the idealized woman, Bulgakov stresses her unique and heroic accomplishments. Bulgakov interestingly rejects the Immaculate Conception on this account since it does not do justice to Mary’s personal accomplishments. Catholic Mariology for Bulgakov fails to take into account an adequate Sophiology that expresses the Divine Human synergy. On the other hand, Solov’ev’s depersonalized account of Mary allows him to freely appropriate the Immaculate Conception because it confirms his essentialist interpretation of Mary.187

2.4.2 Bulgakov and Florensky

There are ample similarities in the Mariology of Florensky and Bulgakov. The most important similarity is their pneumatological interpretation of the Mother of God. Here Bulgakov appropriates his teacher’s thought that Mary is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit188 and clarifies what this means.189 Bulgakov explains the specifics that are absent in Florensky’s account of Mary. For Bulgakov Mary is not the incarnation of the Holy Spirit, but rather her hypostasis is completely penetrated by the Holy Spirit.190

However, the similarities do not end here. The three acclamations I mentioned in my summary of Florensky’s thought with reference to Mary’s relationship to Sophia, virginity, and

187 For Bulgakov Mary is creaturely Sophia. It is not clear if Solov’ev would agree with this statement. Note that Solov’ev does not equate Sophia, whom he mystically and personally encounters, with the Mother of God.

188 Florensky, PGT, p. 259.

189 For Bulgakov Mary is both “a” and “the” manifestation of the Holy Spirit since humankind is invited to manifest the Holy Spirit as well; however no human person will attain the degree of this intimate relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit. More on this will be said in chapter five.

190 Bulgakov, BB, p. 168, n. 13. Here Bulgakov argues for a form of pneumatological adoptionism. More on this will be said in chapters three and five.
creaturely beauty are repeated by Bulgakov. Bulgakov, without ever mentioning Florensky, follows Florensky’s interpretation of virginity and beauty as subjective spiritual states. Just as Florensky, Bulgakov treats Mary as “Beauty-Holiness.” Beauty has an experiential function that connotes truth and purity, and it is intimately related to virginity. Bulgakov writes that virginity “is a perfect orientation towards God in the absence of any multicentricity, destroying its integrity, throwing it into disorder.”\(^{191}\) However, whereas Florensky stresses the virginity of Mary, Bulgakov emphasizes the intimate relationship between virginity and motherhood. Bulgakov plays on the double meaning of virginity as lack of sex and sinfulness, and he argues that Mary reveals God’s original plan for motherhood as virginal insofar as it lacked both of the aspects.\(^{192}\) Nevertheless, Bulgakov maintains Florensky’s position on the special status of saints like Seraphim of Sarov, who abide in a special virginal state in relation to Mary. However, Bulgakov interprets the “race of Mary” to mean those who bear the Spirit as Mary bears the Spirit.\(^{193}\) Bulgakov in effect expands Florensky’s idea to include all disciples; this, of course, does not deny that there are different degrees of virginity and holiness among the Christ’s disciples.\(^{194}\) Moreover, following both Solov’ev and Florensky, Bulgakov argues that Mary is Sophia insofar as she is a deified creation or Sophia in its creaturely form perfected.\(^{195}\)

Given the fact that Bulgakov considered both Solov’ev and Florensky his teachers and openly appropriated much of their thought, there is little reason to doubt that Bulgakov

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\(^{191}\) Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light,” p. 35.

\(^{192}\) Cf. Bulgakov, BB, pp. 93-94.

\(^{193}\) Cf. Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, p. 50. Note that this occurs only in later works.

\(^{194}\) There are different degrees of holiness or virginity that correspond to our will and desire to do God’s will for us.

\(^{195}\) Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light,” p. 34. More on Mary’s deification will be said below; however it is important to note that for Bulgakov deification is a process, which for Mary begins at the Annunciation but its not completed until her Dormition.
appropriated their ideas on Mary and expanded their thoughts to suit his needs. How conscious Bulgakov was of this is not entirely clear. However, reading Bulgakov in this context allows us to see more clearly the genesis of his Mariology. It also provides us with a background to understand many of his ideas that his Orthodox contemporaries will reject as an innovation because they lack a strong patristic basis, e.g. treatment of Mary as the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and his stress on sexuality. Nevertheless, Bulgakov does not simply expand their ideas and correct inadequacies, e.g. Florensky’s inordinate stress on Mary’s virginity and Solov’ev’s inordinate stress on Mary’s passivity. Bulgakov writes unique reflections on the Mother of God that I will further discuss in the pages that follow.

Chapter Three: Bulgakov’s Sophiology and Theological Method

3.1 Introduction

For the purpose of clarity, I have divided this chapter into two sections. Section One examines Bulgakov’s Sophiology that will provide the necessary background for his Mariology. Section Two will examine his theological methodology. Specifically, I will examine Bulgakov’s theological dialectics, his liturgical and biblical hermeneutics, and how he uses the Liturgy and the Bible in the context of his Mariology.

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196 Bulgakov’s purpose in authoring The Burning Bush was to write a systematic exposition of Orthodox Mariology that distinguished itself from Catholic Mariology. Note that Bulgakov’s Mariology is not systematic in a scholastic sense. His thought on Mary is an important theme that is interwoven into his Sophiology. Thus Mary appears throughout his Sophiological works. Nevertheless his thought on Mary is consistent and rationale.

197 Solov’ev also fails to consider Mary’s Motherhood. This is no doubt due to his view that maternal love is egotistical. (Solovyov, The Meaning of Love, p. 49.)
3.2 Section One: Sophia

Like Solov’ev and Florensky, Bulgakov’s Sophiology explicates Godhumanhood; however, Bulgakov spends greater length demonstrating the continuity of Sophiology with the Church Fathers and, in particular, Gregory Palamas. Palamas is an important figure for Bulgakov because Palamas comes closest to expressing Sophiology in his Energy-Essence distinction. Palamas provides an important insight into the first premise of Sophiology. Like Palamas, Bulgakov argues that God is immanent in God’s Energy, yet transcendent beyond any categorization in God’s Essence. Interestingly, in his first theological essay on Sophia “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light” (1925) after his “Catholic hypnosis,” Bulgakov explicitly links his Sophiology to Palamas’ thought. He argues that Sophiology completes Palamas’ work, and the veneration of Divine Sophia in Russia clarifies Palamas’ doctrine. Sophiology addresses with more specificity the relationship between the Trinity, who is an absolute personality, and the Divine Energy, which is an impersonal reality.

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198 Cf. Bulgakov, BB, pp. 117-156. Gallaher demonstrates that Bulgakov probably encountered Palamas through Florensky. (Cf. Gallaher, “There is Freedom,” p. 54.) Note that Palamas is by no means the only Father who plays an important role in his thought. Maximus the Confessor also plays an important role. Bulgakov bases his insights on Divine Wisdom on Maximus the Confessor’s logology. He argues that “[o]f the fathers of the Church, St. Maximus the Confessor has the most consistent doctrine of the divine “logoses” of creaturely being. His “logology” is essentially a sophiology.” (Bulgakov. LG, Endnotes, Locations 7022-7023 of 7314, n. 6.)


201 Cf. Bulgakov, BB, p. 138, 156, 180, n. 16.

202 Bulgakov argues that the Trinity is a “Trihypostatic being.” By this he means that the Trinity exhausts personality as we understand personality. God as the Trinity is the first, second and third person. With reference to the singular and plural pronouns, the Trinity encompasses every mode of personal self-reflection, as “I”, “he, she,
Bulgakov places Palamas’ insight on the Divine Energy and Divine Essence within an antinomic context. Though Palamas’ doctrine of the Divine Energy and Divine Essence expresses the sophiological antinomy, Bulgakov argues that the relationship of God to the world is expressed in three intimately related yet distinct antinomies. These three antinomies are the theological antinomy, cosmological antinomy, and the sophiological antinomy. For Bulgakov, [Antinomy] testifies to the existence of a mystery beyond which human reason cannot penetrate. This mystery, nevertheless, is actualized and lived in religious experience. All fundamental dogmatic definitions are of this nature. It is futile to attempt to dispel or remove an antinomy.

Within the context of religious experience, antinomy is an indicator that points to the limitation of discursive reason to comprehend a Divine truth. Antinomy provides Bulgakov with a philosophical tool to express to a modern audience what Palamas, the Church Fathers, and mystics have argued for centuries: that we cannot fully comprehend God whom we experience.

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203 Bulgakov, BL, p. 309.
204 Bulgakov, Icons and the Name of God, Endnote 47, Location 2395 of 2657.
205 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 77.
206 He uses antinomy in variety of contexts including the hypostatic union, human freedom, (Bulgakov, BL, p. 134.) eschatology, (Bulgakov, BL, p. 381.) pre-eternal place of Christ, and the Theotokos in eternity. (Bulgakov, BB, p. 128.)
The theological antinomy states that God is both the Absolute, the Divine Nothing, and the self-relation in Himself, the Holy Trinity, Who reveals the Godself to humankind. This expresses the distinction between kataphatic and apophatic theology, which Bulgakov interprets as mutually necessary. Thus, God is always known and unknown. The theological antinomy reveals a fundamental tenet of revelation. Revelation, according to Bulgakov, is a process where the unknown (the Revealer) is made known (the Revealer revealing itself) while remaining unknown. If the revealer were completely revealed in its revelation, this would not be revelation but knowledge, which would negate the need for faith. The cosmological antinomy explicates the theological antinomy that God is Absolute-Relative. It states that while God as the Holy Trinity is complete fullness, immutable, and absolute, God is correlative to creation for God created the world out of God’s Love for creation. The sophiological antinomy expresses more clearly the cosmological antinomy, namely how God is relative and absolute in terms of God’s Wisdom. While God reveals Godself in God’s Wisdom, which is also God’s Divine Life and World in eternity, “God creates the world by His Wisdom, and this Wisdom, constituting the Divine foundation of the world.” God therefore abides in creation amidst time and space. God’s Wisdom exists in Godself as the fullness of ideas, yet it exists in creation in a germinal form.

207 God-in-Himself as Absolute cannot be known, and thus from the perspective of the human subject God as Absolute is the Divine Nothing.

208 Bulgakov, Icons and the Name of God, Ch. 2, Location 379 of 2657.

209 Ibid., Ch. 2, Location 525 of 2657.

210 Ibid., Ch. 2, Location 425 of 2657.

211 Gallaher, “There is Freedom,” p. 10.
These three antinomies provide the basic outline of Bulgakov’s Sophiology. Sophia refers to God who is revealed to us; while at the same time, God transcends Sophia (Theological antinomy). Sophia is Godself revealed. God as Sophia is therefore correlative with creation, yet God as Sophia remains immutable and eternal (Cosmological antinomy). Since God as Sophia is united with creation, creation has a Divine foundation that is Divine Wisdom (Sophiological antinomy). God in this sense abides in creation yet remains perfect and transcendent to creation. What follows for Bulgakov is that Sophia exists in a Divine and creaturely state. Divine Sophia refers to God as revealed, who contains the all-unity. creaturely Sophia is synonymous with creation. Divine and creaturely Sophia are ontologically identical. What distinguishes them is the modality of their being. Particularly, creaturely Sophia is Divine Sophia submerged in nothing, or Divine Sophia diminished of its fullness and glory. This echoes Palamas’ emphasis that God is the Divine Energy, yet God-in-Himself transcends Divine Energy. Gallaher argues that Bulgakov collapses the antinomy into one of its theses. (Gallaher, “There Is Freedom,” p. 16.) We ought to be cautious of this conclusion since Bulgakov uses antinomies to demarcate the boundaries of his theological thought. Antimony gives him a theological license, especially as an Orthodox theologian, to express kataphatically what is generally left obscure due to the apophatic emphasis in Orthodox theology. Bulgakov, BL, p. 60.

Creaturely Sophia is a kenosis of Divine Sophia, God’s kenotic act of Divinity. (Bulgakov, BL, p. 60.) Cf. Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above: A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov*, (Leominster: Gracewing, 2005), p. 35. Bulgakov is a panentheist. He stresses that creation is permeated by Divine Life but remains creaturely or autonomous. His theory of kenosis allows him to do this. Creaturely Sophia is a kenosis of Divine Sophia because creaturely Sophia lacks something that Divine Sophia has that in turn allows for the creaturely aspect of creaturely Sophia. What creaturely Sophia lacks are the Divine hypostases and their corresponding attributes or content, e.g. beauty, truth, fullness, and glory. (Note that human hypostases fulfill the roles of the Divine hypostases for creaturely Sophia, and thus creaturely Sophia retains the possibility of reclaiming its former glory, beauty, truth, and fullness as Divine Sophia to the extent that it is possible for a creaturely hypostasis to do so.) Thus creaturely Sophia is a potential Divine nature that God differentiated from God’s Divine Sophia. Nevertheless, creaturely Sophia always remains untied to God since God is the foundation of Divine Sophia.

What the kenosis of Divine Sophia entails is clearer when we consider Bulgakov’s teaching on the Incarnation. Bulgakov stresses that when the Divine Son is made Incarnate, He must undergo a kenosis. After the Incarnation the Son of God, Jesus Christ, does not experience His Divine Nature in the “fullness of self-revelation or consciousness of self.” (Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 4, Sec. II, Location 3661 of 7314) Rather his divinity is kenotically limited so that He lacks the experience of his glory and fullness of being. Only after His Ascension into heaven are
diminishment of Divine Sophia allows creation to differentiate itself from God and, more importantly, begins salvation history, which, as Solov’ev, ends in creation’s unity with God. Antinomy, as in Florensky, guards Bulgakov from the pantheistic claims of Solov’ev. Creaturely Sophia will always remain creaturely even though it will unite with Divine Sophia. Robert Slesinski summarizes this relationship between creaturely and Divine Sophia as the “principle linking and organizing world multiplicity,--natura naturans [creaturely Sophia] in relation to natura naturata [Divine Sophia].” Divine Sophia refers to God’s triune self-revelation, while creaturely Sophia refers to the ability of creation to receive that revelation. Sophia is the means Bulgakov uses to express Godhumanhood. Creation is able to receive God’s revelation and Incarnation because creation is in some way Divine; God is able to incarnate and reveal Godself because God is in some way creaturely.

Bulgakov relies on his theory of kenosis to further express how creaturely Sophia differentiates Herself from Divine Sophia. For God, creaturely Sophia is a kenotic sacrifice. Bulgakov interprets the doctrine creatio ex nihilio anew within this context. To be created out of nothing is for God to be united to nothing, which is also expressed as divesting the Divine self of these attributes restored to the Son of Son. Creaturely Sophia kenosis is similar to the kenosis of the Son of God in the incarnation it remains Divine in its foundation but exists in a creaturely mode of being. Unlike the Son of God, Who is a hypostasis, creaturely Sophia will not gain back its fullness, which would mean that it would no longer be a creaturely nature but the Divine nature.

217 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 50.
its fullness and glory. His theological warrant for his kenotic theory is 1 John 4:8 (God is Love) and Philippians 2:6 (Christ was in the form of God, but did not deem equality with God). To love means to sacrifice oneself for another; therefore, God, who loves from all eternity, sacrifices Godself from all eternity. In this context the Incarnation, which is a kenosis of the Son, (Phil 2:6) is one expression of God’s absolute, kenotic, self-depleting love. 220

As Divine Sophia in a state of kenosis, creaturely Sophia retains Divine Sophia’s epistemic characteristic. It is an image of Divine Sophia, and therefore creaturely Sophia includes, albeit unrealized, the images/logoi of Divine Sophia. These images are imprinted on creaturely Sophia. Thus, “[t]he heavenly world is the ideal anticipation of the earthly, and the earthly is the real fulfillment of the heavenly.” 221 Creaturely Sophia’s goal includes a type of incarnation of its logoi wherein created beings attain their likeness to these logoi. 222 In this way Bulgakov maintains that creaturely Sophia is an all-unity. 223 Albeit in a germinal manner, creaturely Sophia includes all things as the image of Divine Sophia.

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220 Gorodetzky, The Humiliated Christ, p. 162.

221 Bulgakov, JL, p. 67.

222 Creaturely Sophia, in other words, retains the potential to be fully united with the Divine Sophia. However, this union is a union by grace and not nature that can only occur through the mediation of the Holy Spirit, the grace giver. Thus creaturely Sophia after it was engendered by God will never again exist as Divine Sophia, but rather it will always remain the content of creatures, that is capable of being deified. However, Creaturely Sophia is a kenosis of Divine Sophia, and this aspect of kenosis demarcates the creatureliness of creaturely Sophia but also how creaturely Sophia remains untied to Divine Sophia to some extent. This is an antinomy, but also explains Bulgakov’s panenthiesm. Creaturely Sophia is sustained by the Divine Sophia. Nevertheless the union that is possible for creaturely and Divine Sophia will only occur through the human hypostasis and the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit. How this happens will be explained below. But it is important to note that this union or state of deification is strictly a state of grace. Creaturely Sophia will not become Divine Sophia, and by consequence the human hypostases will not become the Divine hypostases.

Following the Genesis account of creation, how the *logoi* of creaturely Sophia are realized is left to humankind. This follows from Bulgakov’s anthropology. Humankind as the image of God has a unique prerogative and mandate. To be made in the image of God is to be made in the image of the Divine Son, the Logos, who contains the *logoi* or divine proto-images of created being. Humankind’s relationship with creaturely Sophia directly parallels the Son’s relationship with Divine Sophia.\(^{224}\) Bestowed with the Divine image of the Son, humankind’s vocation is to be no less than a “god by grace”\(^ {225}\) or a “[guardian] of the universe.”\(^ {226}\) What this means will be discussed in the next chapter. It is sufficient to say now, however, that humankind has the freedom to determine whether creaturely Sophia becomes Divine or remains separated from God. After the original sin, it is only through Christ—who as the hypostatic union that united human and Divine Sophia/nature “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation”—that the reunion of creaturely Sophia with Divine Sophia is possible. Christ is the beginning of the realization of creaturely Sophia that all humankind must accomplish.\(^ {227}\)

Bulgakov’s insistence on the duality of Sophia as well as his antinomic claims about Sophia follows from his personalism. It is not by chance that Bulgakov sees himself as not only in continuity with Palamas but also with the *imiaslavtsy*.\(^ {228}\) Bulgakov supplies what both Palamas and the *imiaslavtsy* lacked, namely a modern comprehension of human subjectivity. His modern stress on the human subject allows Bulgakov to express more definitively how

\(^{224}\) Nicholas, *Wisdom from Above*, p. 42.


\(^{226}\) Bulgakov, *BB*, p. 20. This is Bulgakov’s interpretation of Gen 1:28. (Cf. Ps 82.6; Jn 10.34-35.)

\(^{227}\) Bulgakov, “Appendix 1,” p. 52.

\(^{228}\) Bulgakov, *BL*, p. 19.
theological claims premised on our encounter with God are possible without subsuming the human subject into Godself. As Mikhail Sergeev demonstrates, for Bulgakov religious claims are a result of religious experience, a religious synthetic judgment. At the heart of Bulgakov’s antinomic method is an experience of God as both transcendent and immanent that language fails to express.\textsuperscript{229} Winston Crum writes “the same human faculty that perceives God’s self-revelation also knows him to be completely free of the world or transcendent to it…It is logically necessary, therefore, to hold these opposing principles in an antinomic relationship.”\textsuperscript{230} Religious experience confirms God’s transcendence and immanence whereas discursive knowledge can only express this as a contradiction or antinomy.\textsuperscript{231} Human experience, therefore, provides a valuable category for Bulgakov to express God’s relationship to humankind and theological warrant for this seemingly contradictory claim. Hence, Bulgakov’s reliance on antinomy reveals the centrality of religious experience in his thought. For this reason Louth argues that Bulgakov’s Sophiology is not simply a theory but a “matter of experience.”\textsuperscript{232}

This experientialism pervades Bulgakov’s ideas about Sophia. To express God, Who is a personal being, Bulgakov looks towards human personality.\textsuperscript{233} He concludes that just as the human hypostatic self is not an abstraction but rather a living personal being that is always in relation to itself and others, so too is the Trinity. For Bulgakov the Sacred Scriptures’

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{229} Mikhail Sergeev, “The Religious-Philosophical Concept of Sophia: Its Genealogy and Evolution in Russian Thought in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” (PhD diss., Temple University, 1997), p. 130.
\item \textsuperscript{231} Seiling, “From Antinomy to Sophiology,” p. 263.
\item \textsuperscript{233} Meerson, The Trinity of Love, p. 169.
\end{itemize}
presentation of God as a human-like personality, not an abstract principle, confirms this conclusion. For this reason as Nichols notes, Bulgakov rejects traditional Trinitarian theologies that appropriate philosophical language to the Trinity.\textsuperscript{234} His preference for using Sophia and Glory to speak about God’s substance as opposed to \textit{ousia} is based on their frequent usage in the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{235} Sophia and Glory are associated with the Divine Hypostases, but they are not the Hypostases. Ironically, to express God’s personality, Bulgakov relies not on the Scriptures, but rather abstract discussions about human personality as found in the thought of Fichte. He concludes that God is three personal “Is” which are consubstantial and united in their living/personal nature, i.e. God’s personality. This is best expressed by his neologism “Trihypostatic being.” In other words, God is an absolute personality, God exhausts personality: therefore “the Divine Person is consciousness of self (of me, of you, of him) but also of the me outside of self.”\textsuperscript{236} God does not have three separate persons, but is one Trihypostatic person expressed in the Trinity of persons. Since God is Love, this means that the Divine Person is in reality the “reciprocity of love eternally realized,”\textsuperscript{237} or, as Meerson puts it, a “ceaseless movement of divine selflessness in love.”\textsuperscript{238} God’s personal consciousness of triune self is inseparable from God’s nature, the content of this self-realization. Given this personalism and based on his experience and the Sacred Scriptures, Sophia cannot be described as an abstract

\textsuperscript{234} Nichols, \textit{Wisdom from Above}, pp. 22-23.

\textsuperscript{235} Cf. Proverbs 8.

\textsuperscript{236} Arjakovsky, “The Sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov,” p. 223.

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., p. 223.

\textsuperscript{238} Meerson, \textit{The Trinity of Love}, p. 176.
entity, i.e. simply *ousia*. Yet this is not all Bulgakov has to say about Sophia. Throughout his career Bulgakov vacillates between different expressions as to what this means. For instance in *Unfading Light* he expresses Sophia as “the love of Love” or a fourth hypostasis that does not participate in the inner-divine life; however, he corrects this in 1925 and creates the neologism as *ipostasnost’* or hypostaticity to express this. Although he retains this language in his later works, he stresses that Sophia is “supremely alive life” that possesses personality as feminine passivity, or a self-surrendering love. Bulgakov’s appropriation of personal characteristics to Sophia is not simply due to his preference for speaking biblically about God, but also that the appropriation of personal characteristics to Sophia guarantees the communication of personal character from one person to another in the inner life of the Trinity. Sophia is the characterizing power of each hypostasis. He argues that Sophia responds to the conscious love of the Divine Hypostases by giving Herself to their consciousness. In so doing, She is entirely penetrated by each hypostasis.

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241 Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 1, Sec. III, Location 1533 of 7314

242 Ibid., Ch. 1, Sec. III, Location 1533-6 of 7314.

243 By “personal character” I mean the qualities of each hypostasis that differentiates one hypostasis from another hypostasis.

contends that she is an impersonal being since she does not merge with personality, yet remains
the content of this personality.\textsuperscript{245} How exactly an impersonal being can be personal is not
entirely clear. Nichols employs the analogy of self-love to help explain Bulgakov here. The
argument is as follows: Love is not simply love between two persons. If God truly is Love and is
an absolute personality, then God is Love in every sense of the term, including love of self, albeit
without the selfishness attributed to human self-love. We can say that God loves Godself (i.e.
God as Trinity loving each hypostasis and Sophia) and that Godself loves God (i.e. Sophia
loving God).\textsuperscript{246} However, since the latter is not a center of consciousness as a hypostasis, this
love must be expressed impersonally. As opposed to the hypostases that hypostatize Sophia,
which involves some form of taking from Sophia, Sophia gives up/yields Herself to these
hypostases. Expressed within the traditional gender binary, Sophia is passive towards the
hypostases; thus she loves in a feminine manner. Sophia’s feminine love supports the biblical
portrayal of Sophia as Lady Wisdom, who is largely passive in relation to God. Nevertheless, by
attributing personality to Sophia, Bulgakov borders on the absurd, for, in effect, he argues that
Sophia is an impersonal personality, which is a logical impossibility. Perhaps what we find here
is an example of Bulgakov’s antinomic methodology where, as Arjakovsky describes, Bulgakov
leaves the “sphere of rational knowledge in order to speak in symbolic terms.”\textsuperscript{247}

\textsuperscript{245} Bulgakov, BL, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{246} Nichols, \textit{Wisdom from Above}, p. 25
\textsuperscript{247} Arjakovsky, “The Sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov,” p. 228. Their remains in Bulgakov’s conception of
Sophia unresolved issues, such as how can Sophia, a characterizing principle, act personally, insofar as Sophia gives
up herself to the consciousness of each Divine Hypostasis? It is clear that we are dealing with an antinomy. Thus
Bulgakov does not, nor can he prpound to a logical solution to this quandry.
Sophia expresses biblically God’s relationship to the world. However, God as Sophia is not solely the economic Trinity, but rather both the economic and immanent Trinity. Bulgakov attributes to each of the hypostases that hypostatize Sophia a distinctive attribute. To the Father he attributes the absolute, who is unknown in Godself. The Father is the initiator of Gohumanhood. He reveals Godself in the “bihypostatic unity” of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son hypostatizes Sophia as wisdom, or God the Father’s content; hence He is the image of the Father. The Holy Spirit on the other hand hypostatizes Sophia: the Holy Spirit is the manifestation of the Father’s revelation or glory.

3.3 Section Two: Theological Methodology

3.3.1 Theological Dialectics

Bulgakov is a historically minded theologian. Revelation is not a dead letter passed down from generation to generation but rather a dynamic divine-human process. As a divine-human process, it entails the ambiguity and tension of human existence, which will at times involve dialogue and virulent debate. As evidenced in The Lamb of God, theological debate is a necessary part of the Church’s dogmatic history. It demonstrates the human side of the process of revelation, namely humankind’s attempt, albeit at times quite feeble, to comprehend God. The upshot of this is that it recasts the villains of church history, the heretics, in a new light. Although they reached an incorrect conclusion, they were not only a catalyst for a dogmatic statement, but they represent one side of the truth contained in a dogma. With respect to the heretics

\[\text{248} \quad \text{Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 40.}\]


\[\text{250} \quad \text{Cf. Bulgakov, LG, Introduction, Sec. II, Location 768 of 7314.}\]
repudiated by the seven great ecumenical councils, their heresy is not a denial of truth per se, but rather their inability to transcend the dialectic which results in their one-sidedness. What they fail to do is what the Church accomplishes in its conciliar dogmatic teaching, namely a synthesis between their position and the position of their opponent. The dogmas of the Church incorporated as well as transcend that dialectic in its synthetic teaching. The Council of Chalcedon is a case in point because its teaching on the hypostatic union is not strictly a denial of Alexandrian theology but a synthesis of the Alexandrian school (monophysite school) with the Antiochene school.\textsuperscript{251}

This dialectical reading of history is appropriated in his Mariology. In \textit{The Burning Bush}, Bulgakov interprets the Council of Ephesus’ teaching on Mary within his dialectical reading of history. In this instance, however, what is important to him is not the historical dialectic between Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria that the Council Fathers appropriate in their dogmatic synthesis, but a new dialectic that will draw out the implication of the dogma of Theotokos for the Orthodox faithful. His dialectic juxtaposes Nestorius and the Council of Ephesus. From this juxtaposition, he arrives at a new synthesis that Mary is the pneumatophoric hypostasis.

His rationale for setting up this dialectic is the continued presence of Nestorianism in the Church. Although Nestorius was defeated, his position that Mary is Christotokos has disseminated itself among believers. No names are mentioned by Bulgakov, but Bulgakov argues that Nestorianism is present in the Church because there are still many who believe that the begetting of the Son in Mary was an external operation whereby “flesh is formed in Mary’s

\textsuperscript{251} The council of Chalcedon offers the synthesis that neither the Anthiochene nor Alexandrian school was able to reach. The schools set up the dialectic, but they were unable to reach a synthesis because of their one-sidedness.
womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, and in that flesh the logos dwelled as a soul.” Mary in this sense is a completely passive vessel who provides only human flesh to Christ. In this interpretation, Mary is not the Mother of God but the Mother of Christ’s humanity, the Christotokos. The problem is that even though the Church declares that Mary is the Theotokos, it has not provided a clear expression of what that means for Mary. His historical assessment is correct insofar as the Council of Ephesus declared the Theotokos on Christological, not Mariological, grounds. For the council fathers, the importance of the dogma of the Theotokos is that it safeguards an orthodox interpretation of the hypostatic union of Christ. Since Christ united hypostatically the divine and human natures, to deny that Mary is Mother of his Divinity is tantamount to a denial of the hypostatic union. It implies that Christ has two persons.

Given the importance of Mary to orthodox Christology and the lack of a lucid understanding of what the Theotokos means, Bulgakov finds his Mariology warranted. His doctrine of the pneumatophoric hypostasis is his attempt to purge Nestorianism from Orthodoxy. However, Bulgakov does not demonize Nestorius. Nestorius is an important person who raises a critical question to which the Church has not responded, namely “How in actual fact can Mary, a human being, become and be called Theotokos?” If “like can beget only like,” then

252 Bulgakov, BB, p. 86.

253 Perhaps Solov’ev and like-minded theologians were the Orthodox persons Bulgakov had in mind. In Solov’ev’s account Mary has largely an instrumental significance.


255 Ibid., p. 89.


257 Bulgakov, BB, p. 87.

258 Cf. Ibid., p. 87.
either it follows that Mary must be Divine to be Theotokos or that Mary is the Christotokos because she is merely human. Bulgakov agrees with Nestorius that Mary can only be called Theotokos if she is Divine Motherhood. Since like can only know like and Mary is the Theotokos, then Mary must truly be the Mother of God. Mary must be something more than merely a human mother. The maternal likeness that Mary appropriates in becoming the Theotokos is none other than the motherhood of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the dogma of the Theotokos suggests that a union exists between Mary and the Holy Spirit. For Bulgakov this is already implied in the condemnations of Nestorianism: if Mary only gives humanity to Jesus and has no role in the divine life-giving maternal action of the Holy Spirit, then Ephesus is effectively refuted. Mary would only be Christotokos. It is not sufficient to say that Mary is the mother of the hypostatic union without defining how she participates in the actual union of the human and divine natures in the Divine hypostasis of the Son. The only alternative he finds is his synthetic doctrine of the pneumatophoric hypostasis, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Five.259

3.3.2 Biblical and Liturgical Hermeneutic

Although Bulgakov is a dialectical thinker, dialectics are not the exclusive method he employs.260 With regard to his Mariology, many of his ideas are derived from his biblical and liturgical hermeneutics. His central hermeneutical principle is lex orandi lex credendi.261 What is

259 Bulgakov also employs dialectics when he examines the debate over the creation of the soul in this same work. (Cf. Bulgakov, BB, p. 58.)

260 “Dogmas, if they are possible, are so not in the sense of logical and dialectical deductions but only as religious knowing.” (Bulgakov, UF, p. 63) Dialectics cannot alone produce dogma.

261 This dictum dates back to at least the fourth century when Prosper of Aquitaine used it. (Cf. Prosper of Aquitaine, PL 51:209-210.)
prayed and experienced in the life of Orthodox believers forms the basis for his insight on Church doctrine. Therefore, for Bulgakov the official worship of the Church has a “commanding and authoritative significance for the Theologian.” His stress on the importance of the Liturgy has led some, like Louth, to argue that he is a liturgical theologian, albeit only in the sense as one who “writes out of the Liturgy.” For Bulgakov theology is not an abstract science, but rather expresses the life and experience of the Church as recounted in the Liturgy. According to Bulgakov, a theologian should not simply be an academic, but one who is a committed Christian who actively participates in the liturgical rites. Bulgakov writes “the altar and the theologian’s cell—his workspace—must be conjoined. The deepest origins of the theologian’s inspiration must be nourished from the altar.”

Nevertheless, Bulgakov does not simply restate the Liturgy. As Alexander I. Negrov demonstrates, Bulgakov developed a sophisticated hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures and Tradition that guides his theology. I mention tradition and not the Liturgy because for Bulgakov the Liturgy is tradition but tradition is not exhausted by the Liturgy. Thus, the teachings of the ecumenical councils, the Church Fathers, and magisterial teachings are all sources of tradition.

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263 Bulgakov writes that the sources of the teachings on Divine Wisdom are the patronal feasts of the Sophia of Kiev and Novogord and the Sophia icons and services that are associated with the Mother of God. (Bulgakov, “A Memorandum presented in October, 1935 to his Grace Metropolitan Evlogie by Professor Archpriest Sergius Bulgakov,” pp. 18-19.) He also notes that the sources of true dogma are the ecumenical councils and service-books. (Ibid., p. 19.)


However, the Liturgy has a commanding and primary significance. Bulgakov writes “I shall not exaggerate if I say that out of various forms of tradition, liturgical texts have the most authority, as compared to other sources...liturgical witness has, as a matter of fact, a binding authority, no less that the direct indications in Holy Scriptures.” And again Bulgakov writes “The Infallibility of the Church is manifested in its life of prayer, Divine Worship.” In particular, at least in regard to Mariology, the Liturgy is a central authority and the primary source for his theological inspiration about Mary. Liturgy, however, for Bulgakov includes not simply the liturgical texts but the entire worship experience that is expressed in the iconography and church architecture.

However, the tradition as expressed in the Liturgy is not a second source of revelation; it is intimately connected with the Sacred Scriptures. Bulgakov, preempting contemporary Orthodox and Catholic conceptions of Sacred Tradition, calls Sacred Tradition the “living

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270 The Liturgy and the Scriptures are not juxtaposed in Bulgakov’s thought. The Liturgy provides Bulgakov with a tool to correctly interpret the Scriptures. The Liturgy offers a hermeneutical key to acquire the mind of the Church. Take for instance the vespers for the feast of the Annunciation (March 25). This service includes five readings: Genesis 28:10-17, i.e. Jacob’s ladder; Ezekiel 43:27-44, i.e. the closed gate of the Jerusalem Temple that no one but the Prince may pass through; Proverbs 9:1-11, “Wisdom has built her house”; Exodus 3:1-8, i.e. the Burning Bush; Proverbs 8:22-30, i.e. Wisdom’s eternal place. All of the verses play an important role in his Mariology. The readings from Proverbs are the basis for his Mary-Sophia exegesis. Mary is the manifestation of Sophia on Earth; she is the house of wisdom. Moreover, her place has been prepared by God from all eternity. At the same time she is the ladder between Heaven and Earth (Gen 28:10-17), who remained a perpetual virgin (Ezekiel 43:27-44). She is a creature who retains her creatureliness despite her deification (Ex 3:1-8).
tradition” of the Church. By “living tradition” Bulgakov means that it is an ecclesial-interpretive tradition of the Scriptures through which the Church applies the Scriptures to contemporary time. It is the continual expression of the life of the Church, which proceeds from the Church’s direct and personal encounter with God during its Liturgical services. Revelation is not simply the written text of Scripture, but rather an active relationship between God and humankind. Within this relational approach to revelation, the Scriptures have a central place.

If tradition is the life of the Church, then Scripture is the life of tradition. The Scriptures give a written witness to the direct encounter with God as expressed in revelation. Contemporaneously, we can say that for Bulgakov the Scriptures are formally sufficient in terms of tradition. Scripture provides the central teachings of the faith, but they are neither self-revealing nor contain explicitly all the meaning of revelation. The material sufficiency of revelation is supplied by the collective, ongoing experience of the Church, i.e. living tradition, which is best expressed in the Liturgy. Therefore, “tradition creates a more full and complete picture as to what sacred text really means.” Tradition can foster an experience whereby we gain direct access to the mind of the biblical authors through the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, we gain a direct understanding of what the Bible means in a contemporary setting. In practice,

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273 Bulgakov is clear that the Bible is not materially sufficient (Bulgakov, “Revelation,” p. 148.)

274 Revelation itself is ongoing in the sense that it is a divine-human process. Since humankind is continually changing, for revelation to remain relevant it must be inculcated. (Bulgakov, “Revelation,” pp. 139-140.)

275 Negrov, p. 256.
tradition checks against incorrect interpretations of Scripture. Given his collegial understanding of tradition, the interpretation of the Bible must involve the Church as a whole, not simply experts or an aggregate of individuals. 276 Thus, Bulgakov insists that revelation is bestowed not on an individual, but on “man in the all-inclusive sense, and thus on the whole of mankind through him,” and although this revelation is delimited by space and time, it has an eternal value insofar as it retains its significance for humanity through the living tradition of the Church. 277 In practice his view of revelation entails that there are at least two sources of revelation that we may use when approaching contemporary questions about theology. When he approaches the question of Mary’s sinlessness that he finds decidedly underdeveloped in Orthodoxy, he looks to both the Liturgy and Sacred Scripture as sources for theology. However, since Sacred Scripture is the formal source of revelation, he regularly makes recourse to Sacred Scripture to support his conclusions that are primarily derived from the Liturgy.

Interestingly, as a historically-minded theologian, Bulgakov incorporates historical-critical scholarship into his theology. For Bulgakov the value of biblical scholarship is that it demonstrates the continuity between tradition and scripture, since the Bible is written tradition. 278 Additionally, it prevents the Scriptures from becoming a “dead letter,” antiquated verses, or “equal to the Word of God.” 279 Oddly, given Bulgakov’s positive account of biblical criticism, he rarely employs them in his theological writings. The same is true for historical criticisms of the liturgical texts he uses. His reaction to the biblical scholarship of his day

276 Cf. Ibid., p. 260.
278 See Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church, p. 11.
supplies us with his rationale for his reticence on historical-critical scholarship. Although Bulgakov rarely refers to particular scholars, he takes issue with biblical scholarship that oversteps its bounds by making religious claims. The role of biblical science is to produce scholarship that can help the Church better understand how God uses language and culture to express Divine truth. After we understand the cultural conditioning of the Scriptures, we can destroy “barriers which hinder us in our understanding of the Word of God.” These barriers result from a lack of coordination between the historical images present in the Scriptures and the modern consciousness of humankind. Biblical science is then limited in its historical scope; it cannot proceed to judge faith claims because it lacks the necessary element to do so, i.e. faith. Judgments made outside the faith community will result in overly rationalistic and simplified claims that fail to grasp the Divine-human process of revelation.

Historical studies are a tool for the theologian. When scholarship conflicts with the truths of worship, the scholarship will lose out since its scope is limited to natural, historical science. Bulgakov, therefore, has no qualms about making axiomatic historically dubious traditions, such as the tradition that Mary was a Temple Virgin. Not only is Scripture silent about this event, but most scholarship on this tradition demonstrates that the feast originates from a non-canonical gospel, Proto-Evangelium of James, and that there is no evidence for a cult of Virgins to have

280 These unnamed scholars are liberal Protestants. (Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church, p.17.)
281 Bulgakov, “Revelation,” p. 159.
282 Ibid., p. 160.
283 Ibid., p. 161.
ever existed in the Temple in Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{284} For Bulgakov, however, because this tradition is a liturgical feast it is a true event.

Nevertheless, historical scholarship plays an important role in his theology of the Dormition.\textsuperscript{285} As Bulgakov notes, historical scholarship demonstrates not only the late date of its celebration, i.e. around the fourth century, but the mythical elements present in the earliest accounts of the Dormition. According to Bulgakov, for a rationalist these facts give enough warrant to adduce that Mary did not ascend into heaven as the tradition tells us. For the believer, however, the late date of scholarship and the legendary language is indicative of the miraculous aspect of this event and God’s providence. Bulgakov writes “the language of legend alone is appropriate” to express this event.\textsuperscript{286} Because human language is incapable of expressing a supernatural event naturally, it must take recourse in legend and myth for an adequate expression of this truth. Bulgakov interprets the four centuries of silence preceding its incorporation into the Liturgy theologically; he argues that this is an example of the “dispensation of Providence.” God judged that the Church was not yet ready for this truth to be revealed until the fourth century.

Note that Bulgakov does not reject the scholarship, but he uses it as a tool to further explicate the supernatural aspect of the Dormition. The scholarship provides Bulgakov here with insight into not only Divine Providence but the importance of symbolism and legend to express miraculous events.


\textsuperscript{285} This is the only time Bulgakov explicitly employs historical scholarship in \textit{The Burning Bush}.

\textsuperscript{286} Bulgakov, BB, p. 73. In his \textit{Unfading Light}, Bulgakov writes “myth is the instrument of religious knowing.” (Bulgakov, UF, p. 67.) Dogmatic formula is an attempt to state with clarity this myth. (Bulgakov, UF, p. 73.)
Now that I have spoken generally about Bulgakov’s liturgical and biblical hermeneutics, the remainder of this chapter will examine how Bulgakov uses these interpretive methods in his Mariology.

3.3.3 Liturgical Tradition

Given his biblical hermeneutics that stresses the role of the Liturgy in the interpretation of the Scriptures and the paucity of direct references to Mary in the Bible, Bulgakov relies heavily on the liturgical tradition for his Mariology. The title of his Mariological work *The Burning Bush* is indicative of this. The Burning Bush is an icon of Mary that bespeaks of her sinlessness and glory, which are two very important themes in Bulgakov’s work. Moreover, in this text, he not only frequently quotes from the Liturgy, but provides two appendices that include quotations from various liturgical celebrations in support of his conclusions. The appendices function as proof texts for Bulgakov’s two main themes in the body of this work: Mary’s sinlessness without being immaculately conceived (Chapters One through Three) and Mary’s glorified being (Chapter Four). Appendix One corresponds to the first theme and Appendix Two corresponds to the second.

Regarding Mary’s sinlessness without her Immaculate Conception, Bulgakov argues that the Liturgy provides an overwhelming witness in support of this. Within Appendix One, the

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287 Bulgakov is a liturgical literalist. One major problem with his method is that Bulgakov does not distinguish religious liturgical poetry from prayers and hymns in the Liturgy that have a substantial dogmatic value. For Bulgakov seems that all verses in the Liturgy have a dogmatic value. A critic of Bulgakov may argue that the Theotokian hymn, which Bulgakov interprets ontologically as a proof for Mary’s placement above the angels and also is evidence that Mary is creaturely Sophia, could, in fact, simply be a poetic expression that points to the honor an Orthodox believer should give to Mary. Moreover, in Bulgakov’s thought the Liturgy is more significant than dogmatic statements promulgated by the ecumenical councils, which is an oddity, especially for a western Catholic reader.

288 Bulgakov, BB, p. 9. Based on the liturgical services of “Service for the burial of a child” and the “Entrance into the Temple,” Bulgakov concludes that Mary was sinless from her conception until her Annunciation. From the first
liturgical services quoted describe Mary as such: “Holy of Holies,” “spotless,” and a “pure one.” Although none of the liturgical verses address the Immaculate Conception, based on his argumentation it is clear that they were chosen to provide support for an alternative expression of Mary’s sinlessness. The alternative explanation Bulgakov offers to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception stresses not only her active, personal accomplishment, but also the importance of Christ’s genealogy and the righteousness of her ancestors.\textsuperscript{289} On the former point, his quotation from the Liturgy of \textit{Entrance into the Temple} is important because this feast celebrates Mary’s maturation into the divine temple; this entails Mary’s activity as opposed to her passivity.\textsuperscript{290} On the latter point, Bulgakov’s excerpts from \textit{The Sunday of the Holy Ancestors} and \textit{The Conception of St. Anne When She Conceived The Most Holy Theotokos} highlight the connection between

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service Bulgakov argues that this age, presumably conception until the age of three, is an age of incorruption from sin. At three, Mary entered the Temple where according to the liturgical feast she led a life of prayer to God; and, in fact, she was fed by angels and in communion with them. (Bulgakov, BB, p. 8.) Bulgakov finds it unlikely that someone who was in communion with angels could sin. Mary left the Temple and was placed under the protection of righteous Joseph. Afterwards at the Annunciation, also a liturgical feast, she receives the Holy Spirit and her purity is elevated to a heavenly state. For Bulgakov attributing personal sin to Mary during her time under the protection of “righteous Joseph,” or at the time of the Annunciation, or after the Annunciation is simply blasphemous. Not only is there no biblical or liturgical ground—Bulgakov, however, admits there is some Patristic ground for doing so, i.e. Origen, St. Basil, and John Chrysostom—for attributing sin to Mary, especially after the Annunciation, but the services of the Theotokos are clear that Mary is “the true divine temple pure from infancy on.” (Bulgakov, BB, p. 9.) Bulgakov relies on an argument of fittingness. It is fitting that Mary remains personally sinless because personal sin is that which separates us from God. Sin for Bulgakov has no ontological value; it is a “privation, an accident.” (Bulgakov, BL, p. 147.) Sin is a state of being prompted by personal choice. To sin in any way is to make a deliberate choice against God; it is to separate oneself from God. All sin is ultimately a choice for self. Mary in her fiat gives up herself completely to God. In this giving up of self, she expresses her perfect sinlessness that has no desire for self. “The smallest sin would have broken the integrity of this self-giving and the power of this expression [i.e. Mary’s \textit{fiat}].”(Bulgakov, BB, p. 41.) Mary’s \textit{fiat} was not simply a response but her acceptance of God’s will with her entire being. This is necessary because God requires this. God will only become human when humankind is ready and willing to receive God. Otherwise God, Who vouchsafes human freedom, would in some way deny this freedom since God would incarnate in a woman who was not completely accepting of the Incarnation. To suggest that Mary could sin after giving birth to Christ is unfounded; it is simply unthinkable to suggest that Mary could reach a perfect state of holiness, for which we are all made, experience the grace of Incarnation, and then reject God. Ultimately, however, Bulgakov results to an argument from authority, the Liturgy, to support his thesis that Mary is sinless.

\textsuperscript{289} Bulgakov, BB, p. 54.

\textsuperscript{290} Ibid., p. 12.
Mary and her ancestors. Two verses in particular demonstrate this: “the saints praise you in
glory, because from their seed is a blessed fruit, she who bore you without seed” (The Sunday of
the Holy Ancestors) and “The prophetic words are now fulfilled, for the mountain of the holy
ones is firmly established in the womb” (Conception of St. Anne).²⁹¹

The second appendix refers to Mary’s glorification in the context of her Dormition. The
Glorification is important to Bulgakov because it points to the completion of the Mother of
God’s life and her role in heaven as an intercessor for humanity. Ultimately, he argues that Mary
in her glorification fully participates in her vocation as the revelation of the Holy Spirit. The
verses in Appendix Two are appropriately taken from the Akathist of the Dormition of the
Theotokos, the most important liturgical text on the Dormition of Mary. In the Akathist, although
there is no mention of Mary as the pneumatophoric hypostasis, the implication is there given his
argumentation in Chapter Four; the verses he provides stress that Mary is raised by the “all-
active Spirit of God,” that she “co-reigns” with the Son,²⁹² and that she intercedes for us.²⁹³

Although the liturgical verse “more honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious
beyond compare than the Seraphim” is not mentioned in either appendix, it is quoted fourteen
times in The Burning Bush. This is one of the verses that Bulgakov most frequently uses. It
begins Bulgakov’s discussion with Mary as a warning to his readers of the impossibility to
express fully the Orthodox veneration of Mary that is experienced and practiced by Orthodox

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 13.
²⁹² See my discussion below.
²⁹³ Salvation is an activity of the Holy Spirit, through whom, according to Bulgakov, Mary saves. (Bulgakov, BB,
p. 109.) Bulgakov’s stress on Mary’s intercessory function derives from the Canon of Prayer to the Most Holy
Theotokos at the departure of a soul, which states that Mary meets the soul immediately after death, (Cf. Bulgakov,
BB, p. 70.) and Proskomedia, where a portion of the unconsecrated Eucharistic bread is set aside in honor of Mary
next to the first portion set aside in honor of Christ.
believers. Within the text itself, it is important to him because it points to Mary’s exalted place in heaven after her glorification. Mary is even higher than the highest choirs of angels, which for Bulgakov means that Mary is glorified beyond them not only in degree but in Essence. Given the fact that angels stand as prototypes of humankind, this verse also expresses Mary’s transcendent place in humanity, providing a liturgical warrant for his speculations about Mary in relation to both the angelic world, redeemed humanity, and Sophia. This will be discussed in Chapter Five.

3.3.4 Scripture

Although according to Bulgakov there are three levels of biblical interpretation, the literal, the allegorical, and the mystical, the allegorical and mystical interpretations dominate his theology of Mary in The Burning Bush. Whereas an allegorical interpretation reveals the meaning of a passage that is implicit, the mystical interpretation refers to a meaning that is only revealed with God’s help. Both methods confirm the teaching of the Church as expressed in its Tradition or Liturgy.

An example of his allegorical method is his interpretation of Mary’s fiat. (Luke 1:38) The hidden meaning of this verse is that Mary is personally sinless, which is derived from the tradition. According to Bulgakov it stands to reason that a sinful person could not give his/her fiat or complete expression of assent to God’s will; therefore, Mary must be sinless. Once he establishes this, this verse functions as an interpretive tool to biblically base his speculations

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294 Bulgakov, BB, p. 5.
295 Negrov, p. 261.
296 In The Burning Bush he quotes this verse eight separate times. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) is also important. Bulgakov uses this famous canticle to place Mary’s mediation squarely within the mediation of Christ. (Bulgakov, BB, p. 10.)
regarding Mary’s relationship to the Holy Spirit as well as Mary’s role in her salvation. The verse confirms Bulgakov’s doctrine of synergy, which stresses that God does not compel but always allows for human freedom and responsibility.²⁹⁷ Mary in her *fiat* is the perfect expression of human cooperation with God.²⁹⁸

Once Bulgakov establishes Mary’s sinlessness, he turns to other examples of personally sinless people to understand what this means. Christ, who is sinless by virtue of his Incarnation, is a case in point. Bulgakov allegorically interprets Romans 8:3 that Christ appeared in “the likeness of the flesh of sin” as a basis for his explanation of Mary’s personal sinlessness.²⁹⁹ His argument is that all sin is not the same. Christ, who is sinless as God, cannot personally sin, thus to take upon himself “the likeness of the flesh of sin” is none other than to take upon himself the effect of the original sin or the infirmity of nature associated with the original sin. Mary is sinful only in this manner; she suffers from the infirmity of nature. Unlike her Son, it is natural to her as opposed to something that she assumes. Bulgakov continues this allegorical interpretation of Christological verses with respect to Christ’s temptation (Cf. Heb 4.15; Heb 2:18), death,³⁰⁰ royal glorification,³⁰¹ and relationship to Adam and Eve.³⁰²

²⁹⁷ Bulgakov, BB, p. 69.
³⁰⁰ Bulgakov compares the violent death of Christ to the natural death of Mary as evidence of Mary’s original sin. (Bulgakov, BB, pp. 71-72.)
³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 75-76.
³⁰² Ibid., p. 80.
This allegorical methodology continues with respect to Mary’s relationship to the Holy Spirit. Based on these passages: Luke 3:22 (the Holy Spirit’s manifestations as a dove), Acts 2:3 (the Holy Spirit’s manifestations as fiery tongues), Genesis 22:11-15 (the Holy Spirit’s manifestations in the form of an angel), Acts 2:38 (the Holy Spirit’s manifestations as gifts), and John 16: 13-15 (the Holy Spirit continues Christ’s work), Bulgakov defines the Holy Spirit’s personality and function in the Bible. Then he applies the activity of the Holy Spirit, which is to manifest the Son, to the Holy Spirit’s relationship to Mary. Mary is the means through whom the Holy Spirit manifests the Son.

A good example of his mystical interpretive method is his sophianic interpretation of Mary. Unlike his allegorical methods, these interpretations are not implicit, nor can they be deduced, but rather they are strictly the result of the Church’s worship. The arguments tend to be based on authority as opposed to rationality. Wisdom 9.1, “Wisdom has built herself a house and established seven pillars,” is an important verse he uses. Bulgakov is clear that the association of this verse with Mary is a result of Russian liturgical worship. Particularly, it reflects the icons of Sophia in the churches dedicated to Holy Wisdom in Kiev and Novgorod. The interpretation revealed is that the Holy Spirit is wisdom and Mary is the house in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. As this Mary-Sophia reading continues in his exegesis of sister-bride imagery in the Song of Songs (Cf. Song 1.8-16; 2.2, 10; 3.6, 4; 4.3-9) that he extends to bridal imagery in the New Testament: if Mary, as Sophia, is the Bride of God in the Old Testament, then she is also...
the Bride of Christ in the New Testament. Because these verses are traditionally interpreted allegorically to refer to the relationship of Christ to the Church, they provide Bulgakov with a biblical foundation for his ecclesiological interpretation of Mary. She is the image of every soul in relationship to God as becoming a part of the Church in the process of ecclesialization. His mystical interpretation continues in his exegesis of Luke 7:35, “wisdom is justified in her children” that confirms this sophiological interpretation of Mary. Mary is the first creaturely hypostasis to hypostatize Creaturely Sophia; she is the first creature to be completely deified in soul and body, and thus she is united with God by grace. In other words, Wisdom is justified in Mary because she accomplishes the goal of creaturely Sophia: to be united to Divine Sophia so that in creaturely Sophia “God already is ‘all in all.’”(1 Cor 15:28) More on this will be said in Chapter Five.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview of Bulgakov’s Sophiology and methodology. This chapter has provided a framework to understand some of his more difficult ideas such as his theology of the Trinitarian image of humankind and the Holy Spirit’s relationship to humankind that will be discussed in the next chapter. Even though Bulgakov is an Orthodox theologian who is committed to the Orthodox tradition, his stress on Godhumanhood and creating a strong biblical and liturgical foundation for his thoughts places his thoughts in direct contrast with many of the Church Fathers and, therefore, many of his contemporaries. Bulgakov’s goal is not to create a new dogma, but rather to engage Orthodoxy with modern world. Thus, he is willing to

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305 Cf. Ibid., pp. 103-104.
306 Cf. Ibid., p. 103, 105.
307 Ibid., p. 105.
speculate far beyond many of his contemporaries about issues, which eventually leads to his condemnation by two separate episcopal entities. In the next chapters I will outline some of his boldest ideas he made in the context of his Mariology.
4 Chapter Four: Humankind, the Fall, and Mary

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine Bulgakov’s anthropology, doctrine of sin, and doctrine of grace in the context of his Mariology. It will discuss Mary’s sinlessness and provide the necessary background to understand Mary’s role in the human race as the archetypical feminine, the pneumatophoric hypostasis, and how Mary participates in our salvation that will be discussed in Chapter Five. Corresponding to the three themes of Bulgakov’s anthropology and doctrines of sin and grace, this chapter will be divided into three sections. In Section One I examine Bulgakov’s doctrine of the image of God, spiritual bisexuality, and the relationship between humankind and the Trinity. After I have established that in Bulgakov’s view to be made in the image of God is to be made in the image of the Trinity, which appropriates the Trinitarian antinomy and perichoretic relations between the divine persons to humankind, in Section Two I will argue that these insights allow us to understand Mary’s sinlessness. I will establish this through the examination of Bulgakov’s doctrine of the original sin, Adam’s all-humanhood, and human heredity. Section Three examines God’s role in Mary’s sinlessness and her relationship to the Holy Spirit in tandem with my elucidation of Bulgakov’s doctrine of grace.

4.2 Section One: Bulgakov’s Anthropology

4.2.1 Image of God

In Chapter One I demonstrated the influence that the Russian Religious Renaissance had on Bulgakov’s ideas about sexuality and how Bulgakov distanced himself from Gnostic and erotic androgynous interpretations of humankind.\(^{308}\) The ideas about sexuality that Bulgakov

develops in the first two decades of the twentieth century, with little correction, are appropriated by him in his theological anthropology and Sophiology written during his theological period (1925-1944). This is evident in that fact that sexuality for Bulgakov is a defining characteristic of humankind; furthermore Bulgakov retains a theory of the human androgyne popular in the Russian Religious Renaissance. For Bulgakov sexuality is not simply a characteristic of a human person but rather expresses their spiritual mode of being. To be made in the image of God is to be made an androgynous being or, to use Bulgakov’s term, a spiritually bisexual (dukhovnaya dvupolost) being.

Nonetheless, before I explicate his theology of the image of God, it is important to note that there is no clear consensus among contemporary scholarship on Bulgakov’s androgyne understanding of humankind. Although Evgenii Bershtein, Regula M. Zwahlen, George H. Tavard, and Brenda Meehan argue for some form of a bisexual interpretation of

309 This can explain Bulgakov’s treatment of the image of God that is clearly at odds with the majority of the Church Fathers. The majority of the Church Fathers interpret the image of God psychologically as the intellect, will or action. (For a reliable overview of the Church Fathers’ positions on the image of God see Martien Parmentier, “Greek Patristic foundations for a theological anthropology of women in their distinctiveness as Human Beings,” Anglican Theological Review 84.3 (2002): pp. 555-583.) As Parmentier noted, the issues of sex and gender in the fathers was superfluous, analogous to nationality. (Parmentier, p. 577.) Nevertheless, there are Church Fathers who argue that every person contains a male and female part in his/her intellect. Maximus the Confessor and Gregory of Nyssa are two notable Fathers, with whom Bulgakov was intimately familiar, that argue this point. (Cf. Vincent L. Wimbush, ed., Asceticism, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 524.)


311 As Regula Zwahlen notes, Bulgakov’s thought here affinity to C.G. Jung’s conception of the anima and animus of human individuals, with whom Bulgakov was familiar given Jung’s influence in the Russian Religious Renaissance. (Regula M. Zwahlen, Das Revolutionäre Ebenbild Gottes: Anthropologien der Menschenwürde bei Nikolaj A. Berdjaev und Sergej N. Bulgakov, (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010), p. 309.)

312 Bershtein, p. 211.

313 Zwahlen, p. 309.

314 Tavard provides a concise explanation of Bulgakov’s spiritual bisexuality that concurs with my conclusions that follow. He writes: “Interiorly, in the spirit, man is defined by the polarity of the masculine and feminine principles;
Bulgakov’s image of God, John Milbank, Aidan Nichols, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, and Celia Deane-Drummond interpret Bulgakov’s image of God within a traditional essentialist context. By a “traditional essentialist context” I mean that they argue Bulgakov equates biological men and women with masculinity and femininity, respectively; in other words, males are exclusively masculine while females are exclusively feminine, which is a de facto denial of Bulgakov’s doctrine of spiritual bisexuality. In defense of this position, Bulgakov does not explain in detail his spiritual bisexuality in either his minor or major trilogies. To complicate matters, Bulgakov argues that the image of God as male and female is fully expressed in Christ and Mary, respectively, which is indicative of an essentialist binary treatment of sex.

and even in his exterior being, he is not only man or woman, but he is precisely man and woman, he is this ontological and which expresses the fullness of Theanthropy, of the image of God in man…Bulgakov subordinates sex to spirit and, thereby, the sexual differentiations of male and female to the spiritual distinctions of the masculine and the feminine. The general principle is clear: the masculine corresponds to the Logos and the feminine to the Spirit. The twofold aspects of creatureliness, masculine and feminine, belong to the very condition of all creatures and therefore obtain even in the world of angels. Insofar as they are images of God, all creatures are made of two principles. In the case of man, where this differentiation is carried into the ‘psycho-somatic element,’ this means that ‘the masculine and feminine principles of the spirit are achieved in the form of man and woman. These are predestined, not only to experience spiritual love (the wife must be the ‘helpmeet’, that is, the friend, and the husband must be the head, that is also the friend, though showing his friendship in a different way), but also to be ‘one flesh.’ Eastern theology in general looks at the realities of this world in the light thrown on them by Revelation rather than in what they appear to be in their objectivity apart from the realities of grace. This made it impossible for Bulgakov to describe the feminine and the masculine in empirical terms. Instead of a psychological or sociological description, he provides a strictly theological anthropology: true humanity is divine Theanthropy. It is in that light that we should understand and live the human condition.” (George H. Tavard, Woman in Christian Tradition, (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), pp. 151-170, http://www.womenpriests.org/classic2/tavard07.asp (accessed February 2, 2013).

317 Nichols, Wisdom from Above, p. 45.
320 Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 2, Sec. IV, Location 1664 of 7314; Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 4, Sec. I, Location 2759 of 6301.
In addition, Bulgakov consistently vacillates between a bisexual and a binary interpretation of sexuality within the same text.

Bulgakov’s exegesis of Gen 1:27 in The Burning Bush is indicative of this ambiguous treatment of sexuality. He defines the male and female principle as Adam and Eve.\textsuperscript{321} This indicates an essentialist treatment of humankind, i.e. Adam and Eve are the archetypal male and female. However, he complicates this statement with his description of each sex: “[t]he male is truth in beauty, the female is beauty in truth: truth and beauty are indivisible and of one Essence, but at the same time they are differentiated as two images of the one principle.”\textsuperscript{322} What is important is that truth and beauty are not separate but interrelated and present in both sexes, and what differentiates the sexes is a stress on either principle. This is reminiscent of a spiritual bisexual interpretation of humankind. In The Bride of the Lamb, in the context of the relationship between female hypostases and Christ, Bulgakov elucidates his doctrine of spiritual bisexuality more clearly.\textsuperscript{323}

Christ’s saving work extends to women because women are incorporated into Christ through their shared male nature. Bulgakov writes “There are two relations here: centrifugal and centripetal. And both are necessarily united in each human hypostasis, however they are united in different tonalities, with the love of Christ for the Church, or the Church for Christ, being dominant.” [Emphasis added]\textsuperscript{324} His answer to his question rests on an important distinction he

\begin{footnotes}
\item[321] Bulgakov, BB, p. 86.
\item[322] Ibid., p. 86.
\item[323] Bulgakov, BL, p. 100.
\item[324] Ibid., p. 100; Cf. Compare this statement with a similar statement Bulgakov made in The Comforter, “[i]nwardly, in the spirit, man is defined by the polarity of the male and female principles; and even in his external
\end{footnotes}
makes between the tonalities of each sex. In this context the Church and Christ are used as
euphemisms for femininity and masculinity, respectively. Thus the individual human hypostasis
contains both genders (tonalities); however, one gender is dominant.325

I think his unpublished works, “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe v Bozhestve” (1921) and
“Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe” (1921), shed important light on Bulgakov’s theory of spiritual
bisexuality. In these works Bulgakov argues that the Son and the Holy Spirit in their vocations
and hypostatic distinctions reflect human spiritual bisexuality in God.326 In doing so, Bulgakov
imports the antinomy of the life of the Trinity, i.e. the Trinity consists of distinct persons with
distinct vocations, but the Trinity is nonetheless one, for they share a single Divine life and
content as Divine Sophia to humankind. According to Bulgakov, while the Son is the eternal

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being, man is not only male or female, but precisely male and female.” (Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 4837-4838 of 6301.)

325 Interestingly, five pages before making this statement that is reminiscent of spiritual bisexuality, he argues:
“Although the male and female principles are equally personal and, in this sense, both equally form an I, the timbre
of the male I is different from that of the female I. This is a self-evident fact. Neither the male nor female I
comprises any composition of the two elements. Male and female I’s are equally immediate and simple; they are not
a composition, mixture, or addition.” [Emphasis added] (Bulgakov, BL, p. 95.) This is not necessarily a
contradiction of my theory, as Bulgakov maintains that the sexes are different. However, the difference consists in
their hypostasis. There is only a “male I” or “female I,” not a “male-female I.” Below I will demonstrate the
relationship of the “I” or hypostasis to the bisexual nature that it hypostatizes.

Even in Bulgakov’s response to Metropolitan Sergius’ condemnation of his teachings on sexuality and the image of
God, Bulgakov is not entirely clear whether or not he intends a bisexual or essentialist interpretation of the sexes. He
writes: “Of course, it [my teaching] is absolutely not exhausted and even is not constituted by the division of male
and female sex in the spirit. However even this division is absolutely not invented by me or “taken from nobody
knows where.” It is not unknown for “Orthodox consciousness.” It is enough to point at some fundamental facts.
Firstly, that, what is said in God’s Word on the creation of man: “and God created man on His image, on God’s
image he created him, a man and a female” (Gen 1.27).” Bulgakov seems to reject a bisexual treatment of the sexes,
but then he justifies it. (Bulgakov, O Sofii Premudrosti Bozhiei, p. 37.)

326 Cf. Bulgakov, “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe v Bozhestve,” p. 359. Note that in Unfading Light, Bulgakov did not yet
clearly connect his doctrine of spiritual bisexuality to the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, Unfading Light
provides the clearest and most comprehensive expression of Bulgakov’s spiritual bisexuality. (Cf. Bulgakov, UF, pp.
294-311.) This interpretation remains authoritative: in The Comforter rather than explaining what the male and
female principles are, Bulgakov refers his readers to this section of Unfading Light. (Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 4837, n. 53.)
truth in beauty, the Holy Spirit is the eternal beauty in truth. It is an ineffable relationship that is mirrored in created being through the male and female hypostasis. Only in this sense can we speak of God as bisexual. Males and females reciprocate the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit and, in so doing, humankind exhibits a multiplicity amidst unity. In *The Comforter* Bulgakov shows his continuity with this position in his insistence that all the interrelations of the Son and Holy Spirit has a “parallel in the bi-unity of the human spirit.”

Bulgakov’s inability to state with clarity what differentiates the sexes is based upon the Trinitarian analogy he appropriates to humankind. In so doing, Bulgakov subtly imports the antinomy of the life of the Trinity to humankind that makes it impossible to clearly differentiate the sexes.

This antinomy is apparent in Bulgakov’s dual usage of sexuality as an expression of our shared nature (i.e. spiritual bisexuality) and as an expression of what differentiates males from females (i.e. essentialist treatment of the sexes). Bulgakov bases this interpretation on the creation of humankind in the image and likeness of God in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. According to Bulgakov, God creates each human person with two principles, i.e. spiritually bisexual, and God creates humankind as two separate hypostases, the male and female hypostasis. What distinguishes man from woman, therefore, is a priority of either the feminine or masculine principle. In other words, each human person is a consubstantial

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327 Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, Ch. 4, Sec. I, Location 2754-2758 of 6301.

328 In “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe v Bozhestve” he rejects any attempt to univocally speak about God in terms of human sexuality. The Son and Holy Spirit are analogies for males and females.

329 Bulgakov, “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe,” p. 369; 376. In this work Bulgakov uses both an essentialist and spiritual bisexual expression for the sexes.
unity of masculinity and femininity.\textsuperscript{330} What we experience as maleness and femaleness is the predominance of either the male or female principle. Therefore “[a] woman has a male principle, but in her own way, just as a man has a female principle,”\textsuperscript{331} or, in other words, “[b]oth principles are present in it inseparably, but with the definite predominance of one of them, and both show themselves mutually supplying one another.”\textsuperscript{332}

Bulgakov’s exegesis of the second creation story (Gen 2) further illustrates his spiritual bisexual interpretation of the image of God. The creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, Bulgakov insists, complements Adam. In \textit{Unfading Light} Bulgakov writes that “Eve is present already in Adam’s spirit and body.”\textsuperscript{333} Thus, “[m]ade two-sexed, but precisely because they appear as a single-sexed entity, human beings also have this sexual duality in their spirit, and know the erotic tension as the deepest foundation of both creation and creative activity.”\textsuperscript{334} This tension is finally expressed in the creation of Eve. Yet Adam, however, retains a bisexual being, for if his femininity was entirely exhausted in the creation of Eve, the erotic tension would no longer exist in him. They would have become two completely separated entities. Since “like can only know like,” it follows that Adam must remain feminine in some way; whereas Eve must also remain masculine in some sense to retain the unity of nature that Bulgakov finds to be so important because humankind is made after the Trinity.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{330} Bulgakov, “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe v Bozhestve,” p. 351.
\textsuperscript{331} Bulgakov, UF, p. 310.
\textsuperscript{332} Bulgakov, JL, p. 87; Cf. Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 99; Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 4835 of 6301; Bulgakov, UF, pp. 300-303.
\textsuperscript{333} Ibid., p. 301.
\textsuperscript{334} Ibid., p. 300.
\end{flushleft}
Bulgakov appropriates a traditional patriarchal understanding of gender to his definitions of the masculine and feminine principles. As Rosenthal notes, Bulgakov opposes “false equality,” the blurring of gender distinctions, and considered feminism a cover for “sexual nihilism.” Even though Bulgakov treats God and humankind as bisexual, there is no indication in either his published works or autobiographical reflections that he took issue with gender stereotypes. Whereas the male principle is “the primacy of reason and will over sense,” the female principle is “the primacy of feeling, of experience over reason and will.” Even though his definitions refer to activity that is indicative of descriptions of gender as opposed to sex, Bulgakov makes no such distinction. There were no words in the Russian language that allowed him to do so. Moreover, differentiating gender from sex is a fairly recent phenomenon. The term pol that Bulgakov uses connotes both biological sex and gender.

4.2.2 Image of God as the Image of the Son

As mentioned, humanity as the image of God reflects the Blessed Trinity, in particular the Son and the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the Son has a central place in Bulgakov’s doctrine of the image of God. He insists that the Son is the proto-image in whose image we are created. On this point, Bulgakov follows the consensus of the Fathers. As I mentioned in the previous

335 In the Orthodox tradition there is no single, authoritative teaching on gender. There is, however, a strong emphasis on the “notion of male and female complementary, where females are usually seen as needing to be completed by males.” (Cf. Pamela Dickey Young, “Women in Christianity” in Women and Religious Traditions, ed. Pamela Dickey Young, Second Edition, pp. 163-192, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 166.)


337 Bulgakov, BB, p. 82.

338 Nevertheless, he delineates between sex [pol] and sexuality [seksual’nost’]. (Cf. Bershtein, p. 29.) Sexuality in his theological works is negatively expressed as lust, which is associated with the sexual act.

339 Cf. Bulgakov, FB, p. 144, 15; Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church, p. 105; Bulgakov, JL, p. 88; Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch.5, Sec. 5, Location 5510 of 6301.
chapter, the Son is the Word, who contains the content of Divine Wisdom. Our relationships to God and the world are premised upon our relationship to the Son, as the Son not only created us in His image\textsuperscript{340} but He reveals God the Father to us.\textsuperscript{341} (Cf. Matthew 11:27) Godhumanhood, therefore, primarily involves the Second person of the Trinity. This correlation between humankind and the Son is the basis for Bulgakov’s insistence that to be incarnate is a hypostatic property of the Son.\textsuperscript{342} The fact that we are created in the image of the Trinity is of secondary importance.\textsuperscript{343} His logic for stressing this aspect, which is a minority position amongst the Church Fathers but includes St. Augustine, is his personalism: since God is a Trihypostatic person, every action of God must include the Trinity of persons. The creation of humankind must involve both the Father and the Holy Spirit in addition to the Son. However, since the Father is the “omni-causative” hypostasis who transcends Godhumanhood and who is directly imaged in the Son, it is not proper for Him to be directly revealed in the Trinitarian image of humankind.\textsuperscript{344}

\textsuperscript{340} Cf. Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 2, Sec. III, Location 2005-2008 of 7314.

\textsuperscript{341} Nichols, \textit{Wisdom From Above}, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{342} Cf. Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 3, Sec. II, Location 2581-2586 of 7314.

\textsuperscript{343} Bulgakov’s anthropology stresses that we are created in the image of the Son. However, since the Son is a Divine Person within the Holy Trinity and the Son always acts with the Holy Spirit and the Father, both the Father and the Holy Spirit have an important place in Bulgakov’s anthropology related to their hypostatic activity. By hypostatic activity I mean the particular immanent and economic activities associated with the individual Divine Hypostasis. Thus both the Father and especially the Holy Spirit have an important role in his theology of the image of God.

\textsuperscript{344} According to Bulgakov God the Father engenders the economic activity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son and the Holy Spirit reveal God the Father. In other words, God the Father is never directly encountered by humankind, for the Father is the object of revelation but not the subject encountered during the process of revelation. Of course this does not deny the intimate connection between the Father and the Son, but only specifies how that relationship functions in the order of salvation history. The fact that Jesus Christ primarily reveals the Father in the Gospels supports Bulgakov’s theory. (Cf. Jn. 17: 25-26; Matt 6: 9-13)
In addition to the Son, only the Holy Spirit, Who has an intimate connection to the Son in Bulgakov’s theology, has a direct role in the image of God.\(^{345}\)

Moreover, I think Bulgakov’s approach to the image of God as primarily the image of the Son can help explain his bisexual interpretation of humankind. Since the Son is the primary hypostasis of our imaging, both male and female must reflect the Son.\(^{346}\) Otherwise, Godhumanhood could not extend to both sexes. Women, in particular, would presumably only share a relationship to the Holy Spirit. Women would not be human in the same manner as men or Christ. What would result are two separate economies of salvation; however, given Bulgakov’s pneumatology that stresses the role of the Holy Spirit as manifesting the Son’s work, this is not possible. His doctrine of spiritual bisexuality allows him to maintain that both sexes are primarily made in the image of the Son, participating in His Godhumanhood, but nonetheless share in the image of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the image of God is reflected in the male and female hypostasis as well as in their spiritual bisexual sophianic being. Given Bulgakov’s dynamic view of nature as expressed in his doctrine of Sophia, this is not illogical or a misuse of gender. Recall from the previous chapter that Bulgakov rejects abstracting the hypostasis from its nature or vice versa. Sophia/nature and hypostasis exist in an organic relationship, and their difference lies solely in that a hypostasis is consciousness while nature is the content of that consciousness.

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345 Note that Bulgakov’s anthropology is based in a radical treatment of God’s love. Bulgakov in his *magnum opus* warns not to indulge in empty conceptualizations of creation but rather to focus on the “*positive* foundation in God for creation…God is love, and love is God’s ontological self-determination, a self-determination that is not monotonously impoverished but multifariously diverse.” (Bulgakov, BL, p. 48.) Bulgakov’s theory of God’s kenosis in creation is a theory of love, a God who loves so much that this Divine Love overflows Godself to engender a created being that is able to receive the love of God. God’s love is a central theme that extends throughout his theological reflections. The love of the Son and the Holy Spirit, which are different modes of the same love, are reflected in the creation of the sexual principles, and the function of maleness or femaleness that can only be understood within the context of love.

What makes a hypostasis male or female is how they hypostatize or become conscious of their bisexual nature. This, of course, is analogous to the manner in which the Son and Holy Spirit are conscious of their nature.

4.2.3 Image of God as Image of the Divine Son and Holy Spirit

The personal identity of the Father is the context of Bulgakov’s thought on the Divine Dyad of the Son and the Holy Spirit. In his succinct summation of Bulgakov’s thought, Graves writes “The essence of the personality, according to Bulgakov, the essence of ‘I’, is that it must go outside of itself to find its true nature.” In human persons this involves the subject-object relationship. The subject, the “I,” must extend to the object, the “non-I.” The “non-I” does not limit “I,” but rather it is the “objective reality, which becomes for the ‘I,’ by means of a subjective transformation, personal life.” In humankind the relationship between subject-object always remains even though the object becomes transparent to the subject, for the object retains its objective quality. For God, however, this is not the case. Because God is an absolute subject, God has no need of an object, the “non-I,” outside of Godself for self-realization as a personality. To explain this, Bulgakov relies on the Trinitarian processions of the Son and

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347 Note that Bulgakov considers neither hermaphrodites nor queer men and women that would have complicated his treatment of the sexes. He assumes biology reflects sexual predisposition.

348 A hypostasis is the center of consciousness and intelligence. Below I address what a hypostasis is to for Bulgakov in detail.

349 Andrew Louth notes that the anaphora of the Eucharistic prayer in the Divine Liturgy, which is addressed to God the Father but takes place through the Son and the Holy Spirit influences Bulgakov’s thought on the Divine Dyad. (Louth, “The Task of Theology,” p. 253.)

350 Graves, p. 1.

351 Ibid., p. 2.

352 Cf. Bulgakov, BL, 127.
Holy Spirit from God the Father. He argues: “the Father only knows Himself in the act of begetting the Word.”\textsuperscript{353} The Son in turn allows Himself to be the begotten image of the Father, and, therefore, the Son only knows Himself in the nature of the Father as the revealed image of the Father to the Father. This sacrificial procession of begetting and being begotten remains theoretical without the Holy Spirit, who gives “‘reality’ to this union.”\textsuperscript{354} The Father, “not only reveals himself in his \textit{ousia}-Wisdom through the Son, but he lives in it by the Holy Spirit. And the Son does not only reveal the Father through himself, in his \textit{ousia}-Wisdom, but again he lives in it by the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{355} Because God is the Absolute Subject, even the life of God in which the mutual indwelling of the Son and the Father occur must be hypostatized.\textsuperscript{356} This is the function of the Holy Spirit in the immanent Trinity. The Holy Spirit, Bulgakov contends, is precisely the personalized life of God that makes the revelation of Father to Son real.\textsuperscript{357} Moreover, “[t]he Spirit makes the mutual giving of Father and Son, a giving \textit{out}, not simply a giving to and an exchange.”\textsuperscript{358} The potential tragedy of annihilation, whereby the Father extinguishes His existence in His begetting of the Son, is prevented by the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{359} Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is the love of the Father for the Son and can be “understood only in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{353} Graves, p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{354} Ibid., p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{355} \textit{Uteshitel [The Comforter]}, p. 77 in Nichols, \textit{Wisdom from Above}, p. 162.
\item \textsuperscript{356} Although all the hypostases are interrelated and penetrate one another, ontologically, not chronologically, there is a taxis in the Trinity. The Holy Spirit cannot repose upon the hypostasis of the Son, giving the Son life, until the Son is begotten by the Father. Nevertheless, in this sense without the Holy Spirit there is no Son, no image of God the Father. Without the Son there is nothing for the Holy Spirit to repose upon or proceed onto and through, and thus the Holy Spirit ceases to function and exist.
\item \textsuperscript{357} Rowan Williams, \textit{A Margin of Silence: The Holy Spirit in Russian Orthodox Theology}, (Québec: Lys Vert, 2008), p. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{358} Williams, \textit{A Margin of Silence}, p. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{359} Ibid., p. 23.
\end{itemize}
relation to the Father and the Son.”\textsuperscript{360} Since the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit occur in one eternal moment, the begetting of the Son by the Father simultaneously involves the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father upon the Son as the Father’s love for His Son. This procession is life-bestowing since it makes the Son a real, living hypostatic entity separate from the Father. \textsuperscript{361} Thus, the Father gives content and purpose to the Son, but the Spirit gives life and autonomy to the Son. In these Trinitarian processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Father, Bulgakov’s doctrine of the Divine Dyad is forged. The Son and the Holy Spirit reveal the Father in their own way: the Son is the image of the Father as the Father’s ideas, will, or content, and the Holy Spirit is the actualized reality of this content that manifests itself as the Father’s beauty, life, and love. \textsuperscript{362} Together the Son and the Holy Spirit reveal the epistemological (Son) and experiential (Holy Spirit) elements of the Father’s revelation.

Following from an early Syrian tradition,\textsuperscript{363} Bulgakov expresses the reality/life giving function of the Holy Spirit in regards to the Son in maternal language: “Logos abides in His [Holy Spirit] bosom”\textsuperscript{364} and the Holy Spirit “reposes ‘maternally’ on the Word.”\textsuperscript{365} (Bulgakov’s

\begin{footnotes}
\item[360] Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Ch. 2, Sec. I, Location 2134-2140 of 6301.
\item[361] Cf. Bulgakov, Ibid., Ch. 4, Sec. I, Location 2432-2435 of 6301.
\item[362] Cf. Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Ch. 4, Sec. I, Location 2695-2696 of 6301. Life is manifested as beauty. Bulgakov explains that the Holy Spirit is Love in the context of kenosis. (Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Ch. 4, Sec. I, Location 2680-2685 of 6301.)
\item[363] Bulgakov bases his teaching on the Holy Spirit as Mother on an obscure Syrian bishop, Aphraates “the Persian Sage.” (Cf. Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Endnotes, Location 6126 of 6301, n. 7.) Recent scholarship has demonstrated that Aphraates appropriation of femininity to the Holy Spirit was not an anomaly but widespread in Syria until the fourth century. Stanley Burgess points to the rise of the cult of Mary as a reason for the decline in attributing maternity to the Holy Spirit. (Cf. Stanley Burgess, \textit{The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions}, Third Edition, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Press, 2000.)
\item[364] Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Ch. 4, Sec. I, Location 2754 of 6301.)
\item[365] Ibid., Ch 4, Sec. II, Location 2871-2872 of 6301.
\end{footnotes}
reintroduction of feminine language into pneumatology will provide a strong basis for his pneumatological Mariology that we will discuss in the next chapter.) In this way the Holy Spirit reveals God’s motherhood or daughterhood that is complemented by the Son’s revelation of God’s Sonship.

This dyad and its interrelated relationships are transferred to the economic Trinity. However, space and time delimit their eternal, perichoretic processions so that only one hypostasis is dominant or hypostatically present in the world. The inactive hypostasis in the world is nonetheless present to the active hypostasis in their shared Divine Sophia. From the Incarnation until Pentecost, the Son is the dominant hypostasis in the world. After the Ascension of Christ to heaven and the Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is the dominant hypostasis in the world. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit and the Son share the same mission of the salvation of the human race; yet they save humankind in different manners according to their hypostatic functions in the immanent Trinity. As the image of the Father, the Son’s mission is primarily the revelation of the Father to humankind; this revelation will inevitably lead to the Son’s Paschal Mystery, Resurrection, and Ascension. The Holy Spirit, as the maternal, life-giving hypostasis metaphorically gives life to the Son’s revelation of the Father; the Holy Spirit gives life to the revelation of the Son by realizing it through the members of the Body of Christ, the Church. Pentecost was the first step of this realization. Note that the hypostatic descent of the Holy Spirit

366 Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, Ch.4, Sec. I, Location 2718 of 6301.

367 This means that the Holy Spirit’s mission is primarily to make the mission of the Son effective, persuasive, and personally relevant. It is for this reason that Christ does not give the apostolic mandate to teach and preach the Gospel until the apostles have personally received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. (Cf. Acts: 1: 1-11) The Holy Spirit accomplishes this first through the Spirit’s life-bestowing function at the Incarnation. The Incarnation was the first descent of the Holy Spirit; however, the Holy Spirit only descended upon Mary. At the Pentecost, the Spirit is sent by the Son and descends upon humanity.
at Pentecost occurs only after Christ’s Ascension,\textsuperscript{368} when Christ “acquires a new power—the power to send the Holy Spirit into the world.”\textsuperscript{369} Even though the apostles received Christ’s revelation and experienced the Resurrection of Christ, they were not authorized to preach the Gospel until the Holy Spirit, who is the activating power, descended hypostatically from heaven.\textsuperscript{370} (Cf. Acts 1:4-5) As the “connecting hypostasis” who links the Son to the Father through love and life, the Holy Spirit in a similar manner links the believer to the Father through Christ. The Holy Spirit manifests/vivifies the reality of the Father’s will as established by Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Spirit is directly responsible for the salvation of the human race. It complements the Son’s mission in salvation history. On this complementary relationship to the Son, Rowan Williams writes the Holy Spirit “gives you not further information, but a deeper, more personal, more immediate penetration into the Christian life…the Spirit does not drop new facts into your mind; the Spirit tells you more what it is to have the mind of Christ in your discipleship.”\textsuperscript{371} Accordingly, Christian revelation is a “bi-unique revelation” of Christ and the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{372} Without the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ’s teachings and sacrifice would be merely praiseworthy, but not life-bestowing, incorporating the individual into the Church and imparting salvation. The paschal mystery would have been inconsequential.\textsuperscript{373}

\textsuperscript{368} In other words the kenosis of the divine Son, the Son’s stripping of His glory and power in order to unite with creaturely nature, ended with His ascension into heaven. (Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 4, Sec. I, Location 3304-3309 of 7314) Without this kenosis, the human nature would have been overwhelmed. God would have either dissolved creaturely nature into Godself or undermined creaturely freedom by forcing the Divine will from the outside upon creation.

\textsuperscript{369} Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Ch. 5, Sec. III, Location 3932 of 6301.

\textsuperscript{370} Ibid., Ch. 4, Sec. III, Location 4031 out of 6301.

\textsuperscript{371} Williams, \textit{A Margin of Silence}, p. 19. See also Nichols, \textit{Wisdom from Above}, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{372} Ibid., p. 184.

\textsuperscript{373} Williams, \textit{A Margin of Silence}, p. 26.
For Bulgakov the fact that the Holy Spirit remains personally un-manifested in the Scriptures is indicative of the Holy Spirit’s hypostatic function. Self-manifestation is an exclusive function of the Son, who is the revealed image of the Father. The Divine Dyad reflects his appropriation of traditional gender categories to both hypostases. Whereas the Son expresses the traditional active, masculine role of men as the Revealer, who reveals primarily through rational discourse, the Holy Spirit expresses the traditional feminine, maternal role of women. Moreover, like a mother the Holy Spirit is involved in the raising or rearing of the Christian believer. As a mother the Spirit nourishes Her children with grace and the imputation of Her gifts. She gives actual life to the Son’s words. She is a silent mother who works to make what the Son has accomplished through His sacrifice real in the lives of Her children. Moreover, to take part in the life of the Holy Spirit is to acquire the mind of Christ so that our thoughts, words, and deeds witness to Christ which in turn manifests God the Father.374

These dyadic missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are reflected in humankind, who bears the image of God, in the context of the spiritual life. For Bulgakov the spiritual life involves our masculine and feminine spiritual principles, for these principles refer to the two primary activities of discipleship. However, based on the teaching that the Holy Spirit is the primary hypostasis in the world after the Pentecost, and his stress on St. Seraphim the Sarov’s teaching that the goal of the spiritual life is the “acquisition of the Holy Spirit,”375 the spiritual life will predominantly involve our feminine principle. After all, Bulgakov emphasizes that we

374 Bulgakov writes: “every human countenance that is made radiant by the grace of the Spirit…manifests Him.” (Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. IV, Location 4147 of 6301.)

375 Cf. Ibid., Ch.5, Sec. V, Location 4528 of 6301.
are called to be spirit-bearing saints\textsuperscript{376} and that our acquisition of the Holy Spirit entails an “active passivity”\textsuperscript{377} or the “passivity of reception, this humility of the self-renouncing man.”\textsuperscript{378} Passivity is, of course, a traditional attribute of femininity. To allow the Holy Spirit to actualize the work of Christ in our lives we must humble ourselves by becoming passive. As evident in the term “active passivity,” Bulgakov employs two sets of idealistic descriptions about femininity in his writings. The first set of descriptions express femininity in terms of emotion, feeling, passivity, i.e. intuition, beauty, experience. These are indicative of traditional conceptions of women and their femininity. The second set of descriptions expresses femininity in terms of activity, i.e. life-giving, sanctifying, and realizing. This latter set is empowering. They better reflect the biblical representation of the Holy Spirit, but also the type of femininity required for discipleship. This latter interpretation of femininity is the type of femininity necessary to acquire the Holy Spirit. Bulgakov unwittingly incorporates a liberating approach to femininity that transcends dualistic conceptions of gender inherent to the binary conceptions of the sexes from which he theologizes. Thus, the Holy Spirit is far from a passive entity in Bulgakov’s account, but rather the Holy Spirit is active. She burns and melts the hardened heart so that it is “illumined with sacred mystery.”\textsuperscript{379} In the same manner, the spiritual life involves not only passivity on the

\textsuperscript{376} Ibid., Ch 5, Sec. III, Location 3797 of 6301.
\textsuperscript{377} Ibid., Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 4540 of 6301.
\textsuperscript{378} Ibid., Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 4543 of 6301. Bulgakov, moreover, rejects wholeheartedly the distinction between monasticism and the laity. Asceticism is a necessary practice for all Christians, not just monks and nuns.
\textsuperscript{379} Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Ch. 5, Sec. IV, Location 4147 of 6301.
part of the Christian but also, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, an active realization of the teachings of Jesus Christ.\(^{380}\)

Thus, the actualization of our feminine principle entails a creative engagement with the world that is prompted by the Holy Spirit. Creativity, in fact, is an important theme that we find throughout Bulgakov’s Sophiological works from *The Philosophy of Economy* to *The Bride of the Lamb*.\(^{381}\) According to Bulgakov, creativity refers to humankind’s role in the perfection or fruition of the cosmos.\(^{382}\) Particularly, it refers to a new expression or revelation of Divine Sophia’s *logoi* in creation through the auspices of the human person. Following from his elucidation of the Son and Holy Spirit, creativity is a function of the masculine and feminine principles in humankind.\(^{383}\) Winston Crum summarizes them as follows: “‘[the] former [masculine principle] involves “creative initiative, discovering new themes, tasks, and opportunities’…whereas the latter [feminine principle] is concerned with ‘the execution of themes, the accomplishment of creative assignments.’”\(^{384}\) The feminine is not subordinate even though it is sequentially second. The feminine involves an active appropriation of the masculine principle or discovery. The relationship between the masculine and feminine principles in the human person directly parallels the dyadic relationship of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the

\(^{380}\) Bulgakov more commonly expresses knowing Christ versus coming to an awareness of Jesus’ teachings. However, we should not set up a dichotomy between knowing and becoming aware of Jesus’ teachings, for to know Jesus Christ involves the study and meditation on his works, the use of the human intellect. Nevertheless, after Pentecost, a direct encounter with Jesus Christ is mediated by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that fosters this religious experience that entails a personal encounter with Christ, which also places within us a desire to become more aware of Jesus’ life and teachings.

\(^{381}\) Cf. Bulgakov, PE, p. 145.; Bulgakov, BL, p. 323.


\(^{383}\) Bulgakov, UF, p. 309.

economy of salvation. In terms of the spiritual life, the masculine principle is operative in our discovery of Christ and his mission; however, how we live out this message is related to our feminine principle. This entails humility on our part and the realization of the Gospel in our contemporary context. How a Christian lives out his/her vocation will be the means by which he/she will be judged.

Bulgakov’s stress on a Trinitarian interpretation of humankind as a spiritual bisexuality is relevant to contemporary discussions about sex and gender. For Bulgakov is able to maintain the difference of the sexes that so many Christians today are unwilling to reject given their own experiences and the strong biblical and Patristic support for this teaching; yet he liberates femininity of its passive associations. Moreover, anticipating the insights of feminist theologians like Elizabeth Johnson, Bulgakov’s pneumatological interpretation of the spiritual life and doctrine of the image of God demonstrates a cosmic significance of the Holy Spirit to the community at large, both men and women, and their unique life experiences. Ironically

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385 Steven Seidman, introducing queer theory, commented “[s]exuality is perhaps the last human dimension that many of us refuse to grant is socially created, historically variable, and therefore deeply political.” (Quoted in Gavin D’Costa, “Queer Trinity” in Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body, pp. 269-280, ed. Gerard Loughlin, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 270.) Although this is changing, many Christians are not comfortable with the denaturalizing of sex, which is evident in contemporary Catholic magisterial teachings on women, men, and the priesthood. (Cf. Pope John Paul II’s encyclical Mulieris Dignitatem) Bulgakov’s Trinitarian treatment of humankind may provide a way to speak about the sexes in a traditional, essentialist manner while allowing for creative, individual expression. In other words, Bulgakov’s anthropology remains faithful to the biblical witness and Patristic teachings on gender, but is able to incorporate the ambiguity and individuality of lived experience.

386 Bulgakov spends great length demonstrating the biblical warrant for his insistence that the life of the Church is life in the Spirit. His defense includes these verses: John 3:8, John3:34, John 15:26, Romans 8:9, Acts 2:33, 1 Peter 1:10-12, Ephesians 1:17, Philippians 1:19, Galatians 4:6.

Bulgakov’s stress on gender dualism within his bisexual and pneumatological context breaks down dualistic stereotypes that feminist and queer theologians reject. He provides a way to speak about gender, while retaining two distinct genders that nevertheless confirm lived experience. Thus, Bulgakov in his insights on the Divine Dyad reveals not only in whose image we were made (Son and Holy Spirit), what we were made to do (act creativity), but how we are to do it (actualize what Christ has accomplished).

4.3 Section Two: Bulgakov’s Doctrine of Sin

Based on his Trinitarian image of God, Bulgakov will argue that Mary was sinless, without taking recourse in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. With this insight I now turn to Bulgakov’s doctrine of the original sin and human heredity.

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388 As Johnson contends, if we examine our lived experience, we will find that gender stereotypes are false since traditional feminine qualities such as nurturing and compassion are not just qualities of women. (Cf. Johnson, She Who is, pp. 53-54.)

389 His Trinitarian image of humankind was undoubtedly influenced by Solov’ev and Florensky. (Michael Meerson, “Sergei Bulgakov’s Philosophy of Personality” in Russian Religious Thought, ed. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson, pp. 135-153, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.), p. 149) Like Bulgakov, Solov’ev, for instance, stated, “the interpenetration (perichoresis) of the divine and human natures in Christ to be a ‘model for the mutual interaction and mutual penetration of all entities in Christ.’” (Gustafson, p. 45; Cf. Marilyn Louise Gray, “Russian Theological Anthropology and Bakhtin: The Aesthetics of the Divine Image,” (PhD diss., University of California, 2011), p. 54) Florensky similarly wrote: “Love of one’s brother is a revelation to another, a passage to another, the inflow into another of that entering into Divine life which in the God communing subject is perceived by this subject as knowledge of Truth. The metaphysical nature of love lies in the supralogical overcoming of the naked self-identify “I = I” and in the going out of oneself. And this happens when the power of God’s love flows out into another person and tears apart in him the bonds of finite human selfhood. Owing to this going out of itself, I becomes in another, in not-I, this not-I. I becomes consubstantial with the brother, consubstantial (homoousios) and not only like-substantial (homoiousios).” (Florensky, PGT, p. 67 in Gray, p. 87.)

390 Bulgakov’s Trinitarian interpretation is his answer to a difficulty that we find in the Fathers. As Elisabeth Behr-Sigel notes, this difficulty consisted of the Fathers’ attempt to harmonize “the great affirmation of the unity of humanity with the concrete diversity of human beings and especially with the otherness of men and women.” (Cf. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Ministry of Women in the Church, trans. Steven Bigham, (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1991, Kindle e-book), Ch. 1, Locations 915-916 of 5417.) Note that although it is not a dominant theme in the Fathers, the Fathers consider the “human vocation as a trinitarian life.” (Ibid., Ch. 1, Locations 974-975 of 5417.) Interestingly, Behr-Sigel traces the development of this idea from Solov’ev to Bulgakov, and from Bulgakov to Paul Evdokimov and Olivier Clement. She notes that Thomas Hopko systemizes these ideas in his defense of the exclusion of women from priestly ordination. (Ibid., Ch. 1, Locations 986 of 5417.) However, she notes that Hopko rejects any relationship between Bulgakov and himself. Nevertheless, she concludes that they
4.3.1 Original Sin

How the original sin can be experienced personally by Adam’s descendents is a central concern for Bulgakov. Bulgakov, therefore, distances his position from popular Eastern Orthodox explanations of the original sin, which identify the original sin with the effect of Adam’s sin, i.e. mortality as opposed to sinfulness. By and large, for Orthodox theologians who are influenced by the theology of John Meyendorff, the original sin lacks any connotation of disease, but is rather a state of mortality. Subsequently, the human race is conceived in mortality, not sin. Mortality has no relationship to guilt, but it is simply the state of affairs that humankind now experiences. The upshot of this is that mortality weakens human nature and

share three essential characteristics: 1) they introduce feminine symbolism into God, 2) they base the otherness of men and women in God, and 3) they provide a generous interpretation of femininity. (Ibid., Ch. 1, Locations 995 of 5417.)

In Bulgakov’s own words, how can we explain our awareness of “Adam’s fundamental guilt of our entire being, not sin, but precisely sin, a fundamental anomaly or something that ought not to be: that struggle in our will between good and evil—“the other law” which reigns in our members and draws us not towards that which we wish to do, but to that for which we wish not, of which the apostle Paul speaks (Rom. VII: 10-14). And this obscure immemorial self-definition…is a witness of our personal participation in Adam’s original sin…every one of us with him and in him, committed his sin and still commits it now.” (Sergius Bulgakov, “On Original Sin,” (Journal of St. Alban and St. Sergius 7 (December 1929): pp. 15-26), p. 21.)


There are at least three theories of the original sin in Orthodoxy. I juxtapose Meyendorff’s theory against Bulgakov’s theory of the original sin because Meyendorff’s position is the dominant explanation of the original sin in the Eastern Orthodox tradition in North America. Note that Meyendorff does not originate this theory but rather provides a clear explanation of it in his Byzantine Theology, and he claims that it is the authoritative Orthodox explanation of the original sin.

Properly speaking for Orthodox theologians following Meyendorff’s theory it is not the original sin that is the disease, but rather the infirmity that results from Adam’s sin. Infirmity is transmitted to humankind from Adam; however, infirmity only makes the human spirit weak. Because “disease” has an active connotation, theologians like Meyendorff do not use this term to express the Orthodox teaching on the original sin. The term “disease” is more appropriate for Catholics because the original sin does not simply weaken the human spirit, depriving it of its original graces, but also actively inclines the human subject to do evil. (Cf. Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed., (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011), para. 405.)
makes it more susceptible to sin.\footnote{Bulgakov, FB, p. 20.} Whereas in the West sin causes mortality, in the East mortality causes sin. Formally speaking, original sin’s originality is relative to the individual human agent once that agent chooses to sin. The Eastern understanding of original sin has an affinity with a traditional Western understanding of personal sin. In a sense, for Eastern Christians all humans are conceived sinless, for sin as a choice against God is not actualized until a personal choice against God is made. Mortality, generally leads to sin for as Maximus the Confessor argued, the flesh rules the mind.\footnote{For Maximus the spiritual life involves redirecting the mind from the flesh and carnal desire which make the mind “cowardly and unmanly” to God. Thus, a sinful man or woman is consumed with material things, i.e. the flesh rules the mind. (Cf. Maximus the Confessor, \textit{St. Maximus The Confessor: The Ascetic Life; The Four Centuries on Christian Charity (Ancient Christian Writers)}, trans. Polycarp Sherwood, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1955), p. 167; 186.)} However, inherited guilt is impossible. In this way the original sin is not a disease but rather a state.

Bulgakov synthesizes the Eastern and Western approaches to the original sin.\footnote{Nichols, \textit{Wisdom from Above}, p. 85; Cf. Tataryn, \textit{Augustine and Russian Orthodoxy}, p. 77.} His synthesis consists of the Western emphasis on the original sin as an inherited disease that causes mortality, and the Eastern emphasis on the original sin as a condition of mortality that makes future sin more likely. Our personal participation in the original sin has to do with Adam’s unique placement in history.\footnote{Humankind is not only the greatest creation of God and “the head of the whole world” but also the “microcosm, the world conceived as a unity, and he thus embraces the life of the world in himself.” (Bulgakov, \textit{Social Teaching in Modern Russian Orthodox Theology}, p. 13.) See also Bulgakov, BB, p. 21.} Bulgakov contends that Adam was the “all-human,” and as such he had a unique ability to define human nature for subsequent generations. For Bulgakov Adam is less a historical person than a “metaphysical forefather.”\footnote{Bulgakov, PE, p. 139.} Therefore, according to Bulgakov
Chapters One and Two of the Book of Genesis provide an account of a true event, the creation of the human spirit that signified the completion of creation, in the form of a “cosmogonic myth.” This event had significance for the entire cosmos; however, it was a meta-historical event. The presence of heaven on Earth in an incipient form cannot be expressed historically. Bulgakov insists that empirical history, which is our experience of history that involves time, commences with the fall, and thus it is impossible to prove or even speak accurately about Adam or Eden before the fall without resorting to mythical language.

Bulgakov interprets that biblical account of the original sin symbolically to reflect a unique metaphysical relationship Adam had to humankind and creation. In his earliest Sophiological work, The Philosophy of Economy, Bulgakov explains that Adam’s primary task before his original sin was to humanize nature; in other words to submit it “to his consciousness and realizing itself in him.” Later, in his Hypostasis and Hypostaticity (1925) he provides a hermeneutical key to unlocking what humanization entails within a theological context by employing the terms hypostaticity (self-being) and hypostatize (the process of consciousness).

Bulgakov writes:

This knowledge is not merely a passive reflection of the images of the world in man…In knowledge, man not only encompasses within himself that which is known, but also proceeds

399 Bulgakov, BL, p. 177.
400 Bulgakov incorporates the theory of evolution into his account of creation. Evolution provided the means for him to describe how humankind was created. He adds that few evolutionists, blinded by their “bad dogmatism,” fail to address the motivating force of evolution. (Bulgakov, BL, p. 172.) This for Bulgakov is none other than God.
401 Bulgakov, BL, pp. 170-171.
402 Ibid., p. 121, 135.
out of himself into the world and it identified with the latter (which is why the word “knowledge” is also applied to the union of man and woman: “Adam knew Eve his wife” [Gen 4:1]). In this sense, knowledge is the identification of the inner human logos, the eye of the world, with the logos of the world, with both shining in the world from the Divine Logos.\(^{404}\)

Adam was called by God to hypostatize his hypostaticity that Adam shared with all creation.\(^{405}\)

Before the original sin this was truly a possibility since Adam had no limits placed on his hypostatization/humanization. All creation was in the purview of his self-knowledge and personal intrigue.\(^{406}\) This for Bulgakov is confirmed by Adam’s naming of the animals in Genesis 2:19. Naming is not an arbitrary act because it expresses the essence of the individual that is contained in Adam as the “psychic pan-organism.”\(^{407}\) Adam’s action of naming the animals reveals that he is a microcosm of the cosmos, as he completes creation insofar as Adam manifests the ideas contained in his Sophianic being. As a cosmic being his fall will also affect the animal world.\(^{408}\)

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\(^{404}\) Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, Ch. 4, Sec. 2, Location 3159-3165 of 6301.

\(^{405}\) Adam’s knowledge of Eve is mirrored after the Father’s knowledge of the Son in the Father’s penetration of the Son’s I. Note, however, that Eve herself proceeds out from the side of Adam. Nevertheless, this analogy is limited since Adam is a creature whereas God the Father is an eternal being.

\(^{406}\) Cf. Bulgakov, PE, p. 154.

\(^{407}\) Bulgakov, UF, p. 293.

\(^{408}\) On the cosmic effects of the fall see Sergius Bulgakov, “Heaven—A Cave,” (*Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius* 3 (1928): 14-18), p. 14. Moreover, the original sin results in the loss of Adam’s potential hypostatization of creation. Ensnared by his own self-positing, humankind became incapable of hypostatizing its creaturely Sophia, changing the sinful course of the world. Even the ordering of the human body was lost; the body is no longer subject to the spirit, but rather the spirit is subject to the body, his “consciousness of his spirituality has grown dim.” (Bulgakov, BL, p. 162.) Flesh is no longer seen as a means to divine union, but an end in itself, resulting in mortality. In effect, this clouding of the human consciousness resulted in the loss of creaturely Sophia’s hypostases. (Cf. Bulgakov, PE, p. 140.)
For these reasons Adam was a unique human hypostasis. Bulgakov stresses that Adam was an individual hypostasis, without individuality. 409 Adam’s individuality was quite different from a modern colloquial understanding of individuality. 410 Adam lacked any limitation on his personhood. He had the ability to disclose creaturely Sophia to the world and “was completely accessible to Divine action on him.” 411 But this revelation refers to Adam’s ability to hypostatize nature and in so doing to be present in an immediate, metaphysical way to other hypostases who share in this nature. Adam, therefore, had the ability to an extent to image the dyadic relationship of the Son to the Holy Spirit in the immanent Trinity. Just as these hypostases are present to one another in their shared Divinity, Adam could be present to other created hypostases in his humanity, or creaturely Sophia. 412 This is confirmed by Bulgakov’s insistence that only after the fall does individuality as we experience it, as “separate, uncoordinated, unrepeating and mutually impenetrable centres” 413 or a “bad multiplicity” emerge. 414 In his 1937 article “Die christliche Anthropologie,” Bulgakov is clear that although humankind is now an aggregate of separate individuals, humankind was meant to constitute a single I, interpenetrating one another. 415 This interpenetration was possible before Adam’s original sin. However, once the original sin occurs,

409 Bulgakov, BB, p. 23.
410 Bulgakov’s thought on Adam as an all-man, was common place among the Slavophiles. (Louth, “Task of Theology,” p. 252, n. 18; Cf. Meerson, Trinity of Love, pp. xv-xvi; Valliere, MRT, p. 3.)
413 Bulgakov, BB, p. 23.
414 Crum, “The Doctrine of Sophia,” p. 36.
this is no longer possible, and thus Eve became an autonomous centre of being to Adam. Adam could no longer hypostatize their shared sophianic nature. In terms of knowledge, after the original sin Adam no longer knows Eve as a bi-hypostatic entity but only as a separate individual.

At the metaphysical level what causes the disjointedness and impenetrability of material bodies, or inhibition of hypostatization, is “nothing.” Particularly, “the element of liberated nothing surrounded every creature with the icy cold of loneliness; it divided the all-one and turned the centripetal force into a centrifugal one.” “Nothing” is simply a new mode of being for humankind. After the original sin, we actualize a new possibility of humankind, not a loving Trinitarian-like existence, but rather self-seeking individualism. The “universal body” of humankind and its “connectedness and wholeness” of being at the ontological level remains. However, the relationship of Adam and Eve before the original sin, albeit in an incipient manner, is no longer a possibility for humankind without the direct intervention of God. Thus, our Trinitarian-like existence remains an unrealized potential.


417 A possible analogy for Adam’s hypostatization or presence in others is our experience of empathy. In empathy we unite our spirit in some sense with another human person who is suffering. (Cf. Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 4, Sec. 3, Location 4289 of 7314.) We are co-crucified with them.

418 With individuality comes the introduction of evil in the world that in some way deforms humankind. (Joos, p. 359.) Adam is a microcosm that reflects and determines the macrocosm of the world. Thus, “to his spiritual fullness must correspond the fullness of life in the world, power over the world, the spiritualization of the world.” And again, “Man is a ‘concentrated’ world, a ‘microcosmos’; the world is an ‘anthropocosmos.’” (Bulgakov, BL, p. 177.) Therefore, the ability or lack thereof for “man” to subdue his own passions and thoughts is reflected in creation.

419 Bulgakov, UF, p. 269.

Bulgakov’s unique ideas about Adam and humankind are confirmed by his Christology. In particular, Bulgakov interprets Christ’s proclamation, “That they may all be one; as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee…that they may be one as we are one” within the context of his doctrine of the image of God, and thus offers an ontological reading of this verse that confirms humankind’s potential to become a multi-hypostatic entity. Christ, himself, reveals what a multi-hypostatic existence entails. Bulgakov is consistent in his insistence on employing his doctrine of Godhumanhood. The Incarnation does not violate human nature, but rather fulfills it. Otherwise Bulgakov would fall into the trap of arguing that God is *deus ex machina*, which he continually rejects. His goal is to demonstrate what exactly it means to say that Christ is fully human without sin. The result is that Christ is first and foremost the New Adam, who lives out the relations of the Old Adam. Therefore, only with Christ does the “inert and dark matter of the world” again become transparent and obedient to the “spirit of man.” Christ is truly the New Adam as an all-man; in him “[t]he universal penetrability of bodies” harmonize with his “dynamic individuality.” The Church as the body of Christ is important because it provides the means by which the rest of humankind can be penetrated by Christ but also eventually actualize its Trinitarian-like potential. Thus, Bulgakov speaks of the Church primarily in ontological and not sociological terms; he writes that the Church is “not only a society; it is a consubstantiality, a unity and plurality, real and living.”

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421 Bulgakov, BL, p. 186. Bulgakov writes, “The destiny of humankind is multi-unity.” (Ibid., p. 188.)
422 Bulgakov, *Social Teaching in Modern Russian Orthodox Theology*, p. 18.
423 Bulgakov, UF, p. 266.
relations between diverse subjects or centres of action constitute the one reality.”

It is a pan-Christian organism whereby each person preserves its proper I-ness while uniting with Christ’s I. Only as incorporated into the Church will humanity accomplish its sobornost of consciousness yet retain its individual existence as a multi-hypostatic entity. Incorporation into Christ is not a supernatural event insofar as it is a non-human event, but rather it is a truly human event that fulfills without violating humankind’s created status. The Church, therefore, does not provide a new humanity, but rather a renewed humanity of Adam, of which Christ, not Adam, is now the active head. The Church as Adam’s renewed humanity allows for an existence modeled on the Trinity whereby the members exist in a “community of mutual love, mutual sacrifice.”

Bulgakov’s treatment of Adam’s All-humanhood and his Trinitarian treatment of human nature allow him to clearly explain why we are affected by and experience the guilt associated with Adam’s original sin. Adam as the first human being had the ability to hypostatize human nature for better or worse. Either way human nature bears the imprint of Adam’s activity. If Adam had followed God’s decree, we would know Adam in his selfless love. Just as “Christ as the new Adam is all-humanity, that is, the humanity of each of us and all of us together,” Adam

425 Williams, A Margin of Silence, pp. 31-32.
426 Bulgakov, BL, pp. 260-262.
427 Meerson, Trinity of Love, p. 147.
428 This is the mission of the Holy Spirit. (Williams, A Margin of Silence, p. 28.)
429 Ibid., p. 31.
430 With the exception of the Unfading Light, Bulgakov says little about Eve in his consideration of Adam as the all-man. Perhaps this is further evidence of Bershtein’s argument that Bulgakov in his mature purges his Sophiology of erotic/sexual overtones.
was the all-humanity and immanent in creation. In Adam “every human hypostasis lived and acted harmoniously.” Just as Christ, the New Adam abides in our humanity and changed our internal constitution so that, at the existential level, we seek the Kingdom of God. Adam changed our internal constitution for the worse. We experience Adam in our innermost being. Original sin introduces individuality. Afterwards all sins are truly personal insofar as our actions are unable to penetrate other peoples’ personal beings. Unlike our personal sins, Adam’s personal sin penetrates every human being. In this sense we all experience his sin as our own.

Thus, Adam’s personal sin as an all-human is our original sin. Bulgakov, therefore, writes: “[i]n original sin Adam sinned not as Adam or not only as Adam but as every human. And everyone, all of us, each one of us were co-present in him, co-participated in that metaphysical sin.” In this way we all share in Adam’s responsibility for his sin. We literally experience Adam’s guilt for what he did; this guilt is amplified by our inherent attraction to sin, which is concupiscence. Nevertheless, Bulgakov was not contented with this explanation of our guilt and personal responsibility for Adam’s sin. Always conscious of human freedom, Bulgakov unnecessarily

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433 Bulgakov’s term “hypostatization” refers to the dynamic relationship between the divine nature and the divine hypostasis. With regard to humankind, it refers to self-knowledge, a self-actualization of its content. The human hypostasis as the image of God has the potential to gain consciousness of all created reality; in so doing it can literally command and subdue creation. This consciousness of nature becomes actualized in the actions of the human hypostasis. Therefore “[t]here is nothing in the universe that is out of reach to our understanding, feeling or will.” (Nichols, *Wisdom from Above*, p. 42.) Thus, as Adam grew in his hypostatization, before the fall, he was able to “dress” and “keep” creation. (Gen 2:15) Creation itself does not bear any fruit, or flourish until Adam tills the soil. These biblical references are for Bulgakov allegorical allusions to the practical effect of human hypostatization. Hypostatization is the process by which humankind becomes conscious of the presence of God and its own vocation through nurturing its relationship with God. Nonetheless, the work of hypostatizing creation is synergistic, always involving God.
435 Bulgakov, BB, p. 29.
complicates his doctrine with his speculations about our personal acceptance of Adam’s sin before our conception.  

4.3.2 Human Heredity and the Trinitarian Image

Although the original sin retards humankind’s growth into the fullness of the image of God as a multi-hypostatic entity by engendering our individuality and selfishness, the ontological bond between human beings remains. Even before the Incarnation, humankind remained a consubstantial community of persons. This ontological bond between each human person is manifested in human heredity. Human heredity as a succession of human generations is the residual effect of the original sin. Following Augustine, Bulgakov argues that human copulation which results in conception transmits the original sin of the parents to the child. This expresses humankind’s shared descent from Adam, as well as the solidarity of the human race.

His doctrine of heredity begins with his teachings on the creation of the soul. Bulgakov writes:

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436 Rejecting Origen’s pre-existence of souls as heresy, like Florensky, Bulgakov presents a nuanced version of this doctrine. The central difference between the two is that Origen posited a temporality previous to time as we know it, while Bulgakov speaks of this state as constitutive to God’s eternity. (Bulgakov, “On the Original Sin,” p. 22.) This state of eternity is an antinomy for us. In this state we have the choice to accept the original sin or not. Our choice for the original sin imputes personal guilt for the original sin that the human spirit “ceaselessly recollects [the origin sin] in its own inadequacy, inappropriateness and injury of its entire being.” (Bulgakov, “On the Original Sin,” p. 23.)

437 The term multi-hypostatic entity requires elucidation. As discussed earlier, humankind is created in the image of the Trinity. Here Bulgakov speaks analogically and in no way intends a univocal interpretation. The difference between God Who is a Divine self-enclosed trihypostatic essence and humanity is captured by this notion. Unlike God, humankind was created as natura naturans, not with fullness. Humankind was created to be open not only to God but to the different members of the human race as well as the world at large including animal and angelic/demonic life.

438 Bulgakov, BB, p. 32

439 Cf. Young, p. 166.
The souls of people who have died and the souls of those who have not yet been born...all this is present in exhaustive fullness as a single act in God’s eternity, as if participating in God’s repose, in the Sabbath of the absolute being...The temporal of the world is eternal for God, and eternal in God exists in temporality in creation.\(^{440}\)

According to Bulgakov, the creation of the soul is an eternal-temporal act, or simultaneously a “supratemporal creation” and a “creation in time.”\(^{441}\) The soul proceeds from God into creation at the moment of its conception. At this moment, God gives the soul a choice to either accept or reject God’s offer to incarnate in sinful flesh.\(^{442}\) The soul’s incarnation is premised upon its acceptance of the original sin. Given the fact that each soul is created for the purpose of creation and is thus given a “will for life,” the soul graciously accepts to be incarnate. This choice allows Bulgakov to express our personal culpability in Adam’s sin. How perfectly the soul accepts its incarnation has direct bearing on the “appropriate means or body for their own incarnation.”\(^{443}\) Corresponding to this pre-incarnate fiat, the soul has two possible genealogical lines in which to incarnate: the line of Cain and Seth.\(^{444}\) Within these two heredities, there are various families and

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\(^{440}\) Bulgakov, BL, pp. 59-60.

\(^{441}\) Ibid., p. 113. On this same page Bulgakov distances himself from the “doctrine of the preexistence of souls.” Nevertheless his ideas here are no less problematic than Origen’s preexistence of the souls that presupposed a pre-time state for creation. Bulgakov, however, is trying to convey what happens to the soul at the moment of creation that is an eternal-created event. It is antinomy, and therefore precludes any possibility to understand it.

\(^{442}\) Bulgakov attempts to demonstrate that the human soul has the freedom to accept or deny the opportunity to be incarnate, which includes taking upon itself the personal responsibility for the original sin. However, free choice in this instance is a freedom of excellence, not choice per se. Because the soul is in the presence of God and has no impediments to do the will of God, it only desires to do God’s will, to choose what is most excellent. Freedom of choice as we understand it as a choice between doing or not doing God’s will does not exist for the pre-incarnate soul. It may formally exist, but the pre-incarnate soul has not desire or attraction to do choose anything but God’s will. Nevertheless Bulgakov there is clearly a degree of excellence in choosing, as Mary gives the most excellent response that corresponds to her most excellent vocation to be Sophia’s hypostasis. What determines the difference in the degrees of excellence in accepting God’s will is not clear in Bulgakov’s thought. This idea suggests that Mary’s perfect response was a result of the unique place God had planned for her in salvation history. Therefore what we find here is a distinct Marian privilege.

\(^{443}\) Bulgakov, BB, p. 33.

\(^{444}\) Bulgakov writes: “this special heredity has its basis in the freedom of the pre-worldly self-determination of the soul.” (Bulgakov, BB, p. 33.)
degrees of holiness or sinfulness. The less perfect the response the more inclined they are to
incarnate into sinful families. This does not entail that the soul will become a degenerate, only
that the task towards holiness will be more difficult. Bulgakov does not advocate
predetermination.

The incarnate soul has the prerogative to accept or reject God’s offer of salvation. This
acceptance or rejection will in turn affect future generations. Following from the Trinitarian
image of humankind, Bulgakov contends that there is a communism of spirit. Because we share
the same human nature, we remain connected and, albeit incipiently, our actions for better or
worse have effects on other human beings. However, the direct beneficiaries of our actions are
our descendents. Thus, just as a mother shares an ineffable link with a child as opposed to a
stranger, so we too share stronger links with family members amidst our connection to
humankind as a whole. Bulgakov retains the Old Testament notion that the sins or holiness of
parents affect children and generations to come. (Cf. Ex 20:5-6) Our supratemporal choice for
incarnation, the actions of our ancestors, and our own experiences and actions constitute the
“unrepeatable mixture of colors that corresponds to [our] individual and complex personality.”

His elaborate specifications on heredity exist to express how the human race was capable
of producing the Theotokos. If we all share in the responsibility for Adam’s sin, then we must all
share in the responsibility for our salvation. Mary is the expression of this communism of spirit,
our collective desire to be saved. God, given Bulgakov’s synergistic account of Godhumanhood,
will only save humankind once humankind is prepared; this means that humankind must be
willing to receive God Incarnate through the elimination of its selfish individualism. Therefore,

445 Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. I, Location 3338 of 6301.
the Incarnation is Bulgakov’s pretext for his speculations about human heredity. A positive, collective response to God’s offer of salvation is needed for the Incarnation because God only persuades and never overrules human freedom. In the Mother of God, the definitive human response to God’s offer of salvation is given; on her rests the fullness of the graces of her ancestors. Mary is therefore not the product of divine election, as the dogma of the Immaculate Conception would have her, but rather a product of the holiness of successive generations of prophets and saints. Holiness for Bulgakov has a quasi-materialistic connotation. He describes it in terms of spiritual energy. Bulgakov writes “[s]piritual energies are held back or accumulate” as a result of their ancestors’ actions. Sinfulness is not a negative energy per se, but rather a lack of this spiritual energy, which as we will see in the next pages, is grace. In Mary the spiritual energies of her parents and ancestors reach their culmination.

With respect to grace, the grace that Mary receives is a natural/sophianic grace; it is a result of the “force of love” that each human being experiences in their existential longing for God. Mary’s graced state is a collective human achievement. Mary is therefore truly the New Eve and daughter of Zion. In Mary the prelapsarian state of blessedness returns to humankind.

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446 Nichols, Wisdom from Above, p. 68.
447 Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. II, Location 3418 of 6301.
448 This does not deny the role of Divine Providence.
449 Bulgakov, BB, p. 33.
450 Nichols, Wisdom from Above, pp. 67-68. See also Bulgakov, BL, p. 225.
451 Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 5503 of 6301.
However, insofar as Mary remains faithful to God amidst sin in the world and will conceive by the Holy Spirit, the God-Man, she exceeds Eve’s original blessedness.\textsuperscript{452}

For Bulgakov a strong theology of heredity is necessary to link the Old Testament to the New Testament.\textsuperscript{453} Otherwise what will result is an arbitrary teaching that stresses a philosophical category, e.g. God’s omnipotence as opposed to a scriptural presentation of the Divine-Human synergy; God works with, not against humankind. The result will be incorrect doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception. For Bulgakov, as Louth observes,

The sinlessness of the Mother of God is not then some natural state miraculously created by God (as Bulgakov understood the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception to assert), but the result of God’s providence, working through the history of salvation, and culminating in [Mary’s] personal faithfulness.\textsuperscript{454}

The Immaculate Conception is flawed because it downplays God’s providence and violates human freedom. To the contrary, Bulgakov’s theology of heredity stresses providence and human freedom, which is also a further expression of the Divine-Human synergy.

Bulgakov argues that by her perfect pre-incarnate will for creation and the holiness of the great saints and prophets of the Old Testament, including her parents, Anna and Joachim, Mary was born in sin but nonetheless personally sinless. In other words, the original sin has no personal effect in terms of the experience of guilt and concupiscence on Mary. Mary does not

\textsuperscript{452} As I mentioned in Chapter Two, here we find a clear development of Florensky’s and Solov’ev’s thought on human heredity.

\textsuperscript{453} The importance of heredity, for Bulgakov, is confirmed by the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, which both present Christ’s genealogy.

experience the sin of Adam personally, but rather she is affected by his sin in terms of the external consequence of Adams’s sin, i.e. infirmity and mortality.

Interestingly, Mary’s parents have an important role in Mary’s lack of guilt and concupiscence associated with the original sin. Bulgakov stresses not only Anna and Joachim’s righteous household but also the legendary account of the miraculous conception of Mary amidst their old age. The old age of Anna and Joachim is important because with old age is associated impotence and the lack of lust. For Bulgakov this indicates that Mary’s conception involved passionless coitus that nullified the effect of the original sin, i.e. concupiscence, which presumably would have been passed on to her by way of the lust of her parents during intercourse.

4.4 Section Three: Bulgakov’s Doctrine of Grace

In Bulgakov’s anthropology, humankind is never without grace because it is never without God. Grace, therefore, refers principally to God’s activity in the world, the Divine-Human synergy, and creaturely Sophia. Bulgakov in his writings speaks of two distinct forms of grace: natural/sophianic grace and supernatural grace/grace of deification. Whereas sophianic grace is simply nature created by God that is profoundly touched by God,

455 Bulgakov, FB, p. 28.

supernatural grace is the encounter we have with the Holy Spirit.\footnote{The adjective supernatural does not mean unnatural, but illustrates a new encounter and the effects of this encounter that occur between the Holy Spirit and the human individual. To complicate matters Bulgakov refers to the “supernatural sophianic basis” of creation. (Bulgakov, BB, p. 40.) By this he means that creation is founded in the sophianic Divine life of God. Bulgakov’s theology of kenosis, as expressed above, clarifies what this means.} Bulgakov’s notions of grace echo the sentiments of more recent Catholic theologians like Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac, and Bernard Lonergan, all of whom describe grace in existentialist terms as a movement of human beings to be open to God’s gift.\footnote{Quentin Quesnell, “Grace,” in The New Dictionary of Theology, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, pp. 437-450, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1987), pp. 444-446. Bulgakov and the aforementioned theologians are similar insofar as their discussion of grace includes a discussion of human agency. Note, however, although I do not believe Bulgakov would reject the notion that grace is “a movement to be open to God’s gift,” Bulgakov’s focus is Divine initiative, the divine-human connection that is ever present. In Bulgakov’s account grace makes the movement to be open to God’s gift possible. However, the gift itself is supernatural grace, which will be discussed below.} What grace is or how it differs from human nature is unimportant. Likewise Bulgakov’s concern is the application of grace and not the essence of grace.\footnote{Valliere, MRT, p. 351.} Valliere notes that Bulgakov’s position on grace is reflective of his Orthodoxy, for the Orthodox Church has never engaged the dialectic of grace and nature that has preoccupied Catholicism and Protestantism. However, Bulgakov was not aloof to this dialectic. He was especially well-versed in Catholic theories of grace; thus, he was familiar with St. Thomas Aquinas’ theory of the five effects of grace\footnote{For a succinct explanation of why Bulgakov consistently engages Aquinas and Neo-Scholastic thinkers in polemics see Bruce Marshall’s study: Bruce Marshall, “Ex Occidente Lux? Aquinas and Eastern Orthodox Theology,” Modern Theology 20.1 (January 2004): pp. 23-50), p. 24.)} and contemporaneous neo-scholastic theories of grace. Bulgakov in The Burning Bush offers an alternative expression of grace and nature in contrast to the neo-scholastic attempts that abstracted grace from nature and postulated a pure human nature.\footnote{On Bulgakov’s rejection of the scholastic abstraction of grace from nature see Bulgakov, BB, p. 17. Regarding his alternative expression on grace, see Bulgakov, BB, p. 18, 38-39.}
Sophianic Grace or creaturely Sophia expresses Bulgakov’s alternative expression of grace. Sophianic Grace is therefore not an entity but a constitutive part of human nature: it is “creaturely sophianicity, serving as the basis of all being regardless of its form.” Sophianic grace is a relational category that expresses the spiritual life as a “divine – humanity in the process of being accomplished.” Bulgakov stresses that it is “not a new what but only a kind of how.” In other words, as Boris Jakim notes, it is “the divine image and likeness in humanity,” or, as Valliere notes, the divine ground in us from which creation springs. Thus, sophianic grace is not only the image of God in humankind, but the ability that God gives to humankind to live out this image. And in this sense sophianic grace refers to the spiritual life or the basis and means for our relationship with God. This relationship entails two primary aspects: first, God’s providence, which guides us, and second, the existential yearning that we have for God or “earthly eros.” We desire God because we are a Godlike sophianic being made for communion with God.

Bulgakov’s doctrine of the image of God and the original sin intimately involve his doctrine of sophianic grace. The original sin weakens sophianic grace insofar as the abilities of Adam as an All-Man are no longer possible for postlapsarian humankind. Bulgakov writes:

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464 Bulgakov, BL, p. 225.
465 Ibid., p. 305. Bulgakov maintains that all sprits are graced; thus even Satan is graced since Satan has spiritual life and being. (Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. 1, Location 3377 of 6301.)
466 Bulgakov, BL, p. 305.
468 Valliere, MRT, p. 352.
469 Graves, p. 83.
“Having turned away from God, the human lost the power and fountain of life within, weakened, he could no longer contain and bind his body.”\textsuperscript{470} Thus, we are not stripped of our grace, which given Bulgakov's doctrine of Sophia will be a violation of our created being, but we lose the power we once had, and our bodies that worked in harmony with our spirit are now obstacles to the spiritual life. Adam’s sin introduces self-sufficient individuality into humanity.\textsuperscript{471} Serving ourselves outside of God or in contrast to God’s will is essentially a choice for nothing, or a choice against grace, which is powerless. Individualism brings only death and further separation from God, which is an unnatural, powerless state of our eternal spirit. Unfortunately, we are predisposed to this powerlessness due to Adam’s sin that is evident in our collective experience of guilt and concupiscence. The original sin makes us incapable of fully receiving and benefiting from our relationship to God and the world as God’s image and likeness. Nevertheless, because our life is graced insofar as it is creaturely Sophia, original sin cannot erase the image of God within us: we have the power to regain the fullness of this relationship to some extent. God has a will for us that allows us to respond to God’s offer of salvation. When we agree to do God’s will, we begin the process of overcoming the effects of the original sin and therefore regaining the fullness of our prelapsarian power, which Bulgakov expresses as spiritual energy. Spiritual energy refers to the increase in our knowledge and personal relationship, expressed in holiness and lack of concupiscence. It expresses the reclamation of our original likeness; like Adam and Eve before the original sin, we gain back control of our desires, thoughts, and actions so as to properly order them in relation to God and the world. The life and energy we gain back is our eternal spiritual life, which is not juxtaposed to bodily living but rather refers to the fullness of

\textsuperscript{470} Bulgakov, BB, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{471} Without grace humankind would be merely a material being and mono-hypostatic, “an egoist incapable of loving.” (Nichols, \textit{Wisdom from Above}, p. 190.)
bodily existence as transfigured existence.\textsuperscript{472} Thus, following the Palamite tradition, Bulgakov expresses sophianic grace in terms of energy as “the energy of sophianicity”\textsuperscript{473} or a “life-giving force.”\textsuperscript{474}

When Bulgakov speaks about the accumulation of spiritual energy throughout time that is bestowed on the Mother of God, he is speaking of sophianic grace. Spiritual energy predisposes us to work with the will of God, for whom we yearn to be united. Our prayers and good deeds can increase the effectiveness of this grace, albeit sophianic grace remains preparatory and preliminary. It is precisely through generations of holy and sacrificial living that the grace afforded to Adam is not only restored to Mary in its fullness but extended and increased since Mary, by virtue of living in a fallen world, understands the possibility of disobedience without being tempted to yield to it like Adam. Here we find the influence of Irenaeus of Lyons, who argued that Adam and Eve were immature before the original sin, and that their temptation by Satan was in part due to this immaturity.\textsuperscript{475} For Mary this cannot be the case since she sees the effects of sin all around her.

Before the Incarnation, Bulgakov contends that this restoration of sophianic grace in Mary as the removal of the original sin’s concupiscent effects occurred through three processes.\textsuperscript{476} The first and second processes refer to the grace, or spiritual energy, imparted by

\textsuperscript{472} More on this will be said in the pages that follow.
\textsuperscript{473} Nichols, \textit{Wisdom from Above}, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{474} Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Ch. 4, Sec. II, Location 2975 of 6301.
\textsuperscript{475} Irenaeus of Lyon, \textit{Against Heresies}, Book IV, Ch. 28 in R. M. Grant, \textit{Irenaeus of Lyons}, (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 144-162.
\textsuperscript{476} Theses effects include guilt, impairment and corruption. (Bulgakov, BB, p.19.)
the Levitic priesthood and God’s sophianic presence in creation. They are both ordinary means of grace.\footnote{Bulgakov, BB, p. 39.} The third process refers to the extraordinary means of grace evident in the direct blessedness of the Prophets and Old Testament saints who pass on their holiness to the Mother of God, i.e. Mary’s exceptional heredity.\footnote{Ibid., p. 40.} All three means of natural grace aid in the restoration of humankind’s \textit{justitia originalis}. In the case of Mary, however, she exceeds even this state; and thus perfectly exists as a human being imparted with the fullness of sophianic graces. Gabriel’s acclamation to Mary as “full of grace” confirms this.\footnote{Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 2, Sec. IV, Location 2626 of 7314. Bulgakov writes: “She was ‘full of grace,’ overshadowed even prior to the Incarnation by the constant illuminations of the Holy Spirit.” Bulgakov speaks of Mary as the “maximal soterianization of the human nature” that is \textit{realized} by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon her. By her natural grace Mary is unable to actively live out her proto-imagedness. (Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 2, Sec. IV, Location 2958 of 7314.)} Mary attains a maximal degree of holiness possible for a human person affected by the original sin and living in a fallen world. Only after Mary has attained the fullness of the grace of Sophia can the Holy Spirit descend upon her.\footnote{Cf. Legisa, \textit{Divina Maternitas Mariae in Sergio Bulgakov}, p. 50.} However, although Mary attains the height of human holiness, without supernatural grace she is unable to be \textit{Theotokos} or a “God according to grace.”

In terms of the correlation between Divine and creaturely Sophia, as naturally graced, humankind can manifest their Divine Sophianic \textit{logos}, but this is different from uniting with their \textit{logos}. An infinite gap remains between God and humankind that humankind is unable to cross. The salvation that we desire, which is deification, i.e. union with our \textit{logos}, or realization of our Divine Image, is not possible without the direct, personal intervention of the grace-giver, the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Bulgakov maintains that even though Mary attains the heights of
holiness and is graced to the maximal degree possible before the Annunciation, she is not yet saved. Only after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon her, especially after her Son accomplished His mission, is salvation possible for her.

Supernatural grace, therefore, refers to a communion with God that was not possible before the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven at Pentecost.\(^{481}\) Unfortunately, because we are speaking about God’s personal encounter with humankind and humankind’s encounter with God, theologizing on this point is limited since the relationship of God to the world is guarded by the cosmological and sophiological antinomies. This explains why, as Nichols perceptively noted, in comparison to Bulgakov’s reflections on sophianic grace, Bulgakov publishes very little on supernatural grace.\(^{482}\) Nevertheless, he is clear that the relationship with God for which we were made and existentially yearn is accomplished with the descent of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Nichols writes “man only truly exists to the degree that he welcomes such participation.”\(^{483}\)

With the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is personally present in our lives. She penetrates our nature to the degree in which we welcome Her. The Holy Spirit realizes Godhumanhood insofar as we communicate personally with God. Bulgakov speaks of this sharing in terms of divine inspiration that means the suppression of the personal I, leading to

\(^{481}\) This means that the Holy Spirit is involved in sophianic grace. Properly speaking, the Holy Spirit is the efficient and the formal cause of natural grace. Albeit not the Holy Spirit itself, natural grace is the action/movement of the Holy Spirit in creation. To use Aquinas’ terms, natural grace has operational and cooperative effects. Grace is operational in the sense that it prompts people to respond to God’s offer of salvation and cooperative in the sense that it allows for us to respond to this offer. Yet this grace is only prefigurative and it does not give us salvation. Bulgakov maintains that the Holy Spirit acts impersonally through Sophia, creating these effects. (Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. I, Location 3128 of 6301.) Cosmologically speaking, the Holy Spirit prompts creation to resist the chaos of nothing, which is the correlative of creation due to creation’s creation out of nothing. The activity of the Spirit in nature makes the natural world through human agency prepared to receive the Holy Spirit’s personal descent. (Graves, p. iv.)

\(^{482}\) Cf. Nichols, Wisdom from Above, p. 72.

\(^{483}\) Ibid., p. 16.
a life lived in accordance with the Holy Spirit, which is also life according to our divine *logos*. Stressing Galatians 2:20 “yet not I, but Christ lives in me,” Bulgakov contends that the presence of the Holy Spirit makes the individual believer transparent to the Holy Spirit who, in turn, following from its hypostatic function, makes the believer transparent to Christ Jesus and thereby adopted as children of the Father. Bulgakov’s concern is the new relationship between the Holy Spirit and humankind, who, after the impasse of sin that has been removed through the Paschal Mystery and the Resurrection of Christ, now enables divine communion for humankind. Therefore, supernatural grace not only directly involves the Holy Spirit but also the Divine Son.

This explains why his thought on supernatural grace is situated within a Christological context. In Christ humanity and divinity are united. Christ’s deified humanity is the means by which union between humankind and God occurs. Christ is not simply a human male man, but the all-human, and the hypostasis of the Divine Son. As the all-humanity and the Logos,

484 Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, Ch. 5, Sec. II, Location 3319 of 6301.

485 Bulgakov, BL, 305. Grace involves the entire Trinity; it is an adoption by the Holy Spirit that also involves the realization of Christ in the world. (Bulgakov, BL, p. 305.)

486 Nichols, *Wisdom From Above*, p. 73.

487 Bulgakov writes: “the duality of the natures in man, his eternal divine-humanity, makes possible the deification of life, the inseparable and inconfusable communion of the two natures in man.” (Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 1, Sec. I, Location 1355-1356 of 7314.)

488 Bulgakov insists that Christ was a pure male. (Cf. Bulgakov, “Muzhskoe i Zhenskoe v Bozhestve,” p. 371.) Also in *Sophia: The Wisdom of God* he insists that Christ assumed human nature “in its masculine form.” (Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 100.) Note that he says this after his discussion of the sexual principles. In the same paragraph he writes: “the spirit of every human being combines elements of this dual principle, though of course in different ways and in different proportions.” (Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 99.) Therefore, Christ lacks a feminine potential in his nature. This is because Christ is the incarnation of the Divine Son, who is the image of masculinity. In this way the image of God in not completely manifested until the Holy Spirit descends upon the Mother of God.) How Christ’s pure masculinity is consistent with Bulgakov’s bisexual image of God is not clear in his thought. Bulgakov argues that Christ and Mary together reveal the image of God. However, if spiritual bisexuality is a constituent of humanity
Christ contains within his nature all human hypostases as both a proto-image (divinity) and an image in creation (humanity). His incarnation brings God intimately close to us, and he allows the human race to participate in his divine-human life. He reveals to an extent the path that all Christians must follow towards deification; however, his deification is caused by divine condescension, i.e. God becomes human. Humankind, however, must ascend to God while God in the Divine Dyad descends to humankind. Following Bulgakov’s theology of the Divine Dyad, the Holy Spirit actualizes what Christ has accomplished for humankind. Through the Holy Spirit supernatural grace is imparted to us, which can also be expressed as being incorporated into the Body of Christ. Our deification, once it is complete, will involve direct communion with both the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Supernatural grace is a pure gift, not something we can accomplish by our own efforts under God’s providence, albeit God does not impart it until we are prepared. Even once we are prepared, we only receive the realization of this personal relationship with God to the extent that we are able to do so. This corresponds to our will to be in communion with God. Thus, there are degrees in deification. His insistence that the Holy Spirit is present in our lives points to the Holy Spirit’s hypostatization of our nature. Whereas sophianic grace simply refers to our synergistic relationship with God, supernatural grace refers to a new relationship with God whereby the Holy Spirit is hypostatically present within us and directly affects our relationship

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489 Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 3, Sec. IV, Location 2937 of 7314.
with God, in the imputation of the Holy Spirit’s gifts. In some sense we unite with both the Holy Spirit and the Son naturally, so long as we understand that the relationship is not fully reciprocated. To be God by grace is to encounter God personally within creaturely Sophia. We cannot hypostatize the Divine nature and, therefore, it is impossible for us to know and experience God-in-Himself, but only God as God-for-us. Thus, supernatural grace involves the adoption of our hypostasis by the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit, which is simultaneously to realize our shared Godhumanhood with Christ.

4.5 Conclusion

As we move to discuss Bulgakov’s doctrine of Mary as the pneumatophoric hypostasis in the next chapter, it is important to understand that this doctrine presupposes his treatment of supernatural grace, the Divine dyad, and the image of God that I have outlined previously. Bulgakov emphasizes that the adoption of Mary by the Holy Spirit is none other than the hypostatization of her nature by the Holy Spirit.
Chapter Five: Bulgakov’s Mariology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine Bulgakov’s theology of the Mother of God. I will demonstrate that Bulgakov’s Mariology should be situated within his broader reflection on Godhumanhood that stresses the synergy between God and humankind. Even though she is Sophia and stands closest to God in heaven, Mary is the penultimate expression of Godhumanhood from the perspective of humankind, i.e. she demonstrates how God involves humankind in God’s revelation and saving work. Her exceptional role has less to do with her election by God, but rather her personal holiness and exemplary humility and fidelity to Christ that will allow her to personally partake in the Paschal Mystery and the salvation of the human race. For these reasons she is the “soul of the world.” Given Bulgakov’s situation of his Mariology within his pneumatology, Mary is also our eschatological anticipation realized.

For the purpose of clarity, this chapter has been divided into five sections. Section One examines Bulgakov’s doctrine of the pneumatophoric hypostasis and theology of synergy relevant to my study. Because Bulgakov juxtaposes his Mariology against the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, I will evaluate his interpretation of this dogma and his alternative expression of Mary’s sinlessness. Sections Two and Three expand upon Section One. They will examine the vocational element of Bulgakov’s theology of the pneumatophoric hypostasis. Although Mary becomes the pneumatophoric hypostasis at the Annunciation, she does not fully realize her new existence until her glorification that required a series of personal trials. Section

491 As mentioned earlier, The Burning Bush, Bulgakov’s main work on his Mariology, was authored in response to this dogma and Catholic Mariology proffered by Matthias Scheeben. We cannot speak authoritatively on Bulgakov’s Mariology until we have examined in detail why he rejected the Immaculate Conception and what he offers in contradistinction to it.
Two addresses the stages of Mary’s development into the pneumatophoric hypostasis. This will include a discussion of these themes: Mary’s templification, betrothal to St. Joseph, virginity, Annunciation and the Cross, Pentecost, and the Dormition and Glorification. Section Three will examine Mary’s relationships with Sophia, the angels, the Church, the ecumenical movement, and the final judgment. Section Four examines Bulgakov’s extension of Mary’s relationship to Christians. Section Five concludes this chapter.

5.2 Section One: The Pneumatophoric Hypostasis

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, Mary is the pneumatophoric hypostasis because she is completely united to the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit. She not only shares the mission, e.g. “hypostatic motherhood” itself,\textsuperscript{492} of the Holy Spirit, but also the Holy Spirit’s countenance shines through her own countenance. As the pneumatophoric hypostasis she allows the Holy Spirit to unite the Holy Spirit’s hypostasis with her own hypostasis. She participates directly in the life of the Holy Spirit and, in this way, she is Divine Motherhood personified. Mary is the perfect Spirit-Bearer, and she becomes the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit on Earth at her Annunciation.\textsuperscript{493}

The titles “pneumatophoric hypostasis” and “Spirit-Bearer” that Bulgakov calls Mary encapsulates Mary’s relationship to the Holy Spirit but also to the Church. Although Bulgakov’s title “pneumatophoric hypostasis” is a neologism, it has a precedent in the Orthodox tradition since it is a derivative of the commonly used term \textit{pneumatophoros}. Petro B.J. Bilaniuk claimed that \textit{pneumatophoros} has been employed in the Orthodox tradition; however, it was first used by

\textsuperscript{492} Cf. Graves, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{493} Bulgakov’s teachings on Mary’s role in salvation history explicate the first antiphon of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, “Most Holy Theotokos Save Us.”
the Shepherd of Hermas, who defines it as carrier of the Spirit.⁴⁹⁴ Thus, the title “Spirit-Bearer” is also a derivative of *pneumatophoros*. In the Eastern tradition these terms are used primarily in these contexts: in reference to great ascetic saints, e.g. St. Macarius the Spirit-bearer, the monastic life,⁴⁹⁶ and in reference to a general call to holiness. Therefore, Kallistos Ware in his famous introductory work to Orthodoxy, summarizing the spiritual life writes: “the whole aim of Christian life is to be a spirit-bearer, to live in the Spirit of God.”⁴⁹⁷ From Bulgakov’s use of these titles it is clear that his Mariology should be seen as a contribution to Orthodox pneumatology and discipleship as opposed to the creation of a separate theological discipline, e.g. Orthodox Mariology.

In addition, for Bulgakov “Spirit-Bearer” and “pneumatophoric hypostasis” are synonyms for Divine Motherhood. However, it is important to note that Bulgakov uses “Spirit-Bearer” in reference to Christians but never the “pneumatophoric hypostasis.” Although these terms are synonymous when applied to Mary, the latter term cannot be applied to Christians inasmuch as it carries with it a specific connotation for Bulgakov. Pneumatophoric hypostasis refers to the unique relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit. Not only does she participate in the historical life-giving work of the Holy Spirit, insofar as she gives life to the Divine Son as

⁴⁹⁴ Petro B.J. Bilaniuk, *Studies in Eastern Christianity*, (Toronto: The Ukraine Free University, 1981), 2:54-55. Bilaniuk was unaware of Bulgakov’s *The Burning Bush* since he argues that he is the first to call Mary the Pneumatophora. Note that he derived this term from *pneumatophoros* and Mary’s exemplary relationship with the Holy Spirit.


His mother at the Annunciation, but also the degree to which she unites with the Holy Spirit cannot be attained by other human hypostases. Therefore, Bulgakov calls Mary the “Pneumatophore in the proper sense.” Nevertheless, for Bulgakov this is not to set Mary apart from humanity, but rather a sober realization that although humankind is called to emulate and participate in Mary’s relationship with the Holy Spirit, no creature will approach the intimacy that Mary shares with the Holy Spirit.

5.2.1 Mary and the Immaculate Conception

Bulgakov’s rejection of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception has several prongs. First, he argues that the manner in which it was defined was illicit. Bulgakov takes up the traditional Orthodox polemic that the Pope had no authority to define doctrines/dogmas outside of an ecumenical council.

Second, the Immaculate Conception contradicts this tradition of the Church that teaches that Mary is affected by the original sin and shares the consequence of the original sin in terms of her infirmity of nature. Bulgakov expresses infirmity of nature as mortality or “hunger and thirst, fatigue and the need for sleep,” but also natural death. Since death is the result of the original sin, the Liturgy of the Dormition of Mary, which celebrates the falling asleep—a trope

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499 As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Mary’s adoption by the Holy Spirit is not unique in Bulgakov’s account. What happens to Mary is a perfect degree of sanctification that all Christians will experience. Bulgakov writes: “the blessing with grace or divinization of the human by the action of the Holy Spirit can be imagined generally as a type of adoptionism, more or less full penetration of human nature by divine, their living conjunction.” (Bulgakov, BB, p. 168.)

500 Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 5, Sec. II, Location 5488-5489.

501 Death results from the weakness of the spirit to overcome the body. Thus it is not a curse, but rather the loss of the power of spirit. (Sergius Bulgakov, “Dying before Death” in A Bulgakov Anthology, p. 24.) There is also an important pedagogical function of death that I will discuss in the pages that follow.
for the death of Mary—directly contradicts the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. If Mary was freed from the original sin, then she should not have died.\textsuperscript{502} Yet he argues that the Catholic Church erroneously teaches the contrary and, in fact, it celebrates Mary’s death and resurrection during the feast of the Assumption.

Third, he argues the doctrine is based on a fallacious anthropology and doctrine of God. In this account, the original sin is precisely the stripping away of God’s supernatural grace from humanity, leaving humanity in its natural state. God then simply gives this original grace to Mary. Owing to his Sophiological method, he finds this to be a groundless abstraction since God is always in communion with humankind.\textsuperscript{503} Bulgakov agrees with the Catholic teaching that Mary must be personally sinless to allow for humankind and creation to receive God hypostatically.\textsuperscript{504} However, he rejects any notion that this is a result of a privilege\textsuperscript{505} or that Mary could be redeemed before Christ’s ministry was accomplished.\textsuperscript{506} Bulgakov’s synergistic account of Mary’s sinlessness that involves her ancestors, family, and her personal holiness is in stark contrast to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The Immaculate Conception may allow for the Incarnation, but it does so at the cost of Godhumanhood. It is a \textit{de facto}

\textsuperscript{502} Bulgakov, BB, p. 72.

\textsuperscript{503} It is of interest to note that, as Louth correctly illustrates, Bulgakov’s criticism of pure human nature anticipates Henri de Lubac’s criticism made nearly twenty years later. (Louth, “Mother of God,” p. 153.)

\textsuperscript{504} Graves, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{505} Bulgakov is not always consistent in his rejection of privileges. For instance, Bulgakov argues that the Holy Spirit removed from Mary “suffering and bodily pain” that would have presumably been included in her infirm nature. (Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 5, Sec. I, Location 4293 of 6301.) Mary not only has her pain decreased in accordance with prelapsarian birth but completely removed. However, this is an unnecessary speculation and weakens Bulgakov’s case against the Immaculate Conception and his synergistic explanation of Mary’s sinless state since Mary receives a privilege from the Holy Spirit that no other woman receives.

\textsuperscript{506} Before the Incarnation, Bulgakov insists that God did not encounter humankind hypostatically. (Bulgakov, JL, p. 135.)
replacement of the God of the Scriptures whom we encounter personally with *deus ex machina*. The economy of salvation becomes the arbitrary work of an arbitrary God, Who has an “anthropomorphic will” as opposed to an absolute will.\(^{507}\) Therefore, the Immaculate Conception does not simply supply an erroneous expression of a correct idea, but is suggestive of an alternative expression of the economy of salvation that is not in accordance with biblical or Orthodox teaching. God’s inordinate action in the Immaculate Conception sacrifices the Old Testament, which becomes relegated to a history of God’s arbitrary actions. For Bulgakov this is an aberration because it breaks the solidarity of the new and old covenants and the human race. Moreover, it is suggestive of an arbitrary doctrine of God, for if God can simply exempt Mary from the original sin, then why did God not extend this exemption to the rest of humanity?\(^{508}\) The only reasonable answer is that God’s divine prerogatives allow for such actions, but this is again for Bulgakov a contradiction of Orthodox teaching, which for him stresses that God is eternal and absolute. Thus, he argues that every action of God is consequential and has eternal significance; God does not proceed by way of privileges because God works with and in humanity.\(^{509}\) This is the nature of Godhumanhood, the synergy between humanity and God. Mary is the fruit of this synergy since she bears the effects of her ancestors’ good works and prayers, which nullify the sinfulness of the original sin.

Fourth, the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception violates Mary’s free will and personal accomplishment. Mary is an exception to creation rather than the apex of creation for God does something special to her without giving room for her freedom.

\(^{507}\) Bulgakov, BL, p. 31.

\(^{508}\) Cf. Bulgakov, BL, p. 32.

\(^{509}\) Ibid., p. 31.
Although Bulgakov brings to the attention of his readers these important arguments against the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, he also illustrates a shortcoming in his theology. Bulgakov overly generalizes Catholicism. Particularly, in The Burning Bush, Bulgakov treats Matthias Scheeben’s Mariology as representative of the Catholic tradition. Bulgakov’s main arguments are aimed at the legalism of Scheeben’s neo-scholastic interpretation of the Immaculate Conception, but also his abstract consideration of grace and human nature as two separate realities. Pure human nature was inherently mortal and prone to sin while grace was a donum superadditum that gives eternal life. Although this interpretation of grace stresses the gratuity of grace, it also presents human nature as naturally deficient. For Bulgakov this is offensive since it suggests that God, Who is love, planted the seed of sin in humankind. Moreover, he believes that this position is indicative of a weak anthropology that does not take into serious consideration the biblical account of creation. God created humankind in God’s own image and likeness. Humankind is inherently blessed. I spoke about this blessing in my explication of sophianic grace mentioned earlier. For Bulgakov legalism and abstraction should not have any role in theology since theology expresses the living, organic Divine-human synergy between humankind and God. Nevertheless, much of what Scheeben argues, e.g. pure nature, is no longer acceptable within Catholic circles and thus it should not be taken as official Catholic

510 Ibid., p. 158 n. 13. Surprisingly, Scheeben’s Mariology shares remarkable similarities with Bulgakov’s Mariology. Although Scheeben does not argue that Mary is the pneumatophoric hypostasis, he argues that Mary is the “bearer, organ, and representative of the Holy Ghost who proceeds from the Logos.” (Matthias J. Scheeben, Mariology, trans. T. L. M. J. Geukers, (London: B. Herder Book Company, 1946), 1:217.) As “the organ of the Holy Spirit” the Holy Spirit “works in her in the same way that Christ’s humanity is the instrument of the Logos.” (Scheeben, 2:185.) Moreover, Mary is “an image of the person of the Holy Ghost” and “carnal dwelling of the Holy Ghost.” (Scheeben, 1:179-180.) Like Bulgakov, Scheeben comes very close to arguing that Mary is an Incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Bulgakov was either unaware or uninterested in Scheeben’s Mariology.

teaching. Furthermore, Slesinski demonstrates that the Catholic tradition contemporaneous to Bulgakov was not monolithic, and in fact the question of Mary’s death was debated among the neo-scholastics. Precisely for this reason Slesinski criticizes Bulgakov for his caricature of Catholic Mariology that relies inordinately on the state of pure nature and presents Catholic doctrine within an erroneous *deus ex machina* framework.

As Fredrick Jelly illustrates, within the Catholic theology there were/are at least two perspectives on the issue of Mary’s death: the immortalists, those who deny that Mary died without necessarily agreeing that sin is linked to death—though the implication is clear—and the mortalists who accept that Mary was mortal and that mortality is a consequence of sin. Matthias Scheeben was a proponent of the mortalist position. He argues that although Mary was exempted from death, the penalty of the original sin, Mary dies out of love. Her death has no expiatory significance. Two renowned expositors of Scheeben’s thought, Wilhelm and Scannell, provide further insight on Scheeben’s view; they argue that, for Scheeben, Mary’s loving desire to be with her Son either dissolved the bonds of body and soul or availed herself to God so completely that God had pity on her and miraculously intervened by allowing her death. (I have little doubt that Bulgakov would find this position any more convincing since it relies on another privilege that is out of sync with his doctrine of God.) This ambiguity over Mary’s death

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512 Neo-scholastic theology was *en vogue* during Bulgakov’s life. In fact, Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) requested that the clergy study Aquinas and follow his example. (Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter: “Aeterni Patris: On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy,” 1879), para. 33.) This was the Catholic Magisterium’s *de facto* endorsement of neo-scholastic theology.


is evident in the magisterial teachings of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has never spoken dogmatically about Mary’s death, and when opportunities have arisen for it to do so, e.g. Pope Pius XII’s encyclical “Munificentissimus Deus” that defined the dogma of the Assumption, the Magisterium did not address this issue.

Despite these shortcomings in Bulgakov’s thought, he offers important insights about the Mother of God in his rejection of Catholic Mariology. Bulgakov’s treatment of the Mother of God in The Burning Bush is anthropologically centered. He interprets the Marian tradition anew from the side of the human subject. Thus, Bulgakov stresses Mary’s maturation in the life of faith.

Even though Bulgakov presents a caricature of Catholic Mariology, his overarching criticisms are not easily addressed. If we grant his speculations on Divine-Humanity and salvation history as a synergy between God and humankind, how can theologies of exceptional privilege be granted? Even though Bulgakov is not always consistent on this point, he will argue that they cannot be granted, and to do so is nonetheless a denial of the Divine-Human relationship that he finds ratified at the Council of Chalcedon. Therefore, the Immaculate Conception not only attributes an arbitrary action of God that is out of sync with the rest of Scripture’s account of God, but also robs Mary and the human race’s involvement in Mary’s exceptional state. Mary gives to Christ a fully hypostatic human nature; by this he means that Christ receives Mary’s human nature that is blessed through her choices and actions of her ancestors. Nature is by no means an amorphous abstraction.

5.3 Section Two: The Preparation for the Pneumatophoric Hypostasis

5.3.1 Temple Virgin

Even though Mary lacked the effects of the original sin in terms of sinfulness, she was nonetheless in need of further maturation in her spiritual life. Mary needed to actualize her extraordinary graced state. Herein lies for Bulgakov the importance of the inclusion of the feast of Mary’s entrance into the Temple in the Orthodox liturgical calendar, for it provides evidence of Mary’s spiritual growth that will allow Mary to give her complete and unreserved fiat at the Annunciation. In the Temple, Mary achieves what is for Bulgakov the true goal of monastic existence to become a passionless human through her prayer and fasting. By passionless he means the complete detachment from lust or desire for anything but God. Her Temple experience eradicated the possibility of sin that remained for her even though she was born without the sinfulness of the original sin. This is important because in order to give her fiat, her fiat must totality encompass her will and being; the possibility to sin, which in Bulgakov’s account is related to pride or self-will, must be entirely overcome. To do this, Mary must take up an “angelic habit” and devote herself entirely to prayer and fasting. Like any nun who dedicates herself exclusively to prayer, this will require heroic effort. Well aware of Mary’s influence on nuns, Bulgakov argues that she is “the First Nun;” however, her monastic period was only a preparatory period for Mary. Not every disciple is called to be a monk; however, the spiritual


518 The angelic habit is a reference to monasticism. (Cf. Bulgakov, FB, p. 161.)

519 Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, p. 15.
life requires some form asceticism.\(^{520}\) Therefore, Mary’s experience of the faith is relevant not only for monks but all disciples.

Bulgakov follows the tradition that Anne, Mary’s mother, brought Mary to the Temple at the age of three to be raised before God until her betrothal to Joseph of Nazareth. Only the Temple, the place where God encounters humankind, provides a suitable place for Mary’s spiritual growth and preparation for the Incarnation.\(^{521}\) Given Bulgakov’s stress on the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, this is consistent because Mary becomes the embodied transition between the covenants. Mary is made into the temple of the Holy Spirit at the temple of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. She undergoes what Bulgakov calls a process of templification.\(^{522}\) In this manner, Bulgakov conflates the traditional title that Mary is the “Temple of the Holy Spirit” with the function of the Temple in the Old Testament as the meeting place between God and humankind. During her time in the Temple\(^{523}\) Mary accomplishes the “human side” of sanctification, making herself “an altar for divine power.”\(^{524}\) It is here that Mary exhausts sophianic grace. Just as the Temple was the “God-bearing” place on Earth, after her heroic human efforts, Mary becomes the God-bearer\(^{525}\) who is now prepared to receive God. In

\(^{520}\) Jakim, “Sergius Bulgakov: Russian Theosis,” p. 250
\(^{521}\) Cf. Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, p. 15.
\(^{522}\) “Templification” is Bulgakov’s neologism, which Smith translates from the original votserkovlenie. (Bulgakov, BB, p. 66.)
\(^{525}\) Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, p. 15. God’s presence in the temple points to a peculiarity of God’s presence. “God is not present everywhere; and when He is present, He is present not by His omnipotence, but by His grace-bestowing power, and there are holy, God-chosen places as well as places forsaken by God.” (Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch. 1, Location 257 of 1641.)
this way Mary receives the power of the Temple’s consecration,\textsuperscript{526} and in doing so she makes the Temple at Jerusalem obsolete. The graces imparted to humankind through the Temple, based on Bulgakov’s interpretation of the ordinary means of Sophianic grace, prepared humankind for the Incarnation, which after Mary’s preparation for the Incarnation is no longer relevant. Thus, the Temple remains only a place of prayer since it has served its function.\textsuperscript{527} Whereas before the Incarnation God encountered humankind by means of the temple and angels, now in the person of Mary humankind is able to encounter God personally. The advent of the Incarnation means that Earth is now hallowed because God lives among us. Thus, Mary is the first temple of the Holy Spirit,\textsuperscript{528} but not the last as Pentecost allows for each human hypostasis to become a temple of the Holy Spirit. In Mary, what God destined from all eternity to make humankind “the true place of divine dwelling” has come to fruition.\textsuperscript{529}

5.3.2 St. Joseph

Mary’s templification has significance for the nation of Israel because it represents not only the personal-spiritual development of Mary in the purview of the Incarnation, but also the final step of the development of Israel.\textsuperscript{530} Nevertheless, the Incarnation required not only Mary’s preparation in the Temple, but also her betrothal to a worthy spouse who would provide a

\textsuperscript{526} Bulgakov, BB, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{527} Ibid., p. 66.
\textsuperscript{528} Bulgakov’s thought that Mary is the temple of the Holy Spirit is based on the kontakion from the feast of The Entry of the Virgin Mary Into the Temple, “The all-pure Temple of the Savior...is led today into the house of the Lord, and with her she brings the grace of the divine Spirit,” and Hebrews 9:1-7, the first reading of this Liturgy, that alludes to the Theotokos becoming the holy tabernacle of the Lord.
\textsuperscript{529} Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{530} This typological argument also provides Bulgakov with fodder to defend her perpetual virginity.
righteous, Jewish household for Mary and Jesus as well as a Davidic genealogy, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. St. Joseph fulfills this function; he is the guardian of Jesus and Mary and aids in Mary’s vocation as the Theotokos. Joseph provides Jesus with a Jewish upbringing while guarding both Mary and her Son in a world which would have been otherwise hostile to them. Joseph, as his wife Mary, has a typological function. If Mary is the temple, then Joseph functions as a temple priest who administers to the needs of the temple. Though this is not explicit in Bulgakov’s thought, his typological portrayal of Mary and Joseph’s marriage provides him with an argument for Mary’s perpetual virginity. Just as the priest would not touch the Ark of the Covenant, the bearer of God’s power, St. Joseph would not have had intercourse with the Mother of God, the bearer of God’s Spirit. This also explains Bulgakov’s reticence towards a theology of the Holy Family and preference for the titles “Betrothed” and “Guardian” as opposed to “Husband” for Joseph.

Together as Virgin-Mother and Betrothed, Mary and Joseph are prepared to receive Christ in the Incarnation. However, Bulgakov adds that Joseph is not simply a holy man but “the bearer of all the Old Testament righteousness, the personification of the Old Testament Church.” This is not to take anything away from Mary, who is the “head and glory” of humanity, but rather to demonstrate that Joseph is the greatest representative of Israel, and thus Joseph is confined to the Old Testament to the extent that, as Bulgakov notes, he dies

531 Bulgakov, FB, pp. 185-186.
532 “St. Joseph completes the Lord’s genealogy. He closes the series of forefathers and fathers that is celebrated in the Church over the two weeks preceding Christmas.” (Bulgakov, FB, p. 184.)
533 Ibid., p. 182.
535 Bulgakov, FB, p. 186.
before Jesus begins his ministry. Here Bulgakov demonstrates his appropriation of the patriarchal structure of the Old Testament and emphasis on tracing the genealogical line through the paternal parent.

Interestingly, as opposed to the dominant Catholic tradition that St. Joseph was a virgin, Bulgakov argues that Joseph had children from a previous marriage. These children serve a necessary function for the Incarnation since they provide Jesus with a fully human family complete with siblings. What is not assumed cannot be redeemed. Jesus’ family more fully brings him into the human family and, therefore, allows Christ to redeem the family, in particular our relationships with our siblings.

5.3.3 Virginity

As Louth notes, the icon of The Burning Bush is based on a Mariological interpretation of Moses’ Theophany, where the power of God consumes without burning the bush on Mount Sinai. (Exodus 3) In the Orthodox tradition this theophany prefigures Mary’s perpetual


537 St. Joseph does not approach the Forerunner in holiness; however, he is the greater in holiness than all before him whose lives are confined to the Old Testament. Of course, St. John is a transitional figure, but his relevance is for the New Testament. (Cf. Bulgakov, FB, pp. 186-187.)

538 With exception of Jerome, the majority of the fathers teach that St. Joseph was advanced in age when he married Mary and that he had children from a previous marriage. Notable fathers who opined this position include Eusebius, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Sophronius, Theophylact, Euthymius, Ambrose, Hilary, and Gregory of Tours. (Cf. Bulgakov, FB, p. 172.)

539 Ibid., p. 182.

540 Ibid., p. 182.

Mary was consumed but not destroyed by Divinity. In this tradition, virginity has a spiritual and corporeal connotation. Likewise Bulgakov delineates between historical and spiritual virginity. Both senses of virginity are intimately connected as Mary’s perpetual virginity (historical virginity) is a result of her spiritual virginity.

Historical virginity refers to the fact that Mary never had sexual intercourse. Although Bulgakov’s stress on Mary’s lack of sex may seem inordinate to a contemporary reader, for Bulgakov it is important because it reveals something about God’s original intention for sex and our sexuality. Bulgakov explicitly states this in his apologetics for the virgin conception of Christ. Recall that Bulgakov appropriates Augustinian anthropology into his thought and, like Augustine, he argues that carnal intercourse is the means by which the sin of Adam is passed on to future generations, and thus the dogma of Christ’s sinlessness precludes the normal form of the transmission of life. However, Bulgakov extends this logic further than Augustine. Because Christ is fully human, his conception, which is without sin, must be in accord with human conception without sin. He concludes that the virgin conception of Christ reveals the original mode of human conception. Thus, even in the act of conception, God does not violate human relationships but fulfills them.

Bulgakov’s biblical and liturgical support for the perpetual virginity of Mary is Ezekiel’s revelation of “the image of the closed eastern gates through which no one passes except the Lord.” (Bulgakov, BB, p. 125.) Only Christ passed through Mary’s vaginal tract. Note that this verse is found in Ezekiel 44:2, and it is read during the major feasts of Mary including The Annunciation of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, The Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, The Protection of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and The Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple.

As noted in Chapter Two, Bulgakov’s thought on virginity seems to be influenced by Pavel Florensky.

Bulgakov violently rejected the conclusion of the Church of England’s doctrinal report that allowed for dissent on the doctrine of the virginal conception of Christ. (Bulgakov, “The Incarnation and the Virgin Birth,” p. 32.) He finds speculation about the Incarnation without the virgin birth to be absurd and overly rationalistic.
How this odd state of virginal conception is possible follows from his insights on spiritual virginity. Spiritual virginity bespeaks of a harmonious spiritual state marked by internal harmony and the lack of lust and passion.\textsuperscript{545} It is chasteness, wholeness combined with wisdom.\textsuperscript{546} Virginity “is a perfect orientation towards God in the absence of any multicentricity, destroying its integrity, throwing it into disorder,”\textsuperscript{547} but also the overcoming of lust and passion involved with sex.\textsuperscript{548} In this way, Mary had control over her body that is evident in her lack of “sexuality” or lust and desire to have intercourse with Joseph. Therefore, Mary perfectly manifests virginity in both the historical and religious senses.\textsuperscript{549} Bulgakov calls her the “Incarnation of Virginity”\textsuperscript{550} or “bearer of perfect Virginity.”\textsuperscript{551}

Moreover, based on these definitions of spiritual virginity and the fact that spiritual virginity is a prerequisite for virginal conception, we can also conclude that virginal conception must involve a harmonious action of the body and spirit. It is fitting that only Mary could conceive Christ because she is the only human person who reestablished the harmony of spirit and body needed for this truly human form of conception. This virginity of spirit allows her to actualize a virginal mode of conception. Unfortunately, Bulgakov does not describe at length what virginal conception is. It is clear based on his few insights that it is an extra-physical

\textsuperscript{545} Mary’s role as virgin has a recapitulative function. Bulgakov wrote, “She is not only Virgin and the Mother of Christ, but still more: EVER-VIRGIN (Aei-parthenos). That means that in her is restored the original virginity and purity of mankind which is proper to it in its creation.” (Bulgakov, “A Brief Statement of the Place of the Virgin Mary in the Thought and Worship of the Orthodox Church,” p. 31.)

\textsuperscript{546} Crum, “The Doctrine of Sophia,” p. 58.

\textsuperscript{547} Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light,” p. 35.

\textsuperscript{548} Because of his virginity, i.e. holiness, John the Baptist is worthy to baptize Christ. (Bulgakov, FB, p. 38.)

\textsuperscript{549} Bulgakov, BB, p. 96, 103.

\textsuperscript{550} Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light,” p. 35.

\textsuperscript{551} Bulgakov, BB, p. 10.
relation whereby conception could occur without physical sex or least intercourse as we know it.\textsuperscript{552} Although this may seem offensive to many contemporary readers, since the effect of this teaching is that it devalues normal sexual relations in that he regards them as a result of original sin, the importance of this teaching for Bulgakov is that it reveals that Christ and Mary reveal a truly human existence. Virginal conception for Bulgakov is not a denial of the body and sexuality, but rather its fulfillment. The dialectic that we experience between spirit and body, where flesh struggles against the spirit and vice versa (Galatians 5:17), is a result of the original sin.\textsuperscript{553} This juxtaposition of the body and the spirit are evident in our experience of lust.\textsuperscript{554} For Adam, however, this was not the case, and at least in theory a means of procreation that involved both spirit and body was possible for him. Sex for prelapsarian Adam would have expressed this original harmony between body and spirit. Therefore, parenthood and historical virginity were not originally a contradiction, for Adam and Eve were intended by God to be the first virginal spouses.\textsuperscript{555} Bulgakov’s speculations provide a new insight on the Church’s dogmatic profession of Mary as the Ever-Virgin and Theotokos. These seemingly contradictory titles reveal Mary’s perfect humanity that allows the normal means of conception that is no longer accessible to postlapsarian humankind.

\textsuperscript{553}Cf. Bulgakov, \textit{The Holy Grail & the Eucharist}, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{554}Bulgakov, BB, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{555}Bulgakov, UF, p. 303.
Bulgakov’s thought on the virginal mode of conception affirms the unique aspect of the conception of Christ that occurred through the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Mary; however, the fact that it is conception by means of a spiritual encounter as opposed to carnal union illustrates for Bulgakov an original mode of procreation that is in accordance with his stress on the full humanity of Christ. This is evidence of how thorough-going his criticisms of exceptional privileges are. Christ reveals what it means to be fully human, even in terms of conception. Sex for him involved the complete gift of self that entails a unity of hypostatic spirits without selfish desire. Although his idea is strange even though it does have a patristic precedent, i.e. John Chrysostom, it serves to show the consistency of the virgin birth with the humanity of Christ, which in recent times has come under scrutiny. The most notable theologian to question this consistency was Wolfhart Pannenberg, who denies the virgin birth on account of its inconsistency with the humanity of Jesus Christ; he argues that if Christ is fully human then Christ should be conceived by natural human intercourse, not a miraculous conception. To the contrary, Bulgakov’s speculation on virginal conception demonstrates this is the only form of conception possible for a truly human hypostasis that is not affected by the original sin.

The foregoing exposition is not intended to deemphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit in seedless conception in Bulgakov’s thought, for the context of this speculation is the divine-human synergy. Bulgakov does not suggest that the Holy Spirit had intercourse with

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556 It stands to reason that the most human mode of conception would be between Mary and another virginal spouse. However, such a conception could not produce the Incarnation. Bulgakov is simply expressing how God works with and not against humankind. Virginal conception is the original mode of conception.

557 Bulgakov, BB, p. 93-94.

558 Ibid., pp. 94-95.

Mary, only that despite the miracle of the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit does not work against normal human relations but rather fulfills it. Through her synergy with sophianic grace, Mary regains the spiritual integrity of seedless conception; however, this does not guarantee the Incarnation. It simply made possible the original avenue of the human mode of procreation that provided a means for Christ to incarnate without contracting the original sin.

5.3.4 The Annunciation of the Cross

At the Annunciation the Holy Spirit deifies Mary, but nevertheless this deification is preliminary and it does not result in salvation. Until Christ’s life and ministry have been completed, salvation is not possible. In other words, at the Annunciation Mary becomes the Mother of God only insofar as she is the historical Mother of the hypostatic union; but her role as Mother of God or the one who is fully incorporated into the life and mission of the Holy Spirit has not yet begun. Only after her heroic efforts that continue throughout her life and culminate in her Paschal Mystery and Pentecost is Mary properly the pneumatophoric hypostasis. Yet, even then, she does not fully participate in the Holy Spirit’s mission until her glorification.

In terms of Mary’s personal vocation, the Annunciation was the first stage in Mary’s vocation to be the Theotokos. Just as her temple experience prepares her for the Annunciation, her life experience from the Annunciation to the crucifixion of Christ prepares Mary for her

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560 This title is based on a reflection Bulgakov made on the Orthodox liturgical calendar of 1929 when the feast of the Annunciation fell within the Third Week of Lent or the week of “The Worship of the Cross.” (Sergius Bulgakov, “The Passion’s Annunciation,” Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius (March 1929): pp. 22-25, p. 22.)

561 In his article “The Passion’s Annunciation” Bulgakov argues that the Annunciation is fulfilled only in the crucifixion. The crucifixion reveals the strength and power of love that is the foundation of the Annunciation more fully. (Bulgakov, “The Passion’s Annunciation,” p. 25; Cf. Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light,” p. 35.)

vocation as the Mother of God. Bulgakov illustrates in his article, “The Cross of the Mother of God,” [Krest Bogomateri] (1942) that the Annunciation is the beginning of Mary’s Christian discipleship. Mary begins to carry her cross in the service of God the Father through her Son. (Matt 16:24) According to Bulgakov, the icon of “The Annunciation of the Passion” exemplifies her cross-bearing journey.\footnote{Cf. Bulgakov, “The Passion’s Annunciation,” p. 23} This journey consists of a lifetime of trials. Immediately after the Annunciation, Mary’s cross begins; rather than being greeted with glad tidings from her betrothed, Joseph, she is immediately faced with the threat of divorce. (Matthew 1:19) Once Joseph believes and embraces Mary, King Herod threatens to kill their newborn son. (Matthew 2:13-25) Even when they find respite from these threats, the prophet Simeon greets Mary with a prophecy that her heart will be pierced by a sword. (Luke 2:35) Bulgakov interprets the silence of the biblical authors on Mary in the life of Jesus to be largely part of her cross-bearing maternal ministry, which humbly places her into the background of the Gospel events. For Bulgakov, Mary’s absence during the passion narratives in all four gospels before the crucifixion as well as the liturgies of Holy Week is indicative of this.\footnote{Cf. Sergius Bulgakov, [“The Cross of the Mother of God”] “Krest Bogomateri: Iz Razmyshlenij Strastnoj Sedmicy,” (Bogoslovskaja mysl: Trudy Pravoslavnogo Bogoslovskogo Instituta v Parizhie 4 (1942): pp. 5-24), p. 6.} Mary recedes into the background to carry her cross in humble silence. Although Mary matures in her understanding of her vocation and who her Son is, it is clear to her that all she is and all that she will do will be for the service of her Son, Who reveals God the Father to the world.

To accomplish this, Mary’s central and greatest challenge was to remain merely Jesus’ Mother,\footnote{Bulgakov, BB, p. 9.} and not the pneumatophoric hypostasis she was called to be. Bulgakov records
Mary’s temptation in these three biblical verses: Simeon’s prophetic words to Mary (Lk 2:35); Mary’s words to Jesus after she lost but then found Him in the temple (Lk 2:24, 50); and Mary’s attempt with Jesus’ brothers to speak with Jesus as he preached. (Mt 12:46) Ironically her Divine Motherhood entails the sacrifice of her natural motherly sentiments. Mary’s temptation does not involve sin, but rather her ignorance. Although she shares an intimate knowledge with God, she is not omniscient and, moreover, Mary occupies a unique place in salvation history. This is due to her deification that occurs before her Son reveals the Father’s will for her. Since no “impulses and desires of the flesh” were aroused when she was confronted with the difficulty of remaining solely Jesus’ mother, Mary’s experience of temptation was unlike our experience of temptation. Her temptation is a result of her infirm nature, which again does not denote any form of attraction to the possibility of sin; however, it allows for the question itself to be posed and internally considered. Bulgakov’s consideration of Christ’s temptation provides a suitable analogy to understand how temptation can occur without sin. For instance, when Satan tempted Christ in the desert, Christ took into serious consideration the possibility of disobedience that Satan proffered. Christ, however, had no attraction to it. He knew immediately that this was not the will of God, but nevertheless his weak nature allowed him to contemplate it. His kenosis allows for this; otherwise Jesus’ responses to the Devil would have been almost scripted and less than human.

566 Nichols, Wisdom from Above, p. 240.
567 The Holy Spirit does not impart to Mary the fullness of the Holy Spirit’s gifts until Pentecost and Glorification. More on this will be said in the pages that follow.
568 Bulgaok, LG, Ch. 4, Sec. III, Location 4424 of 7314.
In a similar manner, as Nichols correctly observes, for Mary “[t]emptation could only reach her as trial, according to the weakness of human nature, not as ‘seduction which penetrates to the interior of one’s being, poisoning and staining it.’”\textsuperscript{569} Mary had no desire to sin as an act against “reason, truth, and right conscience” or “the eternal law.”\textsuperscript{570} Mary was aware that her Son was the Son of God and would suffer. However, she was ignorant to some extent about God’s plan for her, of which she is made aware through her Son’s teachings and corrections.\textsuperscript{571} Jesus reveals Mary’s vocation to Divine Motherhood at her expense. Jesus’ harsh words towards Mary do not reveal Mary’s sin, but rather Mary’s inability to overcome her historical motherly sentiments for the Gospel. Jesus called Mary to so much more, to lay down her historical motherhood to embrace fully her eternal motherhood, which she did only in an incipient manner by accepting her role in the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{572}

Ultimately Mary’s path towards her complete embrace of Divine Motherhood occurs at Golgotha as she stands in solidarity with her dying Son. Bulgakov expresses her unique relationship with Christ as a co-crucifixion. By this he means that Mary crucifies her historical Motherhood for the sake of the Gospel. She suffers not simply as a Mother who has lost her Son but as the Mother of God who shares the same life with her Son. For Bulgakov, Jesus’ address to Mary from the cross in the Gospel of John as “Woman” confirms this interpretation. After this point, Mary is “the Mother of the New Adam, [she] is presented here as the New Eve, as the

\textsuperscript{569} Nichols, \textit{Wisdom from Above}, p. 242.

\textsuperscript{570} Catholic Church, \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, para. 1849.

\textsuperscript{571} Cf. Bulgakov, \textit{Apocatastasis and Transfiguration}, pp. 17-19.

\textsuperscript{572} This in no way denies the unique work of Jesus Christ. Rather it demonstrates that Christ was preparing Mary for her unique vocation. Mary’s role in salvation history is to participate in the saving event of the human race that her Son accomplished. Christ is the savior, but he saves through and with the Mother of God. Note that the saints also participate in Christ’s saving work in a similar manner to Mary’s participation. In a sense, Mary and the human race are called to be co-redeemers.
Church, as all God-created or God-accepting humanity.”\textsuperscript{573} But this address is complemented by his address to St. John, “Son behold your Mother.” (John 19: 26) Because Bulgakov interprets St. John, not St. Peter, to be the spiritual head of the Church, Jesus’ words symbolize a mutual adoption of the historical Church as sons of the Mother of God but also the reception of Mary into the life of the Church. Thus, Mary’s motherhood which she shares with the Holy Spirit is extended to the Church. However, as the Mother of God, Mary’s suffering is more than simply empathy and heartbreak over Jesus’ death; Mary co-participates in Christ’s passion, which Bulgakov refuses to theologize. This, of course, foretells of her participation in Christ’s salvation. Nonetheless, given the fact that Mary has matured in her vocation as the pneumatophoric hypostasis, which entails actualization of Adam’s original prerogatives of hypostatization to some extent,\textsuperscript{574} it is not unreasonable to assume that Mary had access to Adam’s potential All-humanhood and spiritually shared in Christ’s suffering.\textsuperscript{575} After all,

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\item \textsuperscript{573} Bulgakov, “Krest Bogomateri,” p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{574} Deification involves the Holy Spirit’s hypostatization of our nature that in turn regenerates us and allows us to hypostatize other human hypostases with whom we are united naturally. This is precisely a form of co-participation in another hypostasis’ life.
\item \textsuperscript{575} Throughout this dissertation I have made mention of “hypostasis” in various contexts. The clearest definition that Bulgakov provides for hypostasis is in Hypostasis and Hypostaticity where he defines hypostasis as “self-consciousness.” (Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light,” p. 18) However, Bulgakov is not always clear as to what he means by hypostasis. Although he consistently employs this definition in his works, (Cf. Bulgakov, The Comforter, Epilogue, Location 5451 of 6301), in other works he defines hypostasis as the “I,” “spirit,” and “Divine image.” (Bulgakov, BB, p. 23, 59.) These different definitions are not necessarily inconsistent because they are all synonyms for personal consciousness. This is clear in the case of “I,” but also in case of the “spirit” if we interpret spirit within his tripartite context. As for equating hypostasis with the image of God, when we consider that to be made in the image of God is to be made in the image of the hypostasis of Son, this is not a problem for my interpretation. Christ only has one hypostasis and therefore one Divine spirit/nous/self-consciousness, and thus to be made in His image is to be made as a human hypostasis/spirit/self-consciousness. This is clear upon the consideration of Bulgakov’s theology of the death of Christ. Bulgakov applies his theology of death elucidated below to Christ’s death. However, the exception is that Christ has a Divine Spirit, a human soul and a human body. (Bulgakov, BL, p. 356.) The human person on the other hand has a human spirit, human soul, and human body. He makes no mention of Christ’s human spirit. This is a conscious omission. Given the fact that hypostasis is the spirit, it would be heretical for him to grant to Christ a human spirit. Christ would then have two hypostases. By the same token, if the hypostasis were anything other than the spirit, then for Christ to be truly human, Bulgakov should have attributed to Christ a human spirit. Thus, either Bulgakov is inconsistent in his failure to appropriate the human spirit to Christ or the spirit is a synonym for the hypostasis. Given his stress on his
Bulgakov argues that Christ shares in Mary’s hypostatic life and that “[e]very human person is an all-man.”

Moreover, based on what has been said about his Trinitarian anthropology, if we take seriously that Mary matured fully into her vocation at the Cross then we should assume that she would be able to live out her Trinitarian likeness to some extent with Christ. After all, Bulgakov insists that Mary and Christ share the same life, and emphasizes that the image of the Incarnation is not Christ alone, but the Jesus-Mary dyad that is, of course, the reflection of the Son-Holy Spirit dyad that reveals the Father.

Interestingly, in “The Cross of the Mother of God” after speaking about Mary’s co-crucifixion/passion with Christ, he immediately speaks about her co-salvation, which he qualifies with his insistence that we will all take part in this through the power of Mary’s nature and freedom.

Joined with Christ in his suffering, Mary with Christ embraces the cross that is a necessary part of Christian discipleship. In this way Mary is crucified with her Son on behalf of humanity; however, unlike her Son’s crucifixion which is saving, Mary actualizes the path of discipleship, the path of Divine Motherhood.

She is allowed to spiritually co-suffer with Her Son so as to embrace all suffering and stand in solidarity with all who suffer; in this way she has matured into her role in the history of salvation as the Mother of God. At this point she is

tripartite account of humankind, it is likely that this omission was intentional. We can conclude that the hypostasis is the rational/personal center of the human being, which is also expressed as the spirit.

576 Bulgakov, BL, p.111.

577 Bulgakov, “Krest Bogomateri”, p. 22. Note that he further qualifies this statement and says that the Holy Spirit may also be called “co-savior.”

578 Bulgakov, “Krest Bogomateri,” p. 23

579 More on this will be said in the pages that follow in the context of Mary’s intercessory function.
prepared to receive the fullness of the grace of Her Divine Motherhood that will be imparted to
her at Pentecost. Nevertheless, after the death of Her Son, Mary incipiently begins her
ministry as the Theotokos: she counsels, blesses and inspires the Church.

5.3.5 Pentecost

For Bulgakov the Annunciation is intimately connected to Pentecost for they are one
event; however, the Holy Spirit acts differently during these events. Bulgakov writes at the
Annunciation the Holy Spirit provides an “unmediated influence on the body of the Mother of
God (analogously to how the Spirit of God hovered over the waters at the beginning of the
universe),” at Pentecost the Holy Spirit gives Mary a “new spiritual birth.” At Pentecost, with
the rest of the apostles, the Mother of God receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit; however, unlike
the apostles, Mary’s struggle against sin and concupiscent nature does not exist. If the
Annunciation was the beginning of Mary’s divinization, then at Pentecost Mary receives the
fullness of this grace. It endows Mary more fully with the gift of her pneumatophoric
hypostasis. Pentecost completes the Annunciation. Not only is salvation now possible for
Mary because her Son accomplished his ministry and saving work, but Mary now understands
fully what it means to be a disciple of Christ, which she accepts. At Pentecost Mary is the


581 Bulgakov, BB, p. 67. This is a poor choice of words on the part of Bulgakov. Nearly a decade later in his The
Comforter Bulgakov argues that the “Spirit of God” is imprecise and can denote the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, or
Divinity.

582 In The Burning Bush Bulgakov spends a great length explaining the difference between the two descents upon
the Mother of God. Nevertheless, he claims that “the Annunciation precedes Pentecost, which in its turn presupposes
it.” (Bulgakov, BB, p. 68.) Pentecost is the fullest expression of the Annunciation. At Pentecost, Mary receives the
fullness of the grace of deification possible before her death. In terms of Mary’s salvation, the Annunciation has a
prefatory quality. Historically the Annunciation precedes Pentecost, but also presupposes Pentecost because the
Holy Spirit’s mission is not fully actualized in Mary, which is to deify her, until Pentecost.

583 Cf. Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. III.
Mother of God in a normative sense. She actively begins to aid in the salvation, or spiritual birth, of the members of the Church, which is none other than to take part in the mission of the Holy Spirit, which Pentecost introduces to the world. She is now more truly a Spirit-Bearing hypostasis. The infirmity of her nature remains and results in her death. Death is an obstacle that prevents Mary from completely living out her relationship with the Holy Spirit.

5.3.6 Dormition of the Mother of God

As illustrated in the Liturgy of the Dormition of the Theotokos, the feast of the Dormition primarily celebrates Mary’s resurrection and glorification. Basing himself on the Liturgy, Bulgakov’s theology of Mary’s death is intimately connected with his theology of Mary’s glorification. Only after Mary has overcome death will she be able to be glorified by the Holy Spirit that “results in the transformation of the creature into a new creation—a Divine-Humanity.” Therefore, the significance of Pentecost is that it endows Mary with salvation and the potential to be fully adopted by the Holy Spirit; however, Mary is unable to actualize this relationship fully because she remains subject to the effects of the original sin.

Death is not natural to humankind. Before the original sin the body and spirit worked in tandem; however, the original sin introduces a barrier to spiritual maturity: death. Original sin

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584 At the Annunciation Mary is the Mother of God in a descriptive sense since she gives birth to God the Son. At Pentecost Mary is Mother of God in a normative sense since she is now actively engaged in the activity of mothering all the children of God.

585 For instance tone five of the Litya from the Liturgy of the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos states, “For today Heaven opens wide as it receives the Mother of Him Who cannot be contained. The Earth, as it yields up the source of life, is robed in blessing and majesty. The Hosts of Angels, present with the fellowship of the Apostles, gaze in greater fear at Her Who bore the cause of life, now that she is translated from life to life.”

586 Jakim, “Sergius Bulgakov: Russian Theosis,” p. 250. “Divine-Humanity” is the living out of her Divine Motherhood. (Cf. Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch. 2, Sec. IV, Location 1380 of 1644.)

587 Cf. Bulgakov. Relics and Miracles, Ch. 2, Sec. IV, Location 1298 of 1644.
makes human nature infirm and thus it can no longer fully control the body. This is evident in the fact that unlike Adam who could freely converse with God and perceive spiritual realities, after the original sin humanity requires faith to do so. Although Christ’s death redeems death so that death can no longer eternally separate us from not only God but our bodies, death remains. With Christ death loses its punitive connotation and takes on a new meaning as a pedagogical opportunity to prepare the human spirit for the general resurrection. This entails reclaiming the original relationship between the body and spirit, whereby the body is transfigured so that spirit penetrates flesh and vice versa.

For Mary and humanity human life is divided into two halves: “psychic-corporeal being” and “spiritual-psychic being.” Death is necessary because in the separation of the spirit from the body we are able to experience life as a “spiritual-psychic being.” This experience provides us with the knowledge needed to master the body, but also to better understand our life, God, and our role in the economy of salvation. Mary was no exception to this rule; death also provides a learning opportunity for her, albeit lasting only three days.

588 Bulgakov, BL, p. 358.
589 Bulgakov moves beyond a simple punitive definition of death, and attributes a pedagogical and ontological function to death. After all, a simple juridical conception of death, which states that death is a punishment for the original sin cannot account for the death of infants and those who in life lacked the opportunity/possibility of an understanding of revelation. (Nichols, Wisdom from Above, p. 226.)
590 Bulgakov, BL, p. 359.
591 Ibid., p. 359.
592 Ibid., p. 358.
593 “Understood in this way, as an essentially necessary part of human life, death is actually an act of continuing life, although life that is affected by ‘dormition.’” (Bulgakov, BL, pp. 359-360.)
Bulgakov approaches death optimistically; death is not something to be feared, but rather it is a new experience of our spiritual existence that we must welcome.\textsuperscript{594} Furthermore, it does not extinguish human life, but rather changes the state of that life. Properly speaking, death is a Dormition or falling asleep of the soul itself.\textsuperscript{595} Bulgakov means this quite literally. He interprets the human person within a tripartite schema composed of body, soul, and spirit.\textsuperscript{596} Note that for Bulgakov all living things have a body and soul, but not a spirit, which is exclusive to the human race. While the body is corporeality and the spirit is the hypostatic consciousness, the soul is the link between the two. The soul is the means by which the body is “quickened,” becoming a spiritual body through the action of the spirit.\textsuperscript{597} Expressed otherwise, the body is the center of corporeal activity, the spirit is the center of consciousness and free will, and the soul is the center of energy, but also the receptacle of the Holy Spirit. Death allows the human spirit to acquire the knowledge and ability to master the soul\textsuperscript{598} that leads to “a new vision of the spiritual world” and prepares the spirit for the general resurrection.\textsuperscript{599}

\begin{footnotes}
\item His positive view on death is no doubt due to the Orthodox emphasis on Mary’s Dormition. Smith notes, Mary’s Dormition influences Bulgakov’s theology of death. (Cf. T. Allan Smith, “Death and Life: Sergej N. Bulgakov’s Sophiological Perspective” [paper presented at the AAASS Annual Convention, New Orleans, LA, November 2007.])
\item There is no doubt that Jesus’ reference to death as sleep influences his thought. (Cf. John 11:11)
\item Bulgakov vacillates between tripartite and bipartite conceptions of the human person; however, he prefers a tripartite account. His vacillation can be explained because the spirit and the soul are a composite entity. In one sense they are the same as the center of the hypostatic spiritual life of the person. However, they are different insofar as the spirit is the conscious center of the person whereas the soul is the means by which the spirit gives life to the body. The soul is the “active principle of the body” and “receptacle of the spirit.” (Bulgakov, BL, p. 378.)
\item Bulgakov, BL, p. 440.
\item Ibid., p. 448.
\item Graves, p. 92.
\end{footnotes}
In the process of death the soul is neutralized. The soul is a quasi-corporeal entity insofar as it “lives in the blood” and is the life principle of the body; thus, after death it remains with the hypostatic spirit, but completely dormant. This dormancy allows that Spirit-Soul composite to depart from the body. The general resurrection that will entail the glorification of the body consists of the reanimation of the soul that in turn reanimates the body. This reanimation is not simply a possibility for the human spirit for it requires Divine assistance, not only to overcome the unnatural state of death, but also to deify the body. For Bulgakov the human person in body, soul, and spirit was meant for deification, but this can only occur through the Holy Spirit. In the last chapter we referred to deification as the Holy Spirit’s hypostatization of our hypostasis. However, at the Parousia this hypostatization will affect our body. Like Mary, the bodies of the elect will be glorified and transfigured by the Holy Spirit. In terms of Bulgakov’s tripartite portrayal of the human person, this will involve the quickening or the imparting of energy to the soul by the Holy Spirit. Given the fact that the original sin retards the soul insofar as the spirit has little control over its bodily desires, which is manifested in lustful desires, it is fitting that the Mother of God who was without any personal sin and therefore had complete control of her bodily desires, and shared an intimate union with the Holy Spirit, would be granted resurrection almost immediately after her death. After her death, Mary fully receives the grace of deification that involves the energization of her soul by the Holy Spirit. This is what for Bulgakov the Orthodox Church refers to as the glorification of Mary’s body. Her glorification in body, soul, and spirit is the state of Spirit-Bearing. Mary is the first human being

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600 Bulgakov, BL, p. 440

601 The soul is made manifest in the blood, (Bulgakov, *The Holy Grail & the Eucharist*, pp.113-114.) Thus, death is signified by the pouring out or absence of blood. (Ibid., p. 25.)

to be deified in body and soul, accomplishing what God had intended for humankind from time immemorial, transfigured existence.  

5.3.7 Glorified Body

Once the spirit understands how to subdue the body, and the soul has been energized/deified, the body is able to meet the demands of the spirit, which means that the body is no longer confined to space and time. Although Bulgakov rejects Origen and his doctrine of ethereal spirits, Bulgakov’s thought on the glorified body shares much in common with Origen’s insights. The glorified body of Mary exists in an ethereal-like state. For Bulgakov this is not a denial of the body, but rather a fulfillment of the body. Thus, Mary’s glorified or spiritual body is “completely free from matter, though the latter is obedient to it.”

Bulgakov’s unique ideas on glorified bodily existence are based on several sources that include Christ’s transfiguration, Christ’s post-resurrection appearances, (Cf. Matt 28:17, Mark 16:14, Luke 24:37), and the iconographic tradition that depicts the glorified bodies of the saints. However, the most important source for his thought is the second letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. St. Paul wrote:

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606 Jakim argues that, for Bulgakov, miracles and miraculous events like the virgin birth are not supernatural, but natural and completely in accord with humankind’s sophianic life. (Boris Jakim, “Translator’s Introduction” to *Relics and Miracles: Two Theological Essays by Sergius Bulgakov*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011, Kindle e-book), Location 50 of 1641.)

607 The icon, with respect to Christ, is the site of the gracious presence of Christ, not his personal presence. (Bulgakov, *The Holy Grail & the Eucharist*, p. 123.) In other words it depicts the reality of Christ’s glorious body
So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being;” the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. (1Cor 15:42-44)

Bulgakov interprets St. Paul’s words about the “spiritual body” literally and concludes that the body in its physical form, as we experience it, is only a temporary state. The body has the potential for spiritual energy; this is unleashed or realized through the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who after death reconnects us to matter, and energizes our soul so that our body is transparent to the spirit and vice versa. Recalling the correlation between Created and Divine Sophia, the post-resurrected body becomes its pure form in Divine Sophia. Again, it is the body of incorruption that is able to meet the needs of the hypostatic spirit, which occurs through the quickening of the soul. Therefore, the resurrection of the dead is not simply the reanimation of the dead body but the spiritualization of the body. As the pneumatophoric hypostasis, the Holy Spirit penetrates even Mary’s body to reveal its true spiritualized form.

but it is not the site of the reality itself, as is the case with the Eucharist. The Lord is present in the icon in his attributes: power and glory.

608 Bulgakov is not a Platonist. He rejects the Platonic notion that the body is a “temporary prison.” (Bulgakov, BL, p. 435.) However, he believes that the current state of the body will be transfigured. Thus the body as we know it will not be dispensed with, as we find in Platonism. Rather it will exist in a different state. The body will be transfigured or spiritualized. In this new state of the body will be able to meet the demands of the Spirit-Soul that is now deified by the Holy Spirit.

609 Williams, A Margin of Silence, p. 29.


611 Ibid., p. 98.
The Orthodox Church’s veneration of relics confirms Bulgakov’s speculations. Miraculous relics, i.e. relics that have healed those whom venerate them, indicate that a connection remains between the disincarnated hypostatic spirit-soul in heaven and the body on Earth. The efficient cause of the miracle is not the saint but rather the Holy Spirit, Who deifies the saint. A miracle consists in the reception of this deified grace through the saint’s relic/body. Therefore, the soul of the saint in this exceptional circumstance is present in the body to some extent. Veneration of relics honors not only a particular saint, but more importantly a saint who is participating in the life and work of the Holy Spirit. In some saints corresponding to the degree of their holiness, the link between body, soul, and the spirit are stronger, which is manifested in the miracles of incorruptible saints and powerful relics.

Relics and the slow decay of the body are indicative of the effect of original sin as the infirmity of the body. However, Mary’s death did not entail the corruption of her body. Bulgakov’s logic is clear: since holiness corresponds to some extent to the rate of decay of the body, then Mary, who is the holy of holies, the hypostatic vessel of the Holy Spirit, should not decay at all.

5.4 Section Three: Prerogatives of Mary’s Glorification

5.4.1 Mary as Sophia

Following from the Russian tradition, Bulgakov argues that Mary and Sophia are inseparable. This, of course, does not mean that Mary exhausts all that Bulgakov has to say about

612 The Holy Spirit energizes the souls of some saints so that their body, to the extent it can do so before the resurrection of the body, becomes a dynamic, spiritual body. (Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch. 1, Location 446 of 1644.) The effect of this is that their body remains connected to their spirit, which is manifested in miracles associated with relics. (Ibid., Ch. 1, Location 334 of 1644.)

613 Cf. Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch. 1, Location 446 of 1644.
Sophia. To the contrary, for Bulgakov, Mary’s relationship with Sophia only extends to creaturely Sophia.

5.4.1.1 Creaturely Sophia

Mary is the creaturely hypostatic manifestation of creaturely Sophia. This is what Bulgakov means when he calls Mary the soul of the world: Mary is the personal human center of Sophia/creation/world. Recall that Bulgakov, like Solov’ev before him, contextualizes salvation history in terms of his Sophiology. Sophia is a quasi-personal nature that is made for and desires reunion with Divine Sophia. Sophia is a passive nature that is always connected to and hypostatized by a hypostasis; therefore, reunion with Divine Sophia is premised upon a worthy hypostasis that can hypostatize creaturely Sophia and allow for this relationship. Although Mary does not reunite Divine and creaturely Sophia, she makes this reunion possible. Because she is a creature circumscribed within creaturely Sophia, her holiness has a cosmological effect. Since hypostases do not exist without hypostaticity, and creaturely Sophia is Mary’s hypostaticity, Mary’s actions affect creaturely Sophia for the better. Her fiat, therefore, represents her hypostatization of creaturely Sophia. She accepts God incarnate not only for herself and the nation of Israel, but for all creation. In this way Bulgakov will refer to her as the

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614 Mary was always the hypostasis of Sophia; the fact that she does not have a guardian angel is evidence of this. More on this will be said below. However, her vocation as Sophia is similar to our vocation as saints. In some sense we are all saints, insofar as God has destined us for salvation from God’s eternity. Yet, we must courageously live out this Divine calling in order to become saints. In a similar manner, Mary was Sophia from all eternity, but she had to actualize her vocation through courageously living it out. Moreover, even with this heroic effort, it was not possible for her to be fully identified with Sophia until she was saved by Christ and overcome the consequences of the original sin. Therefore Mary does not actualize her role as the creaturely hypostasis of Sophia until her Dormition.

615 Crum writes that the “story of man’s salvation, should be depicted ‘as the work of Sophia, as the fashioning and preservation of man’s sophianicity, beginning with his very creation.’” (Crum, “Doctrine of Sophia,” pp. 66-67.)
perfect hypostatic image of Sophia.\textsuperscript{616} All human hypostases hypostatize Sophia to some extent insofar as they consciously act in accordance with God’s will.\textsuperscript{617} Mary’s fiat, however, represents the most complete hypostatization of Sophia that a human hypostasis has given until the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{618}

Her relationship to Sophia is not juxtaposed but a derivative of her relationship to the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{619} This is evident in the fact that just as the Holy Spirit is the beauty and glory of Divine Sophia, Mary is the beauty and glory of creaturely Sophia.\textsuperscript{620}

5.4.1.2 Mary as Sophianic Beauty

Beauty for Bulgakov carries more than simply an aesthetical interpretation. Beauty refers to a non-rational, joyful experience. It is the experience of the heart that corresponds to the religious experience of truth. Therefore, we perceive beauty when we perceive truth. Beauty engenders certitude in the believer. Even though beauty is multiform in its manifestations in religious and secular art, it is objective insofar as it makes the Divine World/logoi transparent to the believer; it is the “sophian idea shining forth in it.”\textsuperscript{621} Yet beauty is related to the feminine principle because it entails an “active-passivity” on the part of the artist or recipient. We cannot

\textsuperscript{616} Cf. Bulgakov, BB, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{617} Note that although sin is a conscious act, because it is a choice for nothing, ontological void, it does not involve hypostatization. Sin is actually a choice against our nature. At the ontological level it is our attempt to hypostatize something outside of our self, which is nothing.
\textsuperscript{618} This statement needs to be qualified. Because Mary is affected by the original sin in terms of infirmity, she is unable to fully actualize the ramifications of her relationship to Sophia until she is glorified. This perhaps explains why Mary performs no miracles in her lifetime; whereas after her Glorification, the Church accredits many miracles to Mary. (Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch. 2, Sec. III, Location 1212 of 1644.)
\textsuperscript{620} Bulgakov, BB, pp. 105-106.
\textsuperscript{621} Crum, “Doctrine of Sophia,” p. 44.
create beauty but only accept it and participate in it. Beauty for Bulgakov is a synonym for holiness or “meekness, humility, love, and tenderness.”622 And, thus, beauty calls us to live humble lives in accordance with the will of God.

Applied to Mary, Mary is the beauty of Sophia because as the pneumatophoric hypostasis she is the goal of Sophia and the mission of the Holy Spirit accomplished.623 Because Mary exemplifies holy/feminine living, Bulgakov calls Mary “‘Beauty-Holiness.’”624 Also, she is the certitude of the salvation that we will all partake in one day. In this way with the Holy Spirit Mary makes “invincible and irresistible”625 Christ’s offer of salvation to the believer.626 Nevertheless, as beauty, Mary “pierces hearts,” and through her, believers overcome their selfishness and individualism and seek the will of God.627 There is little doubt that Bulgakov’s reflection on beauty and Mary were influenced by his experience at Dresden in which the image of Mary pierced Bulgakov’s heart, loosening many of his “psychological knots” that lead him to salvation.628 As the “the beauty of your Son and Creator,”629 Mary manifests the salvation of the world. Following Bulgakov’s description of the sexual principles as beauty in truth and vice

622 Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. IV, Location 4196 of 6301.
623 For this reason Bulgakov contends that the icons of the Mother of God have a special warmth and beauty for the Orthodox believer. (Bulgakov, Icons and the Name of God, Ch. 1, Sec 8, Location 1308 of 2657.)
624 Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. IV, Location 4196 of 6301.
625 Ibid., Endnotes, Location 6189 of 6301, n. 28.
626 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 99.
627 Mary’s beauty is intimately related to her role in the final judgment. See below for more information.
629 Bulgakov, BB, p. 115.
versa, Mary is the beauty of the truth that her Son accomplished that awaits humankind in the Parousia.

5.4.1.3 Mary as Glory and Her Miraculous Intercessions

As the beauty of the world, Mary is also the glory of the world. Glory and beauty are related because glory is also the manifestation of truth or God. Specifically, glory is that which is most beautiful or truly beautiful. Therefore, Mary is the glory of the world or Sophia; nothing can approach her perfect beauty that stems from her perfect and continual fiat. Mary in her Dormition and Resurrection receives the fullness of the glory of creation. This is also expressed in the vivification of her body into a spiritual body. Mary attains the fullness of creaturely existence. She is more than an “All-human.” She is a deified saint, a Spirit-Bearer. But as the glory of Sophia or the perfect manifestation of a human creature, Mary lives out completely Adam’s potentiality. Therefore, Bulgakov calls her the “hypostatized humanity of the Godman” or Sophia in its “hypostatized form,” who hypostatizes “the nature of all human

630 Cf. Ibid., p. 86.
631 In Bulgakov’s excursus on the glory of God in the Old Testament in The Burning Bush, Bulgakov provides a typological interpretation of the manifestations of glory in the Old Testament whereby he interprets glory as made manifest in Mary (the glory of creation) and Christ (the glory of Divinity). (Cf. Crum, “Doctrine of Sophia,” pp. 61-63.) With respect to Christ, Christ is the glory of divinity insofar as He is that which the Holy Spirit glorifies. Mary is the glory of creation insofar as “she participates in the mission of the Holy Spirit. She is the dwelling place of the Glory of God but is herself glorified.” (Bulgakov, BB, p. 118.)
632 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 32.
634 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 130.
635 Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light,” p. 46.
636 Schipflinger, p. 279.
Analogous to the Divine hypostases and their nature, creaturely Sophia is completely transparent to her in her glorified state, and, thus, Mary is transparent to all human hypostases that imperfectly hypostatize Sophia. Herein lies an ontological explanation for her intercessory role: since Mary actualizes creaturely Sophia fully, she is co-present in body, soul, and spirit to each human hypostasis. Mary’s body and soul are “transubstantiated” and she becomes a “true superman.” Bulgakov’s insights on the spiritual body of Christ in his post-resurrection appearances that was able to materialize at will, teach, eat, and changed in appearance provide an analogy for understanding the Marian apparitions, particularly the phenomenon of how Mary manifests herself in the countenance and dress of the local people to whom she appears, e.g. her appearances in Guadalupe, Lourdes, and Fatima, but also the miraculous Marian icons. In all of these instances, Mary manifests her resurrected spiritual/glorified Body. As the glory of Sophia or Sophia in Sophia’s Hypostatized form, Mary is able to manifest herself to humankind as an intercessor and advocate.

Properly speaking, miracles associated with Mary are not supernatural phenomena, but rather are natural phenomena. They are possibilities for glorified bodies that hypostatize Sophia. Sophiology erases any neat demarcation between what is natural/human and supernatural/divine. For Bulgakov everything that occurs in the world is natural to humankind because the world is

637 Bulgakov, BL, p. 302.
638 Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch 1, Location 306 of 1644.
639 For Bulgakov the resurrection of Christ was not an “external act, a deus ex machina, but as a creative disclosure of the original powers of the human nature.” (Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch. 2, Sec. IV, Locations 1464-1465 of 1644.)
humankind’s nature/Sophia. Mary’s miracles are no exception, and they are not supernatural events but rather glorified natural events that express her relationship to creaturely Sophia. More precisely, Mary lives out completely the Trinitarian image of humankind or her all-humanity that was possible for Adam and Eve before the Fall. Anything less would be a violation of human nature. Of course, all Mary’s actions are completed with Divine assistance; however, this assistance fulfills rather than denies humankind’s natural capacities.

Therefore, miracles are actions of the spirit or, more precisely, manifestations of human power that occur in accordance with God’s will. They are manifestations of the human-divine synergy inasmuch as they serve the mission of the Holy Spirit, to manifest the salvation of Christ to the world. The miracles of Christ, e.g. his healings, raising the dead involved His humanity and not simply the action of his divinity. For this reason Mary’s miraculous intercessions are not simply God’s direct intervention in human affairs, but rather God working with Mary as Mary accomplishes a human heroic act. As the pneumatophoric hypostasis, Mary’s

640 Matter ultimately becomes transparent for the human spirit through the Holy Spirit. (Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 5186 of 6301.)
641 Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch. 2, Sec. I, Locations 734 of 1644.
642 Bulgakov writes, “Christ's miracles were the works of a Man.” (Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch. 2, Sec. II, Locations 775 of 1644.) He argues that to attribute his miracles solely to Christ’s divinity is tantamount to Nestorianism, separating his humanity from his divinity.
643 Bulgakov takes a sober position on miracles and argues that a miraculous healing and a medicine given by a physician that heals an ailment are equally miraculous. They are both actions of human power. The difference is simply in the means by why the miracle is enacted. In the first action the miracle worker redirects the laws of nature, but it is nevertheless the result of a human power. (Bulgakov, Relics and Miracles, Ch. 2, Sec. I, Locations 734 of 1644).
miraculous interventions fall within the mission of the Holy Spirit, to accomplish the saving work of Christ.  

As Sophia, Mary attained the goal of creation which has a material manifestation of bodily glory, or the glory of Sophia. This glorification reveals the eschatological significance of Mary. Now humankind can look to Mary to understand what glorified existence entails that it will be granted during the general resurrection.

5.4.2 Mary and the Angels

Although Mary is clearly placed within the communion of saints, her difference between them is more than simply a historical happenstance. This difference is clearly evident in Mary’s distinctive role within Bulgakov’s angelology. For Bulgakov angelology is closely related to anthropology. Whether by direct or indirect service, angels exist for the service of humanity. Their service is reflected in their metaphysical constitution; angels have their own nature and are purely hypostatic spirits. The significance of this is that they do not have their own world as human beings do, and they cannot hypostatize Sophia. Nonetheless, angels are not without content/nature, but rather their nature is circumscribed within their ideal form/logoi imprinted on

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644 Without substantiating his claim, Bulgakov argues that Mary has more “m miracle-working icons” and “revealed” icons attributed to her than all other saints and Christ. (Bulgakov, Icons and the Name of God, Ch. 1, Sec. 8, Location 1318 of 2657.)

645 If the “Spirit is natura naturans, which through the word implanted in it, engenders natura naturata,” Mary’s beauty and glory reflect her nature as complete, natura naturata. (Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 4, Sec. II, Location 2949 of 6301.)

646 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 127.


648 Bulgakov, JL, p. 33.
them by God in creaturely Sophia. Here we find a further refinement in Bulgakov’s Sophiology. The Divine prototypes of Sophia exist in Created Sophia in two ways: spiritually in heaven and “on Earth in incarnation.” Angels occupy the former realm of Sophia. In heaven they are deified spirits whose creaturely natures are completely transparent to their hypostasis. They are god’s by grace. Although they are a part of creaturely Sophia, their hypostatization is limited to their individualized nature of Sophia; “it is a single ray of Divine Sophia in a creaturely-hypostatic consciousness.” Thus, angels cannot become an all-human hypostasis to which humankind is called. Angelic ministry consists in guiding the creaturely manifestation of this prototype on Earth to mature into what God has willed for it. Generally following Ps-Dionysius’ nine-tier choir of angels, Bulgakov argues, with exception to the highest court of angels, every angel contains a prototype of created being and, therefore, acts like a guardian for that creature. Thus, angels have an Earthly ministry. Guardian angels have a special significance since they exclusively serve humanity. With this context in mind Bulgakov speaks about the co-angelicity of heaven. Imprinted upon each guardian angel is the prototype or our “heavenly I.” Their “Heavenly I” and our “creaturely I” correspond and share the same logoi in Divine Sophia, but we are distinct hypostases. Guardian angels are so closely united with us that our lives are almost inseparable since they walk with us and guide us. This does not mean

650 Bulgakov, JL, p. 31.
652 Bulgakov, JL, p. 76.
653 Ibid., p. 66.
654 Ibid., p. 43.
655 Ibid., p. 43.
that we merge with our guardian angel at the Parousia, so to speak, losing our hypostasis. But rather that our redeemed life will involve a close relationship with our guardian angel. The mission of our guardian angel is to aid in the maturation of the human hypostasis’ vocation as expressed in its divine logoi. This mission is the creative task of the angel. Because guardian angels need their human counterpart to achieve their Divine likeness, as they are not fully what God has intended for them until their mission is accomplished, the extent to which the human person successfully accomplishes its vocation will affect its guardian angel.

Within this context, Mary has a unique position. Citing the liturgical hymn that Mary is “more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim” and the tradition that Christ not a guardian angel welcomes Mary into heaven, Bulgakov concludes that Mary must not have an angelic prototype. Although a human hypostasis becomes angel-like in its deification, Mary unites all creation to God; since there is no angel whose task and scope can encompass all creation, no angel can be her guardian. After all, Mary is alone the hypostatic image of creaturely Sophia. Nevertheless, on Earth the angel Gabriel functioned as her guardian angel serving her, which, according to Bulgakov, is appropriate since Gabriel is the angelic representative of the Holy Spirit. Mary’s logos was not a particular idea of God but rather creaturely Sophia. She does not simply hypostatize Sophia fully, but she is also the hypostasis of Sophia. This is why Bulgakov continually stresses Mary’s role in creation as the “soul of the world” or the perfect

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656 Ibid., p. 74.
657 Ibid., p. 68. Bulgakov speculates that the guardian angels are intimately involved in the dispensation of sophianic grace. (Ibid., 66.) They seem to be the means in which we receive this grace.
658 Ibid., p. 98, n. 24.
659 Ibid., p. 47.
creature. Mary alone has this prerogative for she is the pneumatophoric hypostasis, intimately united with the Holy Spirit. No angel can exist as her angelic correlative because her natural image encompasses all the angels, for she is truly the “Queen of the Universe” and “Mother of All Creation.”

Recalling Jacob’s vision of angels descending and ascending upon a ladder, Bulgakov calls Mary “Jacob’s Ladder” because she is the living link that unites heaven and Earth. As Compton illustrates, for Bulgakov the angels rule their “[e]arthly elements through her, the Queen of Angels.”

Although Mary illustrates the path of salvation for the disciples of Christ, she has a unique role in the resurrected Church that no human hypostasis can approach in holiness. Even though every hypostasis is called to be an all-hypostasis and to share in the salvation of the human race which occurs with its angel, no other hypostasis will attain the honor of becoming the hypostasis of creaturely Sophia. Even after the resurrection and glorification of humanity, neither angel nor saint will be able to approach the Mother of God in her glory and closeness to God.

Mary’s lack of an angel does not make her any less human or more divine, but rather it points to her unique role in the economy of salvation. Moreover, angels are assistants for the human race, but humankind is ontologically above the angels and, as a hypostasis of Sophia, it

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661 Ibid., p. 98, n. 24.
662 Ibid., p. 156.
not only encompasses creation but it “will judge the angels.” (1 Corinthians 6:3) Thus, having a guardian angel is normative but not necessarily a constitutive of being human. Although angels remain connected to us in heaven, in the hierarchy of the created order humankind is greater than the angels. Evidence of this is the fact that the most exceptional human beings, Christ, the God-Man, and John the Baptist, “the greatest born of woman,” did not have a guardian angel.  

5.4.3 Mary and John the Baptist

Bulgakov’s speculation about John the Baptist is odd for anyone unfamiliar with Orthodox iconography. It is based on the Orthodox iconographic tradition that depicts St. John the Baptist as an angel-man, the Deisis (Entreaty) Icon, and the positioning of Mary and St. John on the iconostasis, who both stand closest to Christ. As the angel-man, John’s ministry complements Mary’s ministry. They both overcome sexuality as the lust of nature, and together they fulfill all the possibilities of holiness in terms of “humility and obedience.” As Slesinski remarks, their “missions are one with their very being” so that just as Mary is totally committed to her mission as the Theotokos or the Handmaid of the Lord, John is “wholly and only the Forerunner.” Jakim demonstrates that together John and Mary exhaust the masculine and

664 Cf. Bulgakov, JL, p. 47.
665 Cf. Bulgakov, FB, p. 162. The Deisis is usually depicted on the iconostasis dividing the altar from the naïve of the Church. The most famous icon of the Deisus is the Novgorod icon of Sophia.
668 Bulgakov concludes that John’s exceptional holiness transforms him into an Earthly angel. However, Bulgakov refuses to speculate on how this is possible. Although “a man, by virtue of the ontological fullness of his being, can become an angel,” humankind does not become angels, but rather it becomes like the angels. (Bulgakov, FB, p. 134.) Thus, John’s role is exclusive to him. The goal for monks and nuns in particular is to become passionless, which is to be angelic. (Ibid., p. 161.) Nevertheless, for an angel, who is an individual being, to be effected by the Incarnation it needs for the Incarnation to be revealed to it by another angel who was incorporated into the Body of
feminine modes of relation to Christ insofar as they exhibit, respectively, the feminine “self-surrender” and masculine “striving towards” of Christian discipleship. 669 Thus, John the Baptist complements Mary’s role in salvation history. Bulgakov insists that together John the Baptist and the Mother of God stand as the two greatest creaturely hypostases that exhaust the spiritual life as both male and female. 670 Interestingly, John does not live to see Christ preach the gospel or witness his saving works; the implication is that as one who personifies the male discipleship or maleness, the male potential has relevance in the spiritual life in terms of our search for Christ, and, thus, John’s death that occurs immediately after he meets Christ is fitting. It is the feminine potential that is primary in discipleship. 671 Thus, Mary’s role is not limited to one event in the Bible but to the entire ministry of Christ and to the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, John’s role in salvation history was similar to Mary’s insofar as he prepares the way for Christ and provides Christ with assistance as his friend. 672 Both prepare humanity

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670 Ibid., p. 79.

671 John and Mary present a typology for Christian discipleship. As John, in our masculine potential, we desire to meet Christ. Once we do, we recognize that we must decrease while Christ increases. Living out this new knowledge entails a Marian or feminine life where we will humbly and courageously accept the will of God in our lives, to follow Christ through the denial of our self-will.

672 Bulgakov’s stress on the importance of friendship that John the Baptist gives to Christ is no doubt influenced by Florensky, who emphasized that friendship is the greatest expression of Christian love.
through preaching and ministry (John)\textsuperscript{673} and fiat (Mary). In terms of grace both saints are recipients of sophianic grace, albeit Mary’s holiness is primarily the result of exceptional grace, i.e. the holiness of the saints. John’s holiness is primarily the result of the Old Testament cult of the priesthood. After all, he is himself a member of that cult. John the Baptist completes the Old Testament for Bulgakov, for John gives to Christ his priestly blessing. Nevertheless, although John is above the angels as a human-angel and “the greatest born of woman,” he does not attain the glory of Mary. In fact, John is not granted the privilege of the Dormition.

5.4.4 Mary as Church

Bulgakov’s Mariology is ecclesiocentric: Mary is at the center of churchly existence; her personality is transparent to the Church.\textsuperscript{674} Bulgakov’s Mary is not the Mother of the Church but rather Mother-Church. She is the Church personified and glorified. And, thus, for Bulgakov Mary is central to what the Church is and how the Church should exist. I will limit my reflection to the latter point since I have covered much of this already in the context of Mary’s intercession, and more will be elaborated on it in the context of Mary’s role in discipleship.

To grasp the importance of Mary in the Church, it is necessary to briefly examine Bulgakov’s ecclesiology. According to Bulgakov the Church is primarily an organic entity. It is a “spiritual organism”\textsuperscript{675} where a “union of love” occurs.\textsuperscript{676} The Church as a hierarchal and institutional structure is secondary.\textsuperscript{677} Bulgakov’s concern is the ontology of the Church.\textsuperscript{678}

\textsuperscript{673} Cf. Bulgakov, FB, p. 43. Note they both are involved in the birth of Christ. Mary is involved in Christ’s immaculate birth and John is involved in Christ’s spiritual birth. (Bulgakov, FB, p. 51.)

\textsuperscript{674} Similar ideas were later expressed by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar. (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, Mary: The Church at its Source, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 27.)

\textsuperscript{675} Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 136.
Bulgakov speaks of the Church as a sacrament, the visible sign of an invisible reality.

The historical Orthodox Church is the visible sign and the place where Godhumanhood is most perceptible on Earth. (Note that Bulgakov recognizes the legitimacy of non-Orthodox Churches; however, he argues that the Church is present in them to a lesser extent.) As a sacrament the Church extends beyond its visible, historical manifestation. For Bulgakov it is an

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676 His reason for this is St. Paul’s teachings on the Church that gives a secondary importance to the hierarchy. The main scriptures he uses to make his point are 1 Corinthians 6 and 12. He does not mention the epistles to Timothy that speak more clearly about Church order and the hierarchy of the Church. (Bulgakov, BL, p. 261.)

677 Williams notes that Bulgakov writes next to nothing about the role of the hierarchy. (Williams, A Margin of Silence, p. 33.) Williams’ assessment is true respective to his theological corpus. However, Bulgakov was quite passionate about the need for Church order and the hierarchy. For instance at Lausanne he spoke to the Protestant majority in attendance about the necessity of the hierarchy. (Bryn Geffert, “Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars,” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2003), p. 143.) Moreover, for Bulgakov, the institutional church is a necessary historical development that arises over time, and it is intimately connected to the Eucharist because it helps guarantee the validity of the sacrament. (Graves, p. 69; Cf. Chapter Three of Bulgakov’s Orthodox Church.)

678 In his most notable work Sophia: The Wisdom of God, his preference for an ontological interpretation of the Church is clear. The Church, he argues, “has a theandric character; it is, in fact, Divine-Humanity in actu.” (Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 134.) Bulgakov follows a patristic tradition evident in the writings of the Fathers like the Shepherd of Hermas that emphasize the ontological characteristics of the Church. (Ibid., p. 134.) In The Bride of the Lamb, Bulgakov consciously develops this position. (Cf. Bulgakov, BL, pp. 253-254.)

Although theologians like Boris Bobrinskoy criticized Bulgakov for a deficient theology of the hierarchy, Bulgakov attributed great importance to the hierarchy. (Boris Bobrinskoy, “The Church and the Holy Spirit in Twentieth Century Russia,” (The Ecumenical Review 52.3 (July 2000): pp.326-342), p. 337) Bulgakov incorporates historical criticisms into his theology and refuses to grant simplistic notions of apostolic succession. Even though the hierarchy develops in the post-apostolic Church, it was an organic function of the Church, which, of course, was/is guided by the Holy Spirit. Hierarchy is a constitutive of the human condition but also of the Church. But Bulgakov interprets the hierarchy primarily as a service to the Church. Its primary importance is the celebration of the sacraments; it is a Eucharistic institution. (Sergius Bulgakouff, “The Hierarchy and The Sacraments” in The Ministry and the Sacraments: Report of The Theological Commission Appointed by The Continuation Committee of The Faith and Order Movement Under The Chairmanship of The Right Rev. Arthur Cayley Headlam, C.H., D.D. Bishop of Gloucester, pp. 95-123, ed. Roderic Dunkerley, (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1937), p.106.) This reveals the communal character of the hierarchy, which as in the case of the Eucharist that must be celebrated in a community, cannot function without the laity. (Ibid., p. 107.) The Church acts through the hierarchy, but the hierarchy is an organ of the Church. 

679 Bulgakov, BL, p. 273.

680 Bulgakov’s statement her is tempered by his inclusivity. Not only do all Churches insofar as they have truth, participate in the Orthodox Church, but the unity of the churches will only be realized when interior unity has first been established. (Cf. Sergius Bulgakov, “I Believe in One Holy, Catholic & Apostolic Church,” The Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius 3 (1931): pp. 90-104.)
all-encompassing reality that includes the saints, but permeates creation that can be perceived only by inner experience. It is mysterious and ineffable. At its core the Church in the world is creaturely Sophia, or “Sophia in the process of becoming.” Therefore, it encompasses the economy of salvation that Bulgakov separates into four ecclesial epochs: the Edenic Church, Old Testament Church, New Testament Church, and the Church in the age to come. However, the Church extends to Divine Sophia as well: “Church is Sophia in both of her aspects, Divine and creaturely, in their interrelationship, which is expressed in their union.” By this he means that Godhumanhood is a churchly existence: the Church is fundamentally the relationship of God to humankind and vice versa. The Church as the body of Christ encompasses the Divine and creaturely Sophia just as Christ’s theandric body encompasses the divine and human natures. In creation the Church is the “theandric reality of the Divine Sophia in the Creaturely” or the place where the reunion between God and humankind has begun. Churchly existence then entails the extension of this perceptible Divine-Human life to all creation through the auspices of humankind. Herein lies the importance of human creativity; for churchly existence, human creativity entails an active engagement or baptism of the world. Christianity liberates humankind from sin, so as to aid in the manifestation of the Church triumphant in the Church militant.

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681 The invisible Church is perceived by the religious consciousness. Religious consciousness is necessary since religion is precisely based on the experience of the transcendent becoming immanent. (Bulgakov, UF, p. 23.) With respect to church teaching, Bulgakov contends that religious experience precedes and prepares the ground for dogmatic formulation. (Bulgakov, “The Spirit of Prophecy,” (Sobornost 19 (September 1939): pp. 3-7), p. 7.)

682 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 136.

683 Bulgakov, BL, p. 253.

684 Cf. Bulgakov, Social Teaching in Modern Russian Orthodox Theology, p. 12; Cf. Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 136.

685 Gallaher, “There is Freedom,” p. 128.

686 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 142.
Within this context, Mary has an important role since the “Church is represented by Mary, in as much as in her person are united all the properties of the Church, in a personal incarnation that is sublime and ultimate.” She exhausts Churchly existence in all four epochs as the New Eve, Daughter of Zion, Theotokos, and Queen of Heaven, but more importantly she is “the personal center of the Church” insofar as she pervades the Church in its historical possibilities and provides a foretaste of what is to come for the rest of its members. Inasmuch as she is creaturely Sophia personified, she is the Church personified. As the glorified creaturely member of the Church, Bulgakov claims that Mary is the personal head of the Church. This is an odd statement that seemingly conflicts with Christian teaching that Christ is the head of the Church. Bulgakov’s ideas here should be interpreted within the context of his teaching on the Divine Dyad. The Church is not simply the Body of Christ, but also the temple of the Holy Spirit, for to live in the Church is to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit’s grace. Thus, the Holy Spirit’s role in the economy of salvation shares Christ’s headship, and by analogy, as the Holy Spirit’s hypostatic dwelling place, Mary shares in the Holy Spirit’s headship. Particularly, Bulgakov insists that as the pneumatophoric hypostasis, she participates in the Holy Spirit’s “pan-pneumatism;” this is the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. In other

687 Bulgakov, BB, p. 105.
688 Because of this Bulgakov acclaims Mary as the “primary hypostasis of the Church, the personal center.” (Bulgakov, BL, p. 265.) Mary is the creaturely realization of the Church. Bulgakov does not make this same claim about Christ because he stands outside the Church as its head, and He is the means by which the Church is operative in the world. And, thus, members of the Church participate in the Christification of the world, namely the “clarification and effectuation of the divine-human principle in every human being.” (Valliere, MRT, p. 347.) With Mary, Christians live out what Christ taught and made possible through the Body of Christ, the Church.
690 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 138.
words, as Barbara Newman explains, Mary is the head of the Church in a feminine manner (as accomplishing) that complements Christ’s male headship (as Revealed). As the feminine head of the Church, Mary penetrates the life of the Church to such a degree that “nothing passes without her participation, prayer, and blessing,” but again this is entirely consistent with the Holy Spirit’s mission to manifest the salvation of Christ. Recalling our discussion about Mary’s beauty, Bulgakov argues that “Mother and Ever-Virgin irresistibly penetrates into every human heart by virtue of a holy humanity transparent to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, within this pneumatological context, Bulgakov defines the Church as “those who are saved in her [Mary] thanks to him.”

While Christ stands above but transcends the Church as God-Man, the Second Person of the Trinity, Mary stands firmly within the Church as the greatest representative of the communion of saints in the Church triumphant.

Thus, Bulgakov calls her “the soul of the Church/world,” the “soul of souls,” and “heart of hearts” for Mary exists in a close proximity to each soul. In this manner she is “the heart of the Church, its center and personal embodiment.” Her headship, therefore, entails her honorific role and preeminent activity in the salvation of others. For these reasons Bulgakov faults Protestantism for its one-sided Christological conception of the Church that neglects the


696 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 120.
role of Mary and the Holy Spirit as well as the Divine-Human or synergistic activity of Churchly existence, which ultimately leads to a faulty ecclesiology. (This will be further discussed in the pages that follow.)

As the Church personified, Mary is the Bride of God/Christ. Bulgakov conflates the patristic, typological interpretation of the Bridal imagery proffered in *Song of Songs* and the *Book of Revelation* that interpret the Bride to be the Church, with more recent Mariological interpretations that this Bride is Mary. For Bulgakov the Bride is the Church that is personified in Mary. Mary is what the Church on Earth is called to be, a saint united with humanity, divinized by God, and living out the mission of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, as the Bride of Christ, Mary, as illustrated by the *Book of Revelation*, calls upon Christ with the Holy Spirit to save the world. Therefore, it is fitting that Bulgakov ends his final book of his great trilogy with this Mariological interpretation of Revelation 22:17. Mary works towards the consummation of the Church in the world, and once her work is complete, she will, with the Holy Spirit, call upon her Son to come again to judge and redeem humanity. Since Mary meets every soul after it dies, and death for Bulgakov has primarily a pedagogical function, it is reasonable that Bulgakov must conclude that apokatastasis will occur.

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697 To this we may also add: Unwed Bride, Eternal Bride, sister-bride. (Bulgakov, BB, p. 103.)
699 Bulgakov, Sophia, p. 137.
700 Cf. Louth, “Mother of God,” p. 163.
701 Cf. Bulgakov, BB, p. 70. Bulgakov’s teaching that Mary meets every soul after death is based on the “Canon of Prayer to the Most Holy Theotokos at the departure of a soul.”
5.4.5 Mary and the Ecumenical Movement

Bulgakov’s ecclesiocentric Mariology had pragmatic effects that are evident in Mary’s important role in what he deemed to be Church activity. Because Mary is the heart of the Church, she is the heart of all churchly activity, including the ecumenical movement. Bulgakov advocated that the consideration of the Mother of God was an immediate need to make reunion between Orthodox and Protestants a serious possibility. Reunion could not occur until Protestants came to terms with the Theotokos in the life of Orthodoxy. He made this public at the first *Faith and Order Commission* meeting at Lausanne, in his paper on Church ministry.

Rather than focusing on areas of consensus between the Orthodox Church and the Protestant Churches, he addresses the role of the Mother of God in the Church. He argues that reunion will only be achieved under Mary’s cloak, for she is the mystical “Unifier.” His claims offended the Protestant delegates in attendance. Mariology is not only necessary for ascertaining the most central truths of Orthodoxy, but also Orthodoxy as it is lived out by

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702 He believed that not only was the ecumenical movement the work of the Holy Spirit, but, as Gallaher noted, he “looked for Russia’s redemption from the tragedy of history in an ecumenical Orthodox Church led by the Russian Church.” (Brandon Gallaher, “Bulgakov’s Ecumenical Thought,” *Sobornost* 24:1 (2002): 24-55), p. 37-38; Cf. Sergius Bulgakov, “The Old and The New: A Study in Russian Religion,” *The Slavonic Review* 2.6 (1924): pp. 487-513), p. 510.) Note that in the 1920s it was thought by the Orthodox involved in the ecumenical movement that reunion with the Anglican Church was possible. During this period both the patriarchate of Constantinople and Jerusalem recognized the validity of the Anglican orders. (Gallaher, “Bulgakov’s Ecumenical Thought,” p. 43.)

703 Bulgakov, BB, p. 48. This, he argues, is evident in the coldness of Protestant churches. (Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 118.) On the importance of Protestant churches coming to terms with Mariology, at the second Faith and Order meeting Bulgakov argued that Mariology was the “central, though hidden, nerve of the whole movement towards reconciliation among the divided confessions. The way in which the whole Protestant world suddenly ceased to venerate the Virgin Mary was the most mysterious and real spiritual event of the age of the Reformation. This lack of feeling continues up to the present time, and one of the most important preliminary conditions of the success of reconciliation is to overcome it.” (Bulgakov, “The Question of the Veneration of the Virgin Mary at the Edinburgh Conference,” p. 28)

704 Geffert, “Anglicans and Orthodox Between the Wars,” p. 143.

believers is unfathomable without a personal relationship to the Mother of God. In this way, the lack of the veneration of Mary corresponds to Protestantism’s truncated experience of the Church.

### 5.4.5.1 Mariology as a Method

Undoubtedly, Bulgakov’s insistence on the need for Mary in the ecumenical movement reflects his piety and devotion to the Mother of God. Moreover, his sophiological interpretation of Orthodoxy places Mary at the center of churchly activity and salvation history. Yet, his insistence on the need to soberly and honestly address Mariology reveals an important insight and observation about the nature of Mariology within theology. Mariology is unique in that it has a methodological function within dogmatic theology, for Mariology vouchsafes what Bulgakov calls the “human side of the incarnation” or the role of the human race within the economy of salvation. Bulgakov’s stress on Mary’s freedom and creativity poignantly reveal that salvation is a synergy between God and humankind. In terms of Christology, Mariology keeps us from abstractly viewing the Incarnation, whereby the hypostatic union has no real content beyond formal acceptance. God does not simply appropriate an abstract human nature, but Mary’s human nature, and in that way, Mary firmly roots Christ’s humanity within the human race. Mariology provides a corrective function for Christology against non-Chalcedonian theology. How we view Mary is the litmus test to determine if our Christology is Orthodox. Bulgakov explicitly states that the lack of veneration in Protestantism results in an overemphasis of the

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706 Cf. Bulgakov, “A Brief Statement of the Place of the Virgin Mary in the Thought and Worship of the Orthodox Church,” p. 29.
707 Mary’s intrinsic value for the hypostatic union is a historical fact. The neglect of Mary is tantamount to the neglect of the teachings of the council of Ephesus that were necessary in the formulation of the teachings on the hypostatic union, which were formulated at the Council of Chalcedon. We lose the real content of what it means to say that Christ is fully human without the dogma of the Theotokos.
Divinity of Christ at the cost of Christ’s humanity. Moreover, ignoring (e.g. Protestantism) or overemphasizing (e.g. Catholicism) Mary will affect other aspects of theology. This is implicit in his thought. However, it is not surprising that Bulgakov also criticizes Protestantism for a mechanical understanding of salvation history and individualism. After all, as I illustrated previously, Mary is intimately connected to his anthropology and ecclesiology, and therefore the lack of Mariology should affect Protestant anthropology and ecclesiology. The implication is that if Protestants embraced the Mother of God they would have not only a more complete appreciation of Christ’s humanity but also salvation history.

Although his position on Mariology was largely ignored by his contemporaries, recent studies by ecumenists from the Protestant tradition have arrived at similar conclusions. Tim Perry, an evangelical theologian, argues that if Mary is not the Theotokos, then Christians are not saved. Moreover, he states that superficial attention to Mary “inevitably leaves other central Christian doctrines underdeveloped.” Although Perry does not clarify what these implications are, his poignant observations more clearly express Bulgakov’s insights. Church teachings are intimately connected; undervaluing one aspect, especially in the area of Christ’s humanity, will

708 Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 116.
710 In *Unfading Light*, Bulgakov writes: “The whole of Protestantism is sick with this kind of individualism, which gnaws away at it like a worm, and it grows weak religiously. It is all the more difficult to believe that the truth is the truth, i.e., that it demands worship for it and selflessness; it is much easier to take this truth as my opinion which I propose as truth. (Bulgakov, UF, pp. 57-58; Cf. Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, Ch. 5, Sec. IV, Location 4627 of 6301.)
712 Perry, p. 271.
713 Ibid., p. 268.
affect other teachings. Thus, the ignorance of Mariology influences negatively anthropology, ecclesiology, and Christology. The underlying issue for Perry is the connection between Mariology and anthropology. Proper consideration of Mary’s humanity helps to guarantee a proper consideration of Christ’s humanity. Confirming Bulgakov’s acute observations, Perry recognizes within his faith tradition the need for Mariology to correct the “thinly veiled Appolinarianism” whereby God assumes not humanity but a “dispensable body for a period of time, intervening not to restore creation, but to rescue believers from it.” This issue is important because this doctrine has implications for the system as a whole.

5.4.5.2 Mariology and Christ’s Humanity

On the importance of Mariology for Christology, Bulgakov writes:

Protestantism does not understand that Mariology must necessarily be included in Christology as an inseparable part of it, for Christ, as the Son of Man, is the Son of Mary. Mary is His hypostatic humanity, the ‘second’ nature that He assumed in the Incarnation.

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714 Cf. Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 3, Sec. IV, Location 2968 of 7314.
715 Cf. Ibid., Ch. 3, Sec. IV, Location 2968 2967-3058 of 7314.
716 Nancy J. Duff laments that evangelicals have lost the antidocetic function of Mary. In particular, evangelicals have lost the Christological interpretation of the biblical verse that “Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary.” What results is that the virgin birth becomes a litmus test for orthodoxy; however, it “has no real content at all.” (Nancy J. Duff, “Mary Servant of the Lord” in Protestant Perspectives on Mary: Blessed One, pp. 59-70, ed. Beverly Gaventa, (London: Westminster John Know Press, 2002), pp. 61-62.) In essence, by neglecting Mary they have unwittingly neglected Christ’s humanity.
717 Perry, pp. 273-274. Even though Perry shares much in common with Bulgakov, he does not make mention of Bulgakov. There is no evidence that he is familiar with him.
718 Perry, p. 274.
719 Bulgakov. LG, Ch. 3, Sec. IV, Location 2969-2970 of 7314.
Bulgakoff emphasizes that Christ is not God acting “through” humanity, but God acting “in” humanity, whereby without losing God’s Divinity, God is inseparably connected to every human person through Mary. God experiences the world as a human being in solidarity with other human beings; Mary allows Christ to immerse Himself into the human experience. Mary is this abiding link between God the Son and humanity, who guarantees the true, yet sinless humanity of Christ. Mariology, in effect, provides Christology with the anthropology necessary for understanding how, why, and with whom God incarnates. In effect, it guarantees that the teachings of the council of Chalcedon are properly considered.

Not only does Mariology connect Christ to the human family and guarantees his true humanity, but it also prevents an overly mechanical interpretation of salvation history. Like the Catholic Church, Bulgakov argues that Protestantism suffers from a similar deus ex machina framework for the Incarnation. The Protestant tradition’s overemphasis on the sovereignty of God and denial that humankind retains the image of God after the original sin results in a juridical understanding of the Incarnation, whereby “the Incarnation becomes something external, kenotic, a voluntary self-humiliation by the assumption of human nature as a price

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720 As the “hypostatic humanity” of Christ, Mary’s humanity directly takes part in the Incarnation. This is not to diminish Bulgakov’s anthropology, for Mary stands as the perfect representative of humanity. She is a member of the human race, and because of the “communism of spirit,” Mary’s holiness is in part the result of the human race, her saintly ancestors.

721 Bulgakov writes that those who deny the Virgin birth or fail to understand the importance of Mary, limiting her solely an instrument in Jesus’ birth, have a “maimed Christology” and an “absence of a clearly conceived anthropology is striking.” (Bulgakov, “Correspondence,” p. 33.)


723 In *The Bride of the Lamb* Bulgakov diagnoses the error of Protestantism to be anthropological, namely that humankind has lost the image of God. (Bulgakov, BL, p. 325.)
necessary for the purchase of justification before God.” Reminiscent of Perry’s concern, God rescues us from our fallen nature rather than restores human nature to its inherent blessedness. The Incarnation is not an internal necessity but an arbitrary event enacted by God to correct our fault, and thus it loses any real meaning for the human race other than that God will no longer damn us without the possibility of salvation. But this vision of the salvation history is diametrically opposed to Bulgakov’s dialogical interpretation of salvation history, which is expressed in his Mariology. Mary demonstrates the dynamic role of humankind in salvation history. A proper Mariology forces us to consider that history of Israel that culminates in her holiness. God does not arbitrarily save us, but rather through/with humanity God prepares the world for the Incarnation. Mariology, therefore, demonstrates that nominalism has no place in Christian theology, for the Incarnation involves humankind as the Incarnation is contingent upon the preparedness and reception of humankind. Salvation involves the human race, and the Church, which is “the sphere of sanctification,” is the place in which we join the Mother of God by participating in the salvation of one another.

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724 Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church, p. 116.

725 Graves provides an interesting insight into points of contact between Bulgakov and Martin Luther. He argues that Bulgakov like Luther agrees that Mary provides an example of commitment to God’s will. (Graves, p. 135.) He continues that Bulgakov’s Mariology offers no diminution of Christ significance for salvation history. (Graves, p. 141.) Although Bulgakov does not address this similarity, in his The Orthodox Church, he argues that the active faith of Protestantism has affinity with the Orthodox notion of discipleship. (Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church, p. 108.) Mary is then the greatest example of active-faith. Like Luther, Mary is a great disciple of Christ. Nevertheless, Graves warns that Bulgakov divinizes Mary too greatly so as to make her impalpable for Protestants. (Graves, p. 145.) Graves concern is not new but rather reiterates the concern of Bulgakov’s Orthodox contemporaries. His position was not shared by all Orthodox, who believed that his Mariology was excessive and were concerned about Protestant reactions to it. (Cf. Geffert, p. 143.)

5.4.5.3 Do we need to venerate Mary?

Thus far, I have outlined Bulgakov’s ideas on the need for Mariology in theology. However, Bulgakov does not simply state that Protestants need to recognize this role, but also that they need to venerate the Mother of God. At the second *Faith and Order Commission* meeting he argues:

The way in which the whole Protestant world suddenly ceased to venerate the Virgin Mary was the most mysterious and real spiritual event of the age of the Reformation. This lack of feeling continues up to the present time, and *one of the most important preliminary conditions of the success of reconciliation is to overcome it*.[727] [Emphasis added]

Recall that Bulgakov’s theology is replete with aesthetics, e.g. he uses art/iconography as a source of theology, and feeling, e.g. his theology of glory. Christianity involves experiencing the love of God.[728] The experience of Orthodoxy, which for Bulgakov expresses the fullest historical representation of the Church triumphant on earth, involves the experience of love for the Mother of God. He writes “[l]ove and veneration for the Virgin is the soul of Orthodox piety”[729] and “[i]n adoring the humanity of Christ, we venerate his Mother.”[730] Bulgakov does not put forward a clear theological argument for the veneration of Mary, but rather only observations about Orthodoxy. In the context of his discussion of Mary and the saints Bulgakov states that the failure to venerate the saints, which for him is the means by which we ask them to

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[727] Bulgakov, “A Brief Statement of the Place of the Virgin Mary in the Thought and Worship of the Orthodox Church,” p. 29.

[728] Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 118. Bulgakov associates the presence of Mary with the experience of warmth. He does not speculate as to what this means, but based upon what has been said, it is clear that this must be related to Mary’s maternal and feminine presence, for religious experience is a function of femininity but also related to the archetype for femininity, the Holy Spirit. The prayers to Mary and the saints are tantamount to an invitation to the Holy Spirit to enter into our lives and guide us to work with/in the Holy Spirit’s mission.


[730] Ibid., p. 117.
pray for us, will result in a great spiritual loss.\textsuperscript{731} Without Mary and the saints, we “are destined to remain spiritually without a family, without a race, without home, without fathers and brothers in Christ. They traverse the way of salvation all alone, without looking for examples and without knowing communion with others.”\textsuperscript{732} Lack of the veneration of Mary and the saints is a self-imposed spiritual exile from the Church triumphant; one unnecessarily treads the path of the cross alone without the examples and widely available spiritual aid. Given Bulgakov’s understanding of humanity as a multi-hypostatic essence made in the image of Love itself, the Blessed Trinity, the veneration of Mary and the saints is none other than our incipient participation in our true relationship to one another, to love and aid in the betterment of one another so as to grow closer to God. Yet this also illustrates why the Orthodox Church is the fullest representation of the Church triumphant on earth, for it fully communicates with and benefits from those closest to God, Mary, and the saints.\textsuperscript{733} But this is a far cry from arguing that the veneration of Mary and the saints are necessary for salvation. Bulgakov would likely agree with the contemporary Catholic position that the veneration of saints is strongly suggested but not required.\textsuperscript{734} In point of practice, Bulgakov does not mention the Mother of God during ecumenical prayer services out of respect for non-Orthodox Christians. In his article, “By Jacob’s Well,” he writes: “We cannot pray together to the Blessed Virgin and to the saints with Protestants…for the sake of communion in prayer [Orthodoxy] is forced to adapt itself by, as it

\textsuperscript{731} Ibid., p. 122.

\textsuperscript{732} Ibid., p. 123.

\textsuperscript{733} Cf. Sergius Bulgakov, “I Believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church (Conference Address),” (The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius 12 (June 1931): pp. 17-31), pp. 21-22.

\textsuperscript{734} Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 2683.
were, minimizing itself, thereby losing some of its fullness.”

Although these prayers are still effective, they are not as effective as they could be since Mary and the saints are left out. Nevertheless, for Bulgakov, whether or not we ask Mary, Mary will aid in our salvation. Yet he laments not explicitly mentioning this relationship in prayer with Protestants because he desires to express what he experiences, namely the love and kindness of the most Holy Mother of God.

In other words, to acknowledge that Christ is fully human and divine, and to truly seek to be in a relationship with Christ will lead us to acknowledge and love the woman who bore Jesus, the Theotokos. In this sense the veneration of Mary is a natural necessity. But again this is a claim based on his experience of Orthodoxy. If we truly understand who Christ is and what his mission was, then we are left with no alternative but to love the woman he loves.

5.4.6 The Dread Judgment

Perhaps one of the most unique aspects of Bulgakov’s thought is his eschatology. At the final judgment, Mary, unlike humanity, is not judged; her glorification is evidence that she has already undergone this judgment and was found to be righteous. Interestingly, as Nichols notes, Bulgakov’s speculations on Mary’s participation in the final judgment are based

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735 Sergius Bulgakov, “By Jacob’s Well,” (The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius 22 (December 1933): pp. 7-17), p. 11

736 On the importance of praying to Mary, Perry writes: “‘To ask Mary to pray for us is to meet him there.’ In her representative and maternal roles, Mary is the unique space for God, in and through whom the church continues to plead God’s Word not only to God but also to itself.” (Perry, p. 302.) We encounter Christ in a unique manner in Mary. Similarly, the saints bring Christ to us in different contexts that are more applicable to our experiences. When we venerate, or pray to them, we express our solidarity with them and look to them for guidance that inevitably brings us to the living Christ. Bulgakov makes similar claims. For Bulgakov Mary and the saints are “christs in Jesus Christ.” (Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church, p. 120.)

737 Bulgakov, BL, p. 415.
exclusively on iconography. Icons and icon placement, e.g. the *Deisis*, that depict the Mother of God standing between Christ and the human race are fodder for his speculations.  

Nevertheless, his interpretation of the final judgment involves synergy between humankind and God, which provides Mary with a preeminent role in the final judgment. Mary, however, is not judging along Christ, but rather she lives out the function of the Hypostasis of Love, the Holy Spirit, Who “is itself the judgment of the world.”  

This is apparent in Bulgakov’s twofold description of the final Judgment. In his typical antinomic fashion, he describes the final judgment as simultaneously a judgment of love and a judgment of justice. The latter refers to the traditional understanding of the last judgment where Christ descends from heaven to judge the living and the dead. As the hypostasis of truth, Christ renders a just judgment. Christ makes the sinner aware of his/her failure to respond to God’s offer of love: “In every human being, his own unreality or nakedness, his failure to wear a wedding garment at the wedding feast, is clearly, distinguished from Christ’s reality.” More specifically, the sinner stands before his *logos* in the Logos and sees for him/herself the distance between that image and its reality.

The experience of this judgment is the judgment of love. Following Isaac of Nineveh, this judgment involves the experience of hell understood as the torment of God’s love that burns away what keeps the soul from communion with God. The Holy Spirit sets a blaze the heart of the

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738 Nichols, *Wisdom from Above*, p. 229. Bulgakov explicitly admits this. (Bulgakov, BL, p. 410.)
739 Bulgakov, BL, pp. 413-14.
740 Ibid., p. 416.
741 Ibid., p. 458.
believer, who in turn cannot fail to love Christ but then suffers on behalf of this love, as the Holy Spirit makes the believer experience his/her separation from Christ, its proto-image, on account of sin, which causes suffering.\textsuperscript{743} With Christ the soul sees its failure, but now the soul is purged of its failure. The suffering of Hell in this account is less punitive than preparatory insofar as it prepares the soul for the eternal beatitude that God has in store for a soul.

With the Holy Spirit, Mary participates in the judgment of love.\textsuperscript{744} For Bulgakov Mary reveals the human side of this judgment. By this he means that God allows a human hypostasis to participate in the judgment of the human race. With the Holy Spirit, Mary is involved in the provocation of repentance in the sinner.\textsuperscript{745} As the “the living conscience in human beings,”\textsuperscript{746} Mary penetrates the human heart and consciousness, and awakens it to its selfishness and egoism and then to repentance.\textsuperscript{747} In contradistinction to Christ’s judgment of justice, Mary’s participation in the judgment of love arouses in the soul compunction for its failure to respond to God’s love,\textsuperscript{748} in accord with the Holy Spirit’s judgment of love that leads the soul to become aware of its perversion and selfishness and desires repentance. Thus, judgment and purification of a soul involve God and humankind. The soul grievously suffers for this lack of righteousness and inability to provide a fiat that can encompass its earthly existence as did Mary.

\textsuperscript{743} Bulgakov, BL, p. 459.
\textsuperscript{744} Ibid., p. 459-60. The Prayer of the Mother of God for mercy for her children is the prayer of the Holy Spirit. (Cf. Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, p. 13.)
\textsuperscript{745} Cf. Nichols, Wisdom from Above, p. 232.
\textsuperscript{746} Bulgakov, BL, p. 460.
\textsuperscript{747} Cf. Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{748} Bulgakov’s experience with the Madonna at Dresden that caused him to experience compunction for his sin influenced his thought here.
5.4.6.1 Mary and the Damned

For Bulgakov, this suffering that people will experience at the dread judgment is hell.

What distinguishes hell from the final judgment is the presence of the resurrected body. Given his recapitulative account of the final judgment, Bulgakov, following Gregory of Nyssa, argues for a form of *apokatastasis*. Interestingly, Louth suggests that it was precisely Bulgakov’s reflections on the Mother of God that led him to this position. After all, for Bulgakov Mary’s role in heaven is antinomic; she experiences the bliss of deification but also sorrows over the sins of her children and the damned. If her prayers were not answered, not only are her prayers ineffective to some extent, but the Mother of God must sorrow over her lost children for eternity. Bulgakov suggests that Mary co-suffers with the damned. Given Bulgakov’s emphasis on Mary’s co-suffering with Mothers, particularly Mothers who have lost their children, and that the redeemed in heaven do not forget the damned, it follows that Mary must co-suffer with these mothers of the damned in heaven. If hell remains for eternity, then Mary’s torment remains eternal. Given Bulgakov’s optimism, this is not possible. Universalism is the only reasonable conclusion he can accept.

Bulgakov argues that since “everyone is responsible for all,” as long as humankind shares one human nature, our salvation is not complete until the human race is saved. No one can be left

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749 Nichols, *Wisdom from Above*, p. 236.
750 Louth, “Mother of God,” p. 163.
751 Bulgakov notes that Mary does not plead for the forgiveness of sins. This is because the soul itself must desire this. (Bulgakov, BL, p. 488.)
752 According to Bulgakov, the Theotokos is pierced by a sword of Hell for her compassionate love for the damned. (Bulgakov, BL, p. 515.)
753 Bulgakov, *Churchly Joy*, p. 22; Bulgakov, BL, pp. 515-517.
behind. Heaven does not exist in its fullness so long as hell exists. Moreover, given the fact that creation is creaturely Sophia, when God is all in all and creation is divinized, there is simply no place for hell and evil, which has no ontology and is the deprivation of good. For Bulgakov hell is, therefore, an internal state as opposed to an eternal place. Hell is precisely the experience of Divine Love as purging us from sin. Bulgakov’s interpretation of hell is similar to the Catholic Church’s teaching on purgatory insofar as hell is a purgative, temporary state that will not exist after the eschaton. Bulgakov, however, universalizes purgatory.

According to Bulgakov, all sin must be expiated to experience Divine Beatitude. Bulgakov’s predilection for existential language and rejection of legalism as applied to God suggests that this expiation of sin has less to do with making recompense for offenses against God as opposed to the internal condition of the soul. Hell is a self-inflicted punishment; it is brought about by God for our offense. However, we experience the punishment when we see Mary. Her countenance makes us cognizant of our failure to accept God’s Love and honor our Mother through our holy living. Our punishment is self-inflicted existential disappointment.

As expressed in Chapter Three, sin is a disease which contemporary Catholic moral theorists would express as a vice that produces bad habits and character. Our incorporation into the glorified Church is predicated upon our receptivity to God’s love that is only possible insofar as our reason and will are oriented completely to God. Mary accomplishes this perfectly and thus

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754 Bulgakov, BL, p. 489.
755 Bulgakov’s description of Hell is similar to the Catholic catechism’s description of purgatory. Compare what I described earlier to this statement by the Catholic Church: “All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.” (Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 1030.)
she experiences the fullness of heaven without the torment of hell. Her perfect and continuous lifelong fiat is indicative of her lack of any attachment to sin that manifests itself in her perfect holiness and experience of heaven without hell. In a Marian fashion, corresponding to our fiat to the offer of eternal life, we experience heaven and hell in degrees. For Bulgakov, this is canonized not only in the teaching of Jesus who speaks of heaven as the Father’s house with many rooms (John 14:2), but also in the delineation that the Church makes between minor and major saints.  

5.4.7 The Parousia

The Dread Judgment and the Parousia are one event. The Parousia that reveals the glory of the world, the union of creaturely with Divine Sophia that is inseparable from the Parousia of the Mother of God. Mary is after all the “creaturely glory of the world, the glory of Christian humanity.” In this event the entire Trinity is fully revealed in the world: the power of Pentecost and Incarnation are exhausted since Christ’s work is accomplished. With Christ, Mary stands as the complete revelation of the Incarnation and Godhumanhood.

Nevertheless, the Parousia entails the return of Christ in his power and glory but also the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Here, however, some nuancing is required. In Sophia: The Wisdom of God (1935) Bulgakov maintains that the Holy Spirit will be revealed, however, in The Bride of

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757 This idea is an extension of Bulgakov’s reflection on the Church’s canonization practice in which the Church distinguished between minor and major saints as well as the different orders of saints. (Bulgakov, BL, pp. 479-80.) There is a correspondence between honor and glorification in heaven. The most righteous on Earth will be the most glorified in heaven. The flipside of this, as Plekon illustrates, is that holiness is for all people, regardless of culture, gender, and ethnicity. Holiness is not something just for the saintly heroes but for all people, who are likewise called to heroic acts of holiness in mundane human existence. Holiness is not perfection but the triumph of Christ made manifest in one’s life. (Michael Plekon, Hidden Holiness, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. 43-44.)

758 The Parousia entails the dread judgment as the “entry into the realm of divine ‘fire,’ but also the revelation of Christ and Mary. (Nichols, Wisdom from Above, p. 232.)

759 Graves, p. 97.
Bulgakov argues that the Holy Spirit does not reveal Itself *per se*. In perfectly adopting the Mother of God into the Holy Spirit’s life and mission, Mary becomes the historical manifestation of the Holy Spirit that will be revealed when Mary descends from heaven at the Parousia. Mary’s manifestation of the Holy Spirit is a consequence of the Holy Spirit’s function, a secondary cause. Given Bulgakov’s insistence on the intimate union by grace between Mary and the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit allows Mary to participate in the Spirit’s mission, the saving of the human race, it is reasonable that Mary’s manifestation should accompany the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary that the Holy Spirit manifest Itself. Unfortunately, Bulgakov’s thought on this is unclear, and he is easily misinterpreted since he does not concisely express this idea. Nevertheless, in both *Sophia: The Wisdom of God* and *The Bride of the Lamb* Bulgakov reiterates this position: in his chapter on “The Veneration of Our Lady” in *Sophia: The Wisdom of God*, Bulgakov asserts clearly that Mary is the personal revelation of the Holy Spirit.761 Likewise in the *Bride of the Lamb* he writes: “She [Mary] is the Spirit-Bearer, the transparent human image of the revelation of the Holy Spirit” and again she is the “human hypostatic image of the Holy Spirit.”762

Bulgakov consistently maintains throughout his theological career that the Holy Spirit is revealed in Mary. She is, therefore, not simply humanity glorified, but the hypostatic image of the glorifier, the Holy Spirit, that will be revealed to the world at the Second Coming. This is a momentous event in salvation history since Mary “brings the full power of the Incarnation into

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the eschaton. Just as Mary formed the bridge or “living gate” between heaven and Earth in the Incarnation she continues to do so at the eschaton. Now she reveals fully what Godhumanhood entails. Her vocation of motherhood as preparing the world for this event has concluded.

Basing himself on Rev 22:20, Bulgakov suggests that the Parousia of Mary will precede the Parousia of Christ. Nevertheless, as the Holy Spirit’s personal, human hypostasis, Mary with her Son will reveal the fullness of the Godhumanhood: the synergy of God and humankind in both its human and divine aspects. The image of God as Son and Holy Spirit that exists in eternity are fully revealed in creation in the personal revelation of the Holy Spirit and glorification of the Son. Here the eternal foundation of creation and humanity are shown forth in the male and female representatives of the human race, Mary and Christ Jesus.

5.5 Section Four: Mary and Discipleship

5.5.1 Mary’s New Path as Divine-Motherhood

I have frequently made allusions to the important role Mary has in the spiritual life. Without restating what has already been said, it is important to note that Mary is not simply a model disciple, but rather the first disciple to receive of the Holy Spirit and to live out the mission of the Holy Spirit. As the pneumatophoric hypostasis she unites with Divine Motherhood, the hypostatic function of the Holy Spirit, not only in giving birth to Christ but also

763 Graves, p. 99.
765 Graves, p. 99.
766 Cf. Ibid., pp. 145-150.
767 Ibid., p. 99.
in the salvation of the believer. It is in this latter sense that Christians are called to be Divine Mothers: to give birth to Christ through our prayers, thoughts, and deeds, which entails our deification by the Holy Spirit. In this sense Bulgakov’s Mariology is also a development of the Orthodox theology of the spiritual life that entails, as poignantly stated by St. Seraphim, “the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.” Bulgakov writes:

The world is the womb, giving birth to the Mother of God, all humanity is in her becoming a divine Motherhood in the making.” And again “The spirit will give a new sensation, a living knowledge, a vital adoption of this Word, a word-bearing, a universal cosmic divine motherhood. . . .This is the assimilation of Christ by the creature, a living sensation of the universal Christophoricity of creation, and in this sense Christ-bearing or Divine Motherhood is the operation of the Holy Spirit, a world Pentecost.

“The assimilation of Christ by the creature” is a synonym for deification. It is a state created by the Holy Spirit only when the human hypostasis is prepared to receive the Spirit’s presence. At that point the man or woman becomes “pneumatophoric” not only in his/her “natural being but in their personal being and hypostatic consciousness.” This is the beginning of the deification of a particular man or woman and by analogy the direct participation of that man or woman in the maternal mission of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as Sophia Compton poetically expressed, “She [Mary] belongs to the age of glory; her mysteries are a beckoning toward that which is yet to come for the rest of us.” Crum likewise writes “he [Bulgakov] extols Our Lady as the spiritual

768 Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light,” p. 34.
769 Bulgakov, BB, p. 91. Likewise he wrote: “The Logos who was born of the Virgin is born in the souls of the faithful, for every church soul participates in divine motherhood of the Mother-Church, the Mother of God.” (Ibid., p. 92, 105.) He stated more clearly that “the womb bearing of Christ himself, personal Divine Motherhood, which only later, in fullness of time, must be made universal and cosmic.” (Ibid., p. 92)
770 Nichols, Wisdom from Above, p. 177.
type, which every pious person desires to emulate.”

Mary foreshadows what the redeemed community will participate in. She “prefigures the full transformation which shall be accomplished at the Parousia, when the entire Church receives the glory that was first conferred on the Theotokos.”

What this will entail is revealed to us in the Mother of God. Therefore, all that I have said about the Mother of God in relation to her glorification, miracles, apparitions, and intercession are applicable to humankind. As saints, before the Final Judgment, we will participate in the salvation of others.

However, Mary not only tells us what our glorified existence will be like but also gives us an example of heroic Christian living. Mary gives Christians an example to follow, since Christians must embrace their feminine nature and also give themselves totally to the will of God the Father; however, this can only occur if Christians, like Mary, sacrifice their personal I so that the Holy Spirit may enter into them. They must give a complete and utter fiat. The Christian must metaphorically will to give birth to God, which is only possible through the Holy Spirit. In this sense we share the Holy Spirit’s Motherhood as “a state of begottenness in the process of accomplishment.”

Each hypostasis is called to bear the Spirit, inasmuch as each

773 Newman, p. 65.
774 Mary fulfills the destiny of humankind, to receive God. Bulgakov argues that the original sin frustrates God’s plan for humankind that included “the direct path to Annunciation.” (Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, p. 80.) Mary’s holiness and fiat fulfills the destiny of humankind, to be deified or become a Spirit-bearing hypostasis. (Cf. Ibid., p. 80.)
775 Bulgakov, BB, p. 92.
776 Bulgakov, The Orthodox Church, p. 121.
777 Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to Unfading Light,” p. 34.
hypostasis is made by God for divinization or to be adopted by the Holy Spirit. To do so is to receive the general gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts include the spirit of humility and repentance or asceticism, the spirit of love, and prophecy. Mary received and lived out these gifts: she achieved the heights of asceticism at the Temple, demonstrated great love in her fiat at the Annunciation, and provided a prophetic witness throughout her life, which culminates with her co-suffering with Christ at the cross. Mary’s life involves her heroic effort to follow her Son’s example through her spiritual-bearing of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, Mary’s expression of the faith, albeit archetypical, is not meant to silence our expression or experience of the Christian faith. By virtue of our baptism and confirmation, we have received these same gifts of the Holy Spirit and are called to live them out.

The gift of prophecy has a particular importance for Bulgakov’s theology of discipleship. As evidenced by his publication “Spirit of Prophecy” in 1939, prophecy has a central role in the spiritual life. Actualizing our feminine potential under the guidance of the Holy Spirit leads us to make a creative response against the injustices that surround us. This critical engagement with the world stems from the “spirit-bearing quality of Christian humanity after Pentecost.”

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778 Bulgakov, BB, p. 81.
779 Cf. Graves, pp. 76-84.
780 Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5. Sec. V, Location 4540 of 6301.
781 Prophecy plays an important role throughout his theological works. (Bulgakov, The Apocalypse of John in A Bulgakov Anthology, p. 157.) The importance of prophecy for Christian living is evident in the inclusion of the Book of Revelation into the biblical canon. Bobrinskoy argues that for Bulgakov to follow Christ, “to take up the one’s cross,” is prophetic. (Bobrinskoy, p. 329.) Thus prophecy is the most important gift of the Holy Spirit.
783 Ibid., p. 5.
All disciples are called to this form of prophetic witness by virtue of their baptism. However, it is difficult, and just as Mary’s prophetic witness required the denial of her motherly sentiments, so we are also called to do the same, to deny even our own role in our family if need be for the sake of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit requires our complete fiat without reservation, and thus creative activity presupposes humility. The Holy Spirit imparts life to us as an insatiable, erotic love for God that will be satisfied with nothing less than Godself. As prophets, after renouncing our self-will for the will of the Father, we must engage the problems in our society with prophetic zeal. Creativity in this sense entails doing the will of God at the expense of one’s own will or “taking creative responsibility in history, in the light of his knowledge of the end of history.” The Spirit imparts various gifts which are in accordance with our various vocations. Each person has a specific vocation he/she is called to become.

Mary’s unique, personal vocation involved her role as Christ’s Mother and first disciple. With Christ, Mary audaciously took upon herself the cross and was co-crucified with him. She is the first disciple of Christ to follow Christ up to the point of death. After his death Mary was not

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785 Bulgakov, BB, p. 43.
786 Bulgakov writes, “The path of the Christian cannot and should not remain solely the path of passive humility; he must inevitably allow a place in himself for creative activity, for the taking of responsibility, for self-determination and the audacity that is inevitably connected (and even in a certain sense identical) with the latter. The Spirit that lives in us demands this of us, calls us to this.” (Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 4592-4594 of 6301.)
787 Graves, p. 75.
788 Cf. Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 4593 of 6301.
granted her will to die with her Son, but rather she was given a new mission to guide the Church, as she awaited her Dormition in patience.\textsuperscript{790}

In a similar manner, we are called to give birth to Christ in whatever situation we may find ourselves, so that we may aid others along the path of discipleship. Like Mary, Christians must act prophetically in their given context, which will undoubtedly entail co-crucifixion with Christ. The descent of the Holy Spirit means that all human activity is capable of Spirit-Bearing or Divine Maternity. It can give birth to Christ and foster encounters with Christ. For this reason, as Bulgakov illustrates, the Church charges particular ministries associated with cultural and historical activity to canonized saints.\textsuperscript{791} The saints are those men and women who gave birth to Christ in their context, and now stand in solidarity with people today who find themselves in a similar situation. Therefore, all activity in the world can be sanctified, but it is up to the individual spirit-bearer to accomplish this task. Furthermore, Bulgakov argues that pneumatophoric men and women have a lower analogue in the sages and poets of secular society.\textsuperscript{792} Henceforth, the Holy Spirit is not limited to the historical Orthodox Church, but rather inspires the human race. Sages, poets, and artists form part of the mosaic of the spirit-bearing community.\textsuperscript{793}

In this way Bulgakov’s insights on Mary, the Holy Spirit, and discipleship reveal an important insight on St. Paul’s enigmatic words, “we complete what is lacking in Christ’s

\begin{footnotes}
\item[790] Ibid., p. 23.
\item[791] Bulgakov, \textit{The Comforter}, Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 4615 of 6301.
\item[792] Nichols, \textit{Wisdom from Above}, p. 178.
\item[793] Ibid., p. 178.
\end{footnotes}
afflictions.” (Col 1:24) What is lacking in Christ’s afflictions is our participation in the saving event of the Paschal Mystery. Only as a Spirit-Bearing community, who has acquired the Holy Spirit, will the afflictions of Christ be complete; together with the Mother of God, we will bring to fruition, by the Holy Spirit, the realization of Christ’s salvation of the human race.

5.6 Conclusion

Bulgakov is an ecumenically-minded theologian who provides a nuanced treatment of the traditional Orthodox devotion to Mary. Due in part to his anthropological starting point and stress on sharing in Mary’s Spirit-Bearing through the incorporation into Christ by the Holy Spirit, Mary is placed within the community of believers. In so doing, Bulgakov’s Mary, albeit highly exalted, remains closely connected to the human race. She is neither a co-redeemer, nor takes away from Christ’s unique mediation; rather she reveals the Holy Spirit’s hypostasis and function as well as humankind’s role and relationship to God. In so doing, Mary is the penultimate expression of the Divine-Human synergy that is the basis of Sophiology. Mary realizes the Trinitarian-like existence that humankind is called to live out. She is then truly the New Eve; however, she is more than Eve inasmuch as she lives out fully what was only a potential for Eve and Adam, to which humankind is called.

Nevertheless, all the important prerogatives that we apply to Mary are not special privileges, but rather inherent to our blessed human nature. Although Bulgakov’s vision of Mary is an exalted image, his anthropological and pneumatological emphasis in his Mariology keep Mary connected to the human race. In this way there is much in Bulgakov’s thought that is in accordance with more recent Marian studies by Elizabeth Johnson and Leonardo Boff that stress Mary’s role in the Cloud of witnesses, which makes room for the personal and creative response
of the believer. For Bulgakov Mary’s participation in salvation history and relationship to the Holy Spirit is preeminent and perfect but not exhaustive since, as Spirit-Bearers, all disciples are called to give their individual and prophetic witness as they proclaim the Gospel. The salvation of the human race cannot be accomplished by the Holy Spirit until the human race participates in it. This participation has begun in Mary but will include humankind, which is evidenced by Bulgakov’s notion of apokatastasis. We are called to be joined with Mary in her adoption by the Holy Spirit, working towards the salvation of humankind.

794 On creativity with respect to the spiritual life he wrote: “man by his creative acts extracts spiritual beauty and clothes the world in it” and again “Let us bring to Him [Jesus] the creative impulse of our spirit and the fruit of this impulse.” (Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, p. 34.)
Chapter Six: Bulgakov and His Critics

6.1.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the reception of Bulgakov’s Mariology. For this purpose I have divided this chapter into two sections. Section One will examine the reception of his thought within the Neo-patristic movement. Because Vladimir Lossky and Georges Florovsky were members of this movement and well-known critics of his thought within the émigré community in Paris where Bulgakov resided, this section will primarily focus on their criticisms. Note that Bulgakov’s lack of reception in Orthodox communities in Western Europe and North America is in part due to the dominance of their thought and rejection of Sophiology. Unlike Florovsky who rarely addresses Bulgakov in his publications, Lossky in *Spor o Sofii* launches a systematic attack against Bulgakov’s Sophiology, which includes Bulgakov’s Mariology. Therefore, the majority of this section will focus on Lossky’s criticisms. Section One will end with a brief evaluation of St. John Maximovitch’s criticism of Bulgakov. Maximovitch was a member of ROCOR, and, therefore, an outsider to the émigré community. Nevertheless, he is an important saint and authority in the Russian Orthodox community in North America, who shares a neo-patristic methodology and is an important critic of Bulgakov’s Mariology.

Section Two will examine Bulgakov’s reception among feminist theologians. This is important for two reasons. First, in light of the important role sexuality and his typology of women play in his Mariology, this analysis will help us to evaluate if his thoughts and ideas are outmoded from a contemporary perspective. Second, feminist theologians have begun the process of receiving his thought. This evaluation and incorporation of Bulgakov’s thoughts are primarily a Western phenomena. With the exception of brief comments made by Elisabeth Behr-

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795 Even though Maximovitch did not associate with the neo-patristic movement, he uses a similar methodology.
Sigel, a member of the émigré community in Paris, no Orthodox feminist has applied feminist theory to Bulgakov’s thought.

Based on these reasons, this section is divided into two main sub-sections. Sub-Section One will apply feminist theory to Bulgakov’s Mariology. Because Elizabeth Johnson’s *Truly Our Sister* provides the most detailed criticisms of the Mariological heritage as well as a feminist interpretation of Mary, she will be the main source that I will use in my discussion. Based on her main criticisms of traditional Mariologies, I will evaluate Bulgakov’s biblical hermeneutic, idealization of Mary, and dualist anthropology. Sub-Section Two offers a brief comparative study between Bulgakov and Behr-Sigel. The section will help highlight Bulgakov’s mixed reception in his émigré community, but also illustrates points of convergence between his thought and Orthodox feminism. In this way, Bulgakov’s Mariology may provide fertile ground for future Orthodox feminist studies.

6.2 Section One: Neo-Patristic Criticisms

6.2.1 Lossky, Florovsky, and Bulgakov: Background

Although both Vladimir Lossky and Georges Florovsky are neo-patristic theologians they had different agendas in mind. They shared the common goal of rooting their theology in the Fathers; however, they had different views on Tradition and methodology that led to different conclusions. Moreover, Lossky, as Joseph Ross Sauvé illustrates, bases many of his ideas on Florovsky’s work. For my purpose, it is important to note that Florovsky, who is considered

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796 Although Johnson does not evaluate Bulgakov’s Mariology directly, she evaluates his type of pneumatological Mariology.

797 C.f. Joseph Ross Sauvé, “Georges V. Florovsky and Vladimir N. Lossky: An Exploration, Comparison and Demonstration of Their Unique Approaches to The Neopatristic Synthesis Florovsky and Lossky,” (PhD diss., Durham University, 2010), p. 279. Lossky respected Florovsky and argued that Florovsky’s article, *Creature and Creaturehood*, which opposed Sophiology, was a brilliant article. (Vladimir Lossky, “An Explanation of the
one of the greatest antagonists of Bulgakov, never explicitly rejects Bulgakov’s Sophiology. Nevertheless, Lossky’s explicit rejection of Sophiology follows Florovsky’s rejection of Sophiological principles.

Vladimir Lossky, in fact, is widely regarded as the most out-spoken critic of Sergius Bulgakov. This is due to his role in the infamous Sophiological controversy that resulted in the condemnation of Bulgakov’s theology by the Metropolitan of Moscow and the publication of Lossky’s polemical pamphlet, *Spor o Sofii* (Controversy over Sophia). This is an important document for this study because in this work Lossky elucidates his critique of Bulgakov’s Mariology in the context of his rejection of Bulgakov’s Sophiology.


800 Sauvé, p. 279.

801 Lossky’s letter and appraisal of Bulgakov’s theology instigated the controversy.


Bulgakov’s Sophiology that would convey Bulgakov’s unique insights from a traditional Orthodox perspective. Unfortunately, he died before he had the opportunity to write it.

Although Florovsky begrudgingly played an important role in the Sophia Affair—he was compelled to take part in the writing of the minority report that ultimately rejected Bulgakov’s thought—he considered himself a friend of Bulgakov. And, perhaps due to his affection for Bulgakov as well as his discontent with the political and ecclesiastical motivations of the 24 August, 1935 Decree of the Moscow Patriarchate that condemned Bulgakov’s Sophiology as alien to Orthodoxy, Florovsky refrained from publicly attacking Bulgakov. Several studies, however, noted that Florovsky’s neo-patristic method of theology was in part a response to Bulgakov and Russian idealism. In Florovsky’s *Ways of Russian Theology* he rejects Sophiology in general as too speculative and influenced by the West.

### 6.2.2 Lossky’s and Florovsky’s Criticisms

According to Williams, Lossky criticizes Bulgakov’s work because it is “insufficiently apophatic, too preoccupied with concepts.” This criticism of Bulgakov’s Sophiology is carried over to his criticism of Bulgakov’s Mariology. According to Lossky, Bulgakov fundamentally misconstrues the Orthodox tradition. For our purpose what results is an incorrect theology of

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804 Sauvé, p. 60.


806 Florovsky advocates for a “return to the Fathers of the Church,” (Sauvé, p. 136.) which means to have acquired their mind.” (Georges Florovsky, “Patristic Theology and The Ethos of the Orthodox Church” in *Aspects of Church History*, pp. 11-30, (Belmont, Nordland: Nordland Publishing, 1989), 4:18.)

807 Williams, “The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky: An Exposition and Critique,” p. ii. Ultimately, for Lossky, Bulgakov’s theology is dangerous because it distorts ecclesiastical tradition and misuses sources. (Ibid., p. 63.) Bulgakov’s theology is based on biblical books, e.g. the Song of Songs and Revelation, and fathers, e.g. the Syrian bishop, Aphraates, that have a minor significance in the Orthodox faith. (Vladimir Lossky, “The Sophia Controversy: Protopriest S. Bulgakov’s “Report” and the Meaning of the Decree of the Moscow Patriarchate,” (trans. William Kevin Fisher, 2004), p. 24.)
Mary that is too preoccupied with her femininity and relationship with the Holy Spirit rather than her place and meaning within the Orthodox tradition. As Sauvé demonstrates, for Lossky apophatism is a mindset or attitude towards theology.\(^{808}\) Orthodoxy is not concerned with the positive content about God \textit{per se}, but rather the direct experience of Godself.\(^{809}\) This nuanced approach to theology means that theology cannot pursue knowledge about God for its own sake, or presume that it can achieve a rational comprehension of God, since knowledge of God is ultimately a mystical experience. In other words, apophatic theological method “forbids us to follow natural ways of thought and to form concepts which would usurp the place of spiritual realities.”\(^{810}\) Similarly, Florovsky continually warns against excess and indulging in abstract thought.\(^{811}\)

Nevertheless, Orthodoxy is not mystical escapism, but rather a limited engagement with the modern world. Faithfulness to the methods and thoughts of the entire body of Orthodox Church teachings delimits our appropriation of modern thoughts and methods.\(^{812}\) Lossky’s hostility towards Bulgakov is based on his perception of Bulgakov’s misuse of the Orthodox tradition most evident in Bulgakov’s pneumatology, the very basis for his typological treatment of Mary. In Lossky’s view, Bulgakov takes too much liberty with the Church’s teaching in his

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\footnote{Sauvé, p. 156.}
\footnote{Sauvé, p. 86.}
\end{footnotes}
speculations inasmuch as he stresses sexuality as an interpretative principle for the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this idea is based on the thought of a minor church father and ignores the patristic consensus. Bulgakov’s heresy is his unbridled speculations and appropriation of ideas from the Russian Religious Renaissance into his theology. Specifically, Bulgakov neglects the dialectic between “revolutionary innovators” and “conservative formalists” inherent to Orthodox teaching, leaning too far towards “revolutionary innovation.” For Lossky apophatic theology represents a middle way. It neither simply restates old axioms nor speculates for the sake of speculation. Lossky’s scholarship on Mary provides an example of what apophatic theology is. In his articles, “The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception” and “Panagia” he clarifies the Orthodox teaching about Mary and offers unique insights about Mary; however, he remains reserved in his conclusions. Interestingly, many of his conclusions directly parallel Bulgakov’s ideas.


814 For Bulgakov this position is a form of patristic rabbinicalism that neglects the variations and contradictions in the Fathers. (Louth, “The Task of Theology,” p. 246.)


816 Sauvé, p. 106.

Like Bulgakov, Lossky argues that humanity is fully realized in Mary and Jesus, and that Mary’s holiness is a result of her placement in history at the summit of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{818} On this latter point, although Lossky never develops the ontology of holiness that we find in Bulgakov,\textsuperscript{819} he argues that Mary’s holiness is not simply her accomplishment but also the Wisdom of God, who is the Second person of the Trinity that adapted itself to the wills of Mary’s ancestors, neutralizing the effect of the original sin on Mary. How this happens is not within Lossky’s purview to speculate. Rather Lossky bases his reflection on an authority, namely Gregory Palamas, who taught that Mary’s holiness was a result of the successive purifications of Mary’s ancestors.\textsuperscript{820} He arrives at the same conclusion as Bulgakov: that Mary is “kept from all taint of sin without any impairment to her liberty,”\textsuperscript{821} circumventing the contentious dogma of the Immaculate Conception.\textsuperscript{822} Like Bulgakov, he concludes that even though the original sin affects Mary, she did not personally sin.\textsuperscript{823}

The similarities do not stop here; Rowan Williams in his dissertation on Vladimir Lossky notes that both thinkers treat Mary as a type of the Church.\textsuperscript{824} For Lossky and Bulgakov Mary is

\textsuperscript{819} Lossky, “Mariology,” p. 192.
\textsuperscript{820} In his \textit{The Mystical Theology}, he also references St. John Damascus and St. Dmitri of Rostov as evidence for Mary’s preparation. (Lossky, \textit{The Mystical Theology}, p. 140.)
\textsuperscript{821} Ibid., p. 141.
\textsuperscript{822} Ibid., p. 140-141.
\textsuperscript{824} Williams, \textit{Margin of Silence}, p. 40.
the Church realized, as an all-Holy created being fully realizing “in her consciousness all the
import of the Incarnation of the Word, including the fact of her own divine maternity.”825 Again
like Bulgakov, Lossky stresses that she is “the holiness of the Church.”826 She exists at the
“supreme transition” of the creation; she is the eschaton realized, fully deified and assumed body
and soul into heaven, participating in the glory of her Son.827 For this reason he also refers to her
as the mystical center of the Church that is beyond the Resurrection and Final Judgment.828 The
uniqueness of her position is precisely what makes Mary so important to the Christian tradition,
for she is the only deified/resurrected human hypostasis, and as such she is the object of hope for
all Christians.829

However, in contradistinction to Bulgakov who attributes a form of headship to Mary,
Lossky is quick to stress that Christ is the head of the Church and the new humanity, not Mary.
Lossky is careful to place his reflections on Mary within an Christological context. In so doing
he arrives at original insights, including his Christological interpretation of Mary’s appearance at
Lourdes, France.830 Lossky’s apophatic method is evident in his reservations about theologizing
about Mary. Thus, he does not author a systematic Mariology, but rather limits his ideas to the
refutation of errors (e.g. the Immaculate Conception and Pius IX’s interpretation of Lourdes) and

826 Ibid., p. 194.
827 Ibid., p. 197.
829 Like Bulgakov, Florovsky considers virginity a “spiritual and inner attitude,” and he makes the observation that
the lack of Marian interest is indicative of a “reduced Christology.” (Florovsky, “The Ever-Virgin Mother of God,”
3:171) Florovsky similarly rejects the Immaculate Conception because it fails to account for Mary’s personal
freedom. (Florovsky, “The Ever-Virgin Mother of God,” 3:182.)
refuses to speak about the mysteries of Mary’s Dormition and Glorification. With regard to these mysteries Lossky says, “[l]et us therefore keep silence, and let us not try to dogmatize about the supreme glory of the Mother of God.”\textsuperscript{831} Although these teachings are apparent to an Orthodox believer, they are intentionally shrouded in a margin of silence that must be respected.\textsuperscript{832} In other places Lossky refers to these teachings as the unwritten tradition or the mysteries of the Church.\textsuperscript{833} As opposed to written tradition, e.g. the Scriptures, unwritten traditions are teachings that are relevant only to the Orthodox believer; they are not for public preaching. Written tradition is the content of preaching, evangelization, and the central truths of the faith that all people should know. However, not all of the tradition should be publicly taught, for much of the tradition of the Church, i.e. unwritten tradition, precludes rational discourse and is perceptible only to the mystical experience of a believer, e.g. the Dormition of Mary. Unwritten tradition is a part of the deposit of faith that is taught to a believer, but there is no way to understand it. Rather it points us to “the foundation of our hope, a fruit of faith, ripened in tradition.”\textsuperscript{834} Lossky finds confirmation of his position in the Church’s several centuries of silence on the Dormition.\textsuperscript{835} Quoting St. Basil, Lossky writes with reference to Marian teachings, “it was an unpublishable and ineffable teaching, which was preserved by our fathers in silence, so as to be inaccessible to all curiosity or indiscretion, for they had been healthily instructed how to protect, by silence, the

\textsuperscript{831} Lossky, “Mariology,” p. 197.


\textsuperscript{834} Lossky, “Mariology,” p. 197.

\textsuperscript{835} Lossky, “Panagia,” p. 35.
holiness of the mystery.”^836 Therefore, not only are the uninitiated unable to understand these teachings, but Lossky believes it to be imprudent for theologians to speak publically about unwritten tradition, since it may prove detrimental to the spiritual welfare of non-Orthodox persons. Since these teachings on Mary are only accessible through experience, for those who have received the Holy Spirit, then it will be impossible for a catechumen or non-Orthodox to perceive these truths. Any attempt to preach about the unwritten traditions that are perceptible to intuition will result in rationalistic distortions. His pastoral concern is based on his fear that one will inspect what is contained in these teachings, and after failing to comprehend this teaching, disregard or lose their veneration of Mary.\(^837\)

Nevertheless, recent historical scholarship casts doubt on Lossky’s interpretation of the Orthodox teaching on Mary as largely an unwritten tradition that was kept in prudent silence. We are aware of a variety of apocryphal works, such as the proto-evangelium of James, that speak in-depth about Mary. However, Lossky explains that these works do not represent the Orthodox tradition, for they “often alluded imprudently to mysteries about which the Church had maintained a prudent silence.”^838 Lossky is correct that the Orthodox Church has never accepted the Gospel of James as authoritative. However, Lossky fails to take into consideration its influence on Orthodox piety and worship. Moreover, he neglects the Mariological works authored by Byzantine theologians, such as Maximus the Confessor’s influential work, *Life of* 

\(^{836}\) Ibid., p. 35.  
\(^{837}\) Ibid., p. 36.  
\(^{838}\) Ibid., p. 35.
the Virgin,\textsuperscript{839} as well as St. John of Damascus’ *Homilies on the Virgin Mary*. Bulgakov frequently makes references to St. John of Damascus’ work in *The Burning Bush*.\textsuperscript{840} Stephen Shoemaker’s scholarship casts serious doubt on Lossky’s apophatic interpretation of the Mariology as largely an unwritten tradition in Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{841} Shoemaker argues that Maximus’ work inspired a variety of Mariological works in the Orthodox world.\textsuperscript{842} Maximus the Confessor himself in his *Life of the Virgin* presents an Orthodox Mariology that speaks in detail about Mary’s Dormition.

Given Lossky’s theological methodology and his hesitation in theologizing about the Mother of God and Orthodox devotion to her, it is not surprising that Lossky was grievously offended by Bulgakov’s *The Burning Bush*. Bulgakov’s conclusions that I have outlined in Chapter Five, albeit based in the Orthodox Liturgy and tradition, speak about that which should have remained silent. What we find here again are two different mindsets. As Tataryn commented, Bulgakov is a “historically minded” theologian, and his attention to history and the development of Orthodox teaching as well as the speculative methods of many Church Fathers like Gregory of Nyssa vindicate his system. The Church Fathers are important but, for Bulgakov,
they do not exhaust theology and should not limit theology. For Bulgakov the neo-patristic synthesis that Lossky and Georges Florovsky proposed was simply untenable.\footnote{Cf. Myroslaw Tataryn, “History Matters: Bulgakov's Sophianic Key,” \textit{St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly} (2005): pp. 203-218.}

For Lossky, Bulgakov’s failure to acquire an Orthodox, patristic, and apophatic mindset provides Bulgakov with a faulty method. This failure to theologize like the Fathers must have been evident for Florovsky as well.\footnote{Bilaniuk, 2:24.} Florovsky is clear that Mariology must be subsumed within Christology;\footnote{This is ironic since he makes this statement in a treatise, albeit short, on Mary. (Florovsky, “The Ever-Virgin Mother of God,” 3:171.)} Mary should not be the subject of her own treatise.\footnote{Georges Florovsky, “The Ever-Virgin Mother of God,” 3:173.}

Lossky attempts to demonstrate that Bulgakov failed to acquire the mind of the Fathers. He argues, for instance, that Bulgakov uses analogies improperly. According to Lossky, analogies are useful for practical theology, i.e. giving examples to help illustrate a point, but not dogmatic theology. Lossky gives the example of St. Photius who uses the analogy of the human family to clarify the procession of the Holy Spirit. However, he notes Photius does not use this analogy as the basis of his argument. Analogies cannot be used as a theological axiom. Lossky argues, in effect, that Bulgakov’s pneumatology, Christian anthropology, and Mariology are problematic because they are based on a “narrow spiritual analogy” that attributes gender to the Divine Son and Holy Spirit. Gender cannot be axiomatic because God is ultimately more dislike than like humankind. Bulgakov’s approach, however, is more nuanced than this insofar as he will argue that the Son and the Holy Spirit do not have gender, but that their activity is the basis
of human gender.\footnote{Cf. Dean-Drummond, \textit{Christ and Evolution}, p. 123.} For Lossky Bulgakov’s usage of analogies as axioms also illustrates how Bulgakov’s system is arbitrary. Thus, much of Bulgakov’s theology is simply speculation for the sake of speculating, not Orthodox theology.

Bulgakov’s pneumatological Mariology is further evidence of this. Lossky argues that Bulgakov’s gender essentialism that is based on the Son and the Holy Spirit and their images, Christ and Mary, is irrelevant. It is a “rash synthesis” because Bulgakov’s stress on gender as an interpretive principle is not based on good reasons and has little Patristic precedent. Lossky does not disagree that Jesus and Mary are the fullness of humanity, but rather rejects Bulgakov’s argument that Jesus and Mary are the fullness of humanity because they exhaust the image of God in their respective masculinity and femininity. In Bulgakov’s account, according to Lossky, Mary gives to Christ what Christ lacked, femininity.\footnote{Lossky, “The Sophia Controversy,” p. 24.} But this is an arbitrary speculation.

Lossky speculates that because Bulgakov is not faithful to the Orthodox tradition, he could have selected any quality that Mary and Jesus shared as the basis for his anthropology, dyadic theology, and Mariology, such as their Jewishness. Whatever Jewishness is would characterize the activity of the Son and Holy Spirit, humanity, and Jesus and Mary.

However, Lossky does not take into serious consideration Bulgakov’s justification for his choice, namely that God made humanity male and female. (Gen. 1:27) Although we cannot downplay the influence of the Russian Religious Renaissance’s preoccupation with sexuality on Bulgakov, Bulgakov explicitly links his thought to the biblical teaching on the image of God.\footnote{In 1937, Metropolitan Sergius accused Bulgakov of anthropocentrism. Interestingly, as Zwahlen notes, Bulgakov agreed with this accusation. Bulgakov writes: “But then Metropolitan Sergius accuses me of taking up an}
From his perspective, his good reason for making gender axiomatic is revelation, which defines humankind as male and female.

As Sauvé notes this issue of gender in the image of God caused Lossky “cognitive dissonance,” which Lossky overcomes over time.\(^{850}\) It is clear that early in Lossky’s career he followed Maximus the Confessor and Gregory of Nyssa in arguing that the differentiation of the sexes was due to God’s prevision. Lossky explicates this point in his *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.\(^{851}\) Thus, for Lossky the creation of humankind as male and female is not relevant to his theology of the image of God.\(^{852}\)

Bulgakov was aware of this interpretation and he rejects it on the account that it smacks of crass occasionalism in the Godhead and presumes a radical sinfulness of the body.\(^{853}\) The implication of this teaching is that the body is a result of sin that will be discarded at the Resurrection. Bulgakov attempts to link this idea with the heresy of the Bogomils.\(^{854}\) Interestingly, as Sauvé demonstrates, later in Lossky’s career, Lossky comes to share Bulgakov’s anthropocentric position because my starting point would be the axiom of man being God’s image and likeness. But what else could that be than a truth given to us by revelation itself? ‘God created humanity in God’s own image’ in order to ‘fill the earth and master it’ (Gen 1, 26–28). Is ‘orthodox consciousness’ really allowed to juggle with that truth?” (Sergius Bulgakov, Dokladnaja zapiska Mitropolitu Evlogiju Sergija Bulgakova po povodu opredeˇlenija Archierejskago sobora v Karlovcah otnositel’no ucˇenija o Sofii Premudrosti Bozˇiej, p. 17 in Regula Zwahlen, “Different concepts of personality: Nikolaj Berdaev and Sergej Bulgakov,” (*Studies in East European Thought* (2012): pp.183–204), p. 185.)

850 Sauvé, p. 207.


853 Bulgakov, UF, pp. 299-300.

854 Bogomils were a dualist religious sect. (Cf. Bulgakov, UF, p. 491, n. 21.)
insights and concerns. Lossky in his *Orthodox Theology* rejects Nyssa’s argument, and explains the differentiation of the sexes in a Bulgakovian sense. Lossky argues that the sexual differentiation refers to the image of God, namely that humankind was created as singular and plural as a reflection of the singularity and plurality of the Trinity. Lossky writes:

Thus the mystery of the singular and plural in man reflects the mystery of the singular and plural in God: in the same way that the personal principle in God demands that the one nature express itself in a diversity of persons, *likewise in man created in the image of God.*

[Emphasis added]

Here we find an uncanny similarity to Bulgakov’s thought. Sauvé, in fact, argues that Lossky borrows his ideas directly from Bulgakov. The gender distinction of male and female analogically refers to the Trinitarian image in humankind. This distinction represents two distinct persons that are united in one human nature analogous to the Blessed Trinity that is three divine persons united in one divine nature.

Moreover, echoing Bulgakov’s teaching on the effect of sin, Lossky argues that sin destroys the original unity of Adam and Eve creating individuals with two separate natures. Thus, the task of humankind is to reunite the sexes. However, what exactly this means is left ambiguous by Lossky.

Lossky’s polemic against Bulgakov’s pneumatological Mariology continues: attributing femininity to the Holy Spirit and by consequence to Mary is problematic since femininity

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856 Sauvé, p. 209.
857 Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, p. 67.
859 Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, p. 77.
connotes passivity. To the contrary, Lossky argues that the Holy Spirit is active in that the Holy Spirit inspires the prophets, operates in the sacraments, and perfects the activities of Christ.\textsuperscript{860}

Although Lossky mentions this critique in passing, he addresses a valid point, namely the problem of linking the Holy Spirit with gender. Unfortunately, Lossky’s presentation is schematic and does not take into account the nuances in Bulgakov’s thought. For Bulgakov femininity is an equivocal noun that refers to passivity but also passive-activity.

Moreover, Lossky argues that Bulgakov’s teaching on the relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit before Pentecost is problematic. If Mary was deified at the Annunciation, then there would have been no need for the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{861} Unfortunately, Lossky fails to read what Bulgakov says on this point, namely that the fullness of Mary’s deification does not occur until Pentecost. Before Pentecost Mary has a unique relationship with the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation, but she is not saved.

Nevertheless, Lossky’s most pressing criticism has to do with what he deems as Bulgakov’s confusion of hypostasis and nature.\textsuperscript{862} He notes that gender and sex are functions of nature not hypostasis, and thus to attribute gender to a hypostasis is to confuse nature with hypostasis.\textsuperscript{863} This is again an attack on Bulgakov’s essentialism which gives a great importance to Mary because she lives out and allows Christ to incorporate femininity into the Incarnation. Thus, to appropriate masculinity to the Son, and femininity to the Holy Spirit and their creaturely

\textsuperscript{860} Lossky, “The Sophia Controversy,” p. 23.
\textsuperscript{861} Ibid., p. 24.
corollaries, Jesus and Mary, is unfounded since Bulgakov is treating as hypostatic that which is essential. However, there is no attempt by Lossky to dialogue with Bulgakov on Bulgakov’s terms. As I demonstrated in Chapter Four, following from his Trinitarian treatment of the image of God, Bulgakov treats gender as both essential and hypostatic terms. Thus, not only is the hypostasis either male or female, but each hypostasis has both genders in its nature. The gender of the hypostasis is contingent upon a dominant gender principle in its nature. To complicate matters, what makes the gender principle dominant is precisely the engendered hypostasis. Thus, men are born with a predisposition towards truth, albeit containing beauty, and women are born with a predisposition for beauty, albeit containing truth. However, his Sophiological works do not state this with clarity. The difficulty is, of course, that if gender is a descriptive for personal action/intuition, in what sense can it also be an essential category? As mentioned, the antinomy between the persons of the Trinity as a trihypostatic God is appropriated to humanity by Bulgakov. In so doing, Bulgakov makes the qualification of what a human hypostasis is as opposed to human nature problematic. But this again is a sticking point for Bulgakov, as he rejects abstracting nature from hypostasis, which is often the case in traditional theologies.

6.2.3 St. John Maximovitch

Two months after Metropolitan Sergius of Moscow condemned Bulgakov’s thought, the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCOR) condemned Bulgakov’s ideas as heresy. According to George Grabbe, this position was reached in part thanks to arguments by John Maximovitch (1896-1966), who at this time was the bishop of Shanghai in ROCOR. Maximovitch was

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864 St. John Maximovitch was roughly a contemporary of Sergius Bulgakov, and he wrote his treatise on Mary, The Orthodox Veneration of Mary the Birthgiver of God, in 1933, as a response to Bulgakov’s The Burning Bush and Catholic Mariology.
an important figure in ROCOR and viewed Bulgakov’s Sophiology as a heresy and a threat to the faithful. His influence as a contemporary saint and “wonder-worker” in ROCOR should not be underestimated. Like Lossky and Florovsky, he rejects Bulgakov’s Sophiology and methodology because it is not faithful to the Church Fathers.

His evaluation of Bulgakov’s Mariology occurs in his short book The Orthodox Veneration of Mary the Birthgiver of God (1933). This book provides a concise overview of Orthodox teaching on Mary, and it is polemical in tone. Five chapters of his book address various Mariological heresies that dishonor Mary. The final heresy St. John addresses is the heresy of Sophiology and Sergius Bulgakov, “who for the time being, belongs to the Orthodox Church.” John Maximovitch shares the concerns of Florovsky and Lossky that Bulgakov “glorifies her beyond what is proper,” for “[t]ruth is foreign to all overstatements.” Bulgakov’s error in this respect leads him into the error of Western Mariology. According to Maximovitch, Bulgakov, in fact, surpasses the West with respect to his identification of Mary with the Holy Spirit. Bulgakov’s Mariology is not Orthodox since it ascribes to Mary what is

867 Maximovitch, The Orthodox Veneration of the Birthgiver of God, p. 52.
868 Ibid., pp. 53-54; pp. 60-61.
869 Ibid., p. 53.
neither present in Scripture nor Tradition. Bulgakov places her outside humanity by
exempting her from the original sin, but also by exalting her as co-Redemptrix, and attributing to
her a state of “equality with God.” Therefore, this senseless praise of Mary turns out to
blaspheme her. However, Maximovitch fails to consider the dialectic present in Bulgakov’s
Mariology between his idealization of Mary, who is the revelation of the Holy Spirit, and his
placement of Mary within the communion of saints. Bulgakov’s thesis that Mary is the
pneumatophoric hypostasis is a synthesis of these theses. What results is a one-sided portrayal of
Bulgakov. Moreover, although Bulgakov is open to the term co-Redemptrix as a title for Mary,
he qualifies it with his insistence that this is true only if we are willing to grant that the Holy
Spirit is also a co-Redemptrix. Given his pneumatology and theology of discipleship, this would
also mean that each disciple is a co-Redemptrix. This is consistent with the argument I have
made that for Bulgakov Mary, along with the disciples, participates in the salvation of sinners.

6.3 Section Two: Bulgakov and Feminism

6.3.1 Feminist Evaluation of Bulgakov

While Bulgakov did not explicitly reflect on or make use of what we now call feminist
theory, feminists have appropriated many of his insights into their own thought. In his own
lifetime Bulgakov inspired women to take active roles in society and the Church. (Elisabeth
Behr-Sigel notes that, in 1929, after she converted to Orthodoxy, she took Bulgakov’s advice to

870 Ibid., p. 54.
871 Ibid., p. 52.
872 Ibid., p. 61.
serve as the preacher and exercise pastoral ministries at a local Reformed Church.¹⁸⁷⁴

Bulgakov’s thought is attractive to some feminists because his definition of God as Sophia reifies
the feminine gender. Feminine language about God, especially within a maternal context, is
relevant and meaningful. Since God is Sophia, the traditional patriarchal God is not the dominant
idea in his theology. Nonetheless, he theologizes from a traditional Orthodox understanding of
the sexes based in a traditional biblical hermeneutic, and appropriates a traditional understanding
of the sexes, e.g. masculine is active and feminine is passive, into his thought. Even though
Bulgakov argues that every male and female contains both sexual principles, and he does not
“depersonalize real women” or “deny female sexuality by exalting the Madonna over the
Whore,”¹⁸⁷⁵ Bulgakov clearly distinguishes the sexes, and moreover, warns against overly
theologizing about sexuality because it is based on a mystery.¹⁸⁷⁶ He does not stress the liberating
implications of spiritual bisexuality that I briefly addressed in Chapter Four.

This is evident in his incorporation of a stereotypical understanding of the sexes that
produces problematic claims for feminist readers. For instance, he writes that

In man, a clear distinction is established between male and female, expressed in the fact that
the female was made out of one of the male’s ribs (not directly out of the dust of the earth)
and, in general, in the fact that the male plays the dominant role, since he bears the image of
the demiurgic hypostasis, the Logos.¹⁸⁷⁷


¹⁸⁷⁶ Bulgakov does not transcend gender stereotypes, but rather re-inscribes both stereotypes into each sex. Nevertheless, Bulgakov conceives God’s femininity not just as an aspect but as a dimension of God, which has radical possibilities for feminists. (Meehan, p. 160.)

¹⁸⁷⁷ Bulgakov, LG, Ch. 2, Sec. IV, Locations 2028-2030 of 7314; Cf. Bulgakov, BL, p. 99.
This interpretation represents what many feminists would consider the secondary status of women in Bulgakov’s thought. Moreover, the association of Christ with male persons, as Celia Dean-Drummond notes, has undesirable consequences since it usually entails the appropriation of an imperialist, patriarchal model of the household into Christian theology. However, as Dean-Drummond observes, Bulgakov qualifies the maleness of Christ with his stress that Christ’s humanity includes both genders. Bulgakov interprets Galatians 3:28 that in Jesus there “is neither male nor female” as a confirmation of his essentialism. Ultimately, the hierarchy of creation has a typological function that neatly conforms to his dyadic theology of the Son and Holy Spirit. As the male is created first and the female second, so too Christ as the content of the Father is first in the economy of salvation, and the Holy Spirit as the actualization of this content is second in the economy of salvation. However, the dominant role that the male plays in his theology as a symbol for the Son does not translate into his thoughts on real-life. It is curtailed by Bulgakov’s overly pneumatological interpretation of discipleship that emphasizes feminine activity for discipleship. His pneumatology and stress on Mary’s pneumatophoric hypostasis liberates Mary from a traditional patriarchal context that does not take into account women’s experience. It is important to note that Bulgakov in his works does not stress Mary’s role vis-à-vis women, which would be expected in his dualistic account of the sexes that makes Christ the archetype of males and the Holy Spirit the archetype of females. Mary’s unique relationship to the Holy Spirit is inclusive and invites all people to embrace and accept the Holy Spirit. Situating

878 Dean-Drummond, Christ and Evolution, p. 124.
879 Ibid., p. 123.
880 Bulgakov, BL, p. 99.
881 Behr-Sigel notes that the argument that Mary is a model for women is alien to Orthodoxy. (Behr-Sigel, Ministry of Women in the Church, Ch. 6, Location 4018 of 5317.)
Mary within a pneumatological context is beneficial because, as Johnson argues, it “points to the graced existence of all believers.”\textsuperscript{882} There are ample convergences with feminist theologians when we stress the pneumatological context of his Mariology.

Nevertheless, a dialogue between the two is hampered by Bulgakov’s biblical hermeneutic that is not sensitive to the experience of women, which I mentioned previously, and his idealization of Mary and dualistic anthropology.

6.3.1.1 Critique One: Idealization of Mary

Although Bulgakov stresses Mary’s freedom and personal expression, he nonetheless idealizes her. Mary is clearly the archetypical disciple: she demonstrates the perfect feminine response that all disciples are called to live out, but also completes the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery. Bulgakov is clear that with Christ she is the fullness of the image of God revealed.\textsuperscript{883} For Johnson this is a problem since idealizations of Mary are dangerous for two reasons: first, they strip Mary of her history, voice, and prophetic accomplishment, and secondly, Mary’s idealization has the effect of marginalizing women because their life and experience are only relevant inasmuch as they are consistent with Mary’s experience.\textsuperscript{884} Johnson, on the contrary, argues that Mary is first and foremost a historical woman, with her own history that must be respected. For Johnson, by focusing on the historical Mary and Mary’s unique voice, we make room for our unique experience and witness of the Christian faith.

\textsuperscript{882} Johnson, \textit{Truly Our Sister}, p. 41.

\textsuperscript{883} One criticism that is common among secondary scholars is that Bulgakov’s idealizations of Jesus and Mary neglect that they are historical persons. (Cf. Dean-Drummond, \textit{Christ and Evolution}, p. 124.) For this reason although many feminists have adopted similar Sophia imagery that Bulgakov uses, they emphasize that Jesus, not the Logos, is Sophia.

\textsuperscript{884} Johnson, \textit{Truly Our Sister}, p. 100
Superficially, it seems that the fact that Bulgakov does not attempt to reconstruct the historical Mary serves to confirm Johnson’s rejections of idealistic Mariologies. Nevertheless, Bulgakov’s Mariology does not fit neatly into any of the problematic Mariologies that Johnson has in mind. Although Bulgakov idealizes Mary, he is concerned with recovering the prophetic and creative voice of the Mother of God. I think this element in his thought produces a Mariology that is more congruent with feminist theory.

However, Bulgakov’s stress on Mary’s voice is motivated by his polemic with Catholic Mariology, in particular the Catholic stress on Marian privileges, e.g. the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Recall that one of his main problems with Catholic Mariology is that it fails to illustrate the Divine-Human synergy present in Mary’s life, namely her personal and prophetic accomplishment. Mary is the greatest disciple not because of a privilege that God gives to her, but rather because of her perfect and complete actualization of God’s will for her in her life. In so doing, Bulgakov circumvents the Catholic tradition of appropriating privileges to Mary that according to Johnson disparages women. Johnson writes: “by making Mary the exception rather than the type, these doctrines, as we have seen, subtly disparage women’s sexuality, holiness, and independence.”

Using Johnson’s terminology, Mary, for Bulgakov, is a *type* of disciple, rather than the *exception* among the disciples. This is not to downplay the unique role of Mary, but rather to highlight that Bulgakov’s stress on Mary’s personal accomplishment places her squarely within human history. Mary’s experience illustrates in general what discipleship entails. This, of course, includes the cross-bearing ministry of the Mother of God, and the requisite passive *fiat* for salvation. Mary’s heroic response to God amidst her infirmity of nature and the challenges she faced should inspire us to act. Stressing Mary as the type of disciple,

885 Ibid., p. 40.
Bulgakov, like many feminists, makes “a strength out of qualities construed by the dominant group as the deficiencies or less valued complementarities of ‘the other.’”\textsuperscript{886} He does this with his stress on the importance of motherhood and femininity. In fact, the female expression of motherhood is a dominant metaphor for the experience of Christians. What results then is that as our intercessor, Mary does not stand in heaven aloof to our struggles, but rather in solidarity with us, and, as a Spirit-Bearing woman, she inspires us to give birth to Christ in all our thoughts, words, and deeds. Rather than silencing women, Bulgakov’s Mary provides a context for women to act prophetically like the Mother of God. However, his Mary invites not only women but all people to creatively live out the Gospel and to have their witness of the faith be included in salvation history.

His stress on her personal, creative, and prophetic self-accomplishment illustrates another important similarity between his methodology and feminist theory. Like feminist theory that approaches revelation inclusively so as to include the stories of historical women, personal experiences and stories are an important source for his theology.\textsuperscript{887} This is evident in his method that incorporates his personal experience into his theology, the stories of the saints, but also his stress on our creative accomplishment, which welcomes our story into the actualization of Divine Revelation. In this way Meehan interprets Bulgakov’s Sophiology as “a theology of inclusive, continuing, open-ended revelation” that unfolds in the “wisdom of all human beings.”\textsuperscript{888}

\textsuperscript{886} Meehan, p. 163.


\textsuperscript{888} Meehan, p. 162.
Bulgakov’s stress on the universal gift of prophecy and the central importance of human creativity confirm Meehan’s interpretation.\textsuperscript{889}

To use Johnson’s categorization of Mariologies as either patronage or communion models, Bulgakov’s Mariology should be placed within the latter category. Mary does not stand as a patron between us and God, giving us gifts of grace in exchange for our prayers, which imports medieval notions of repayment into the eternal life. Rather, Mary stands as one completely redeemed within the communion of the saints in solidarity with us. The emphasis in Bulgakov’s thought is not that Mary stands above us, which she does after her Dormition, but rather her realization of what God has in store for all of us if we accept the Gospel as did Mary. This is why I argue that his Mariology is a “realized eschatology.”

Nevertheless, unlike Johnson, who largely disregards the Mariological tradition and the presence of Mary in the Divine Liturgy—which has the effect of marginalizing Eastern Christians who, as Bulgakov, hold the Liturgy in the highest esteem—Bulgakov’s theology dialogues with the faith of the Church, allowing for an egalitarian understanding of Mary and the saints without jettisoning the faith of the Church. Perhaps his Mariology can offer a corrective to Johnson’s theology of Mary that she proposed in her \textit{Truly Our Sister}.

\subsection{6.3.1.2 Critique Two: Dualistic Anthropologies}

For Johnson gender is an important part of who a person is, but it is not the exclusive part, nor should it function as an interpretive principle for human activity. Herein lies the

\begin{footnote}{889} There is dialectic between Mary as the idealized disciple and Mary as member of the communion of the saints that prompts us to respond to the Gospel in Bulgakov’s theology. They must be held together. If we drop the idealization, what results is a faith other than Orthodoxy, and if we stress solely the idealization, then the human experience becomes irrelevant.\end{footnote}
problem with dualistic anthropologies: i.e. they constrain men and women to specified roles that do not represent reality. – Johnson, Truly Our Sister, p. 47.

Moreover, they also create Christological problems since one is forced to account for how the feminine/female is redeemed by the male Christ. – Cf. Ibid., p. 56.

Dualistic anthropologies tend to perpetuate prejudice against women insofar as men are the active initiators, while women are passive recipients. Interestingly, Johnson takes issue with pneumatological Mariologies—her sparring partners are liberationist theologians, primarily Leonardo Boff—that link the feminine expression of Mary with the Holy Spirit. She argues that attempts to appropriate gender to God fail because God is simple and, therefore, names, images, and symbols about God are only appropriate if they are meant to evoke God’s unity and wholeness. – Ibid., p. 86.

Gender descriptions of God fail to take into account God’s simplicity.

As mentioned, Bulgakov appropriates the patriarchal and androcentric understanding of gender into his anthropology. However, his treatment of the distinction of the sexes is nuanced; while the male principle is activity, the female is passive-activity. Moreover, his Trinitarian account of the image of God leads him beyond a binary treatment of gender to argue that each hypostasis is both male and female in gender. Nonetheless, Bulgakov’s theology of gender is based almost exclusively on the creation account in Genesis, and thus he does not consider the sociological influences on our understanding of gender/sex, which is problematic for a contemporary reader. Genesis 1:27 is the proof text that for Bulgakov justifies in his account of the dyadic interpretation of the missions of the Holy Spirit and the Son. We mentioned the difficulty with the line of thought earlier, and the Christological problem it creates, especially
when we consider Bulgakov’s emphasis on the pure masculinity of Jesus. Nevertheless, his emphasis on spiritual bisexuality as an interpretive principle for human experience allows him to express the differences of the sexes without limiting men’s and women’s experience to one gender. In this respect his thought has a liberating function since, at least in theory, it allows for multifarious expressions of the gender.  

Men are not simply active and women passive because both men and women are bisexual, e.g. active and passive, in nature. Rather than removing from Mary the traditional veneration of her purity, unselfishness, and submissiveness, which Johnson does because they limit women, Bulgakov universalizes these characteristics as traits appropriate to the expression of the spiritual life common to all men and women. The effect of this move is that Bulgakov is able to salvage this tradition from Johnson’s criticism without prejudicing women. Bulgakov’s approach provides an egalitarian anthropology, which although it retains gender essentialism, allows for the variations in human experience to be meaningful. For Bulgakov, Genesis 1:27 gives equality to men and women because they are equally created in the image of God. Because he stresses that Genesis 1:27 refers primarily to the sexual principles, male and female, that are shared by all people, the repression of the feminine or women is a repression of the human as such. Spiritual bisexuality becomes a “call to everyone to a new...
imagination, a new vision of interconnection, interrelation, and interdependence among all.”

This is consistent with Bulgakov’s anthropology and theology of personhood that rejects individualism and consistently stresses that humankind is a Trinitarian being, who shares the same nature. His dynamic interpretation of a person as always in communion with other people precludes any form of prejudice or inequality. We find evidence of his inclusive anthropology in his theology of marriage. Although Bulgakov, following the Bible, argues that the husband is the head and the wife is the “help meet,” he defines their relationship in terms of friendship or spiritual eros. The headship of the husband has only a formal function; what is operative is the mutual love and support between the spouses that allows them to overcome lust together. How their sexual principles complement one another is not clear. However, Bulgakov defines sin as gender one-sidedness. Therefore, Satan is the archetype of “bad maleness,” which is activity without humble receptivity to God’s will, and Lilith the archetype of “bad femaleness,” which is seductive receptivity. What follows is gender equality, not simply as a theological expression of humankind, but also as our personal expression of what we are and who we are in relationship to other people. To live out the image of God, we must embrace not only the masculine and feminine aspect of ourselves, but also refrain from erasing the distinction of the sexes and prejudicial attitudes based on gender. Nevertheless, what distinguishes the sexes beyond biology is a matter of a predisposition in their activity.

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896 Scanlon, p. 41. His theory of spiritual bisexuality dovetails with his theory of personhood. The bisexual subject cannot know him/herself except in relation to another bisexual subject. Nevertheless, differentiating the male or female hypostasis from their shared bisexual nature is a thorny issue for Bulgakov. For instance Bulgakov writes, “this differentiation between male and female qualifies in a very essential way the spirit of man, who is in no wise an ‘androgyne’ (although every man is, to a certain degree, androgynous in his spirit), but is male or female.” (Bulgakov, The Comforter, Ch. 5, Sec. V, Locations 4873-4874 of 6301.)

897 Ibid., Ch. 5, Sec. V, Location 4925 of 6301.

898 Ibid., Footnote, Location 6123 of 6301, n. 5.
Regarding Johnson’s criticism of pneumatological Mariologies, Johnson is unable to account for Bulgakov’s highly technical treatment of the Holy Spirit. Bulgakov makes no contention that God has gender. Rather what we experience as gender is based on the activity of Son and the Holy Spirit. His observations do not contradict the simplicity of God, since for Bulgakov God is a Trihypostatic person, and each Hypostasis has a distinctive function. If we do not grant this, then we have fallen into the heresy of modalism.

6.3.1.3 Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Sergius Bulgakov

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel is widely regarded as the most influential feminist Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century. Although earlier in her career she evaluates Bulgakov’s theology, she did so before she came to terms with the questions and methods of the feminist movement. Nevertheless, in her mature works she notes casually the important influence Bulgakov had on her and her impression that Bulgakov mystifies women. However, she does not seriously evaluate the role of the feminine and Mary in his thought.

Nevertheless, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel offers an Orthodox Mariology from a feminist perspective that is remarkably similar to Bulgakov’s Mariology. Her Mariology should be positioned as a middle ground between the theology of Lossky, Florovsky, Maximovitch, and

899 Although Behr-Sigel criticizes Bulgakov’s Sophiology, she only flippantly considers his thought on women and Mary. Her most detailed discussion of Bulgakov’s ideas was published in this article: Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, “La Sophiologie du Peré Boulgakov,” Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses 19 (1939): pp. 130-158.

900 Behr-Sigel, Ministry of Women in the Church, Preface, Location 251 of 5317.

901 She only notes that Paul Evdokimov’s identification of Mary with the Holy Spirit and subsequent defense of the prohibition for women to be ordained as priests are based on the Sophiology of Bulgakov. (Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Vision of Elisabeth Berh-Sigel, ed. and trans. Michael Plekon, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), pp. 106-107.) She, however, mistakenly argues that Bulgakov associates Mary’s femininity with Sophia and not the Holy Spirit. She views the pneumatological Mariology of Evdokimov as a corrective of Bulgakov’s pneumatology. (Behr-Sigel, Ministry of Women in the Church, Ch. 6, Location 4053 of 5317.) Bulgakov associates Mary’s femininity with both the Holy Spirit and Sophia.
feminists like Elizabeth Johnson. Behr-Sigel retains the gender binary and emphasis that men and women are distinct. However, she stresses the “otherness” of men and women that cannot be qualified in spiritual or psychological terms. She recognizes that there is something instinctual about the femininity of women and the masculinity of men, but this is not to be defined, and it is of little significance whether this “instinct [is] innate or acquired under the influence of culture and education.”\(^{902}\) Still, she notes that “every human person is in reality a composite being having either a masculine or feminine dominance which has been more or less accentuated, formed or deformed by education and cultural influences.”\(^{903}\) Although Behr-Sigel incorporates a bisexual understanding of the human person into her thought, she is cautious about defining personhood solely in terms of sexuality. She writes that it is “dangerous to turn the masculine and the feminine principles into personal realities to the detriment of the basic category of person as the image of God in man.”\(^{904}\) Thus, she purposefully avoids defining what constitutes these sexual elements, but emphasizes that men and women are distinct amidst their shared bisexuality.\(^{905}\)

Nonetheless, gender plays an important role in her reflection on Mary. However, for her, as for Bulgakov, Mary is the archetype for men and women. With Mary, men and women are called to give “a ‘feminine’ attitude of welcoming grace, of giving and offering ourselves so that the new man, the total Christ, \textit{totus Christus}, can be born in the Spirit in each one of us and in all

\(^{902}\) Behr-Sigel, \textit{Ministry of Women in the Church}, Ch. 1, Location 1603 of 5317.

\(^{903}\) Ibid., Ch. 4, Locations 2608-2610 of 5317.

\(^{904}\) Ibid., Ch. 6, Locations 4059-4061 of 5317.

\(^{905}\) Behr-Sigel argues that one characteristic of womanhood is that women get “deeply and personally involved in whatever they undertake.” (Ibid., Ch. 4, Locations 2626 of 5317.) Although Behr-Sigel agrees that women and men are equal but distinct, she rejects arguments that roles in the Church should be distributed based on sex/gender. She notes that this idea lacks scriptural support. (Ibid., Ch. 6, Location 4122 of 5317.)
of us together in the Church."\textsuperscript{906} This for Behr-Sigel is confirmed by the tradition of the Orthodox Church that Mary represents all humanity and is a “sign, the anticipation of a human person entirely given to the Lord."\textsuperscript{907} Therefore, we are all called to share in Mary’s maternal vocation. Mary in her account is a prophet and liberator who demonstrates the life of a follower of Christ. Behr-Sigel circumscribes her Mariology within Christology. Moreover, beyond stressing Mary’s prophetic role in salvation history and her revelation of the goal of Christian discipleship, she does not speculate on Mary’s Dormition or role in the Eschaton. For Behr-Sigel, all that is necessary to know about the Mother of God is contained in the Divine Liturgy.

Nevertheless, for Behr-Sigel the Orthodox theological attitude permits “great freedom to interpret and appropriate the mystery according to times and places.”\textsuperscript{908} This freedom permits her to stress the active, prophetic, maternal, and liberating function of Mary. Nevertheless, because there this not a strong basis for the teaching that the Holy Spirit is feminine, or the link between Mary and the Holy Spirit in the Bible, she rejects this argument.

Her vision of Mary as model for believers and Spirit-bearing saint shares a remarkable similarity with Bulgakov. With exception of her conclusions about ordained ministry, all that Behr-Sigel says about sexuality and Mary are found in Bulgakov. Bulgakov, of course, delves into much greater detail about these issues than Behr-Sigel. It is these details that are a cause of concern for many, and as I illustrated create problems in his thought, e.g. the relationship of femininity to Christ. In addition, although he does not use the term “otherness” to explain the sexes, Bulgakov admits what constitutes the sexes is a mystery, which he links to the mystery of

\textsuperscript{906} Ibid., Introduction, Locations 602-605 of 5317.
\textsuperscript{907} Ibid., Introduction, Location 598 of 5317.
\textsuperscript{908} Ibid., Ch. 6, Location 3351 of 5317.
the Trinity. Mary for Bulgakov is not the model for women but rather the model for the members of the Church. Like Behr-Sigel, Bulgakov’s Mary has a liberating function: to reject the injustices of the world and build the kingdom of God through humble obedience to the will of God.

6.4 Conclusion

In the Orthodox world Bulgakov’s theology has not been well-received. This is no doubt due to his condemnation by ROCOR and the Patriarchate of Russia, but also his attitude towards Orthodox theology. Although he agrees that God is beyond knowledge, this is not the main emphasis in his thought. Therefore, basing himself in the Divine Liturgy, he proceeds to define Orthodox Mariology. Bulgakov, who was a product of one the most creative periods in Russia, incorporates this energy and creativity into his theological work, and thus seeks to better understand the role of the Mother of God in Orthodoxy. For Lossky and Florovsky this was inappropriate. The idealizations in his thought to which both feminists and these theologians react negatively are perceived as unwarranted speculations.

In evaluating Bulgakov’s thought from an Orthodox perspective, the central question at hand is “What is the nature of Orthodox theology?” If Lossky is correct and Orthodox theology is patristic, apophatic theology, then Bulgakov is not an Orthodox theologian. Nevertheless, if Orthodox theology is first and foremost an exposition of Godhumanhood—and I believe that it is—then perhaps Bulgakov has something to offer contemporary Orthodox thinkers, for his Mariology can provide an inclusive albeit traditional reflection on the Mother of God that can seriously dialogue with feminism and other theologies of liberation. Orthodox theology is not

909 By the same token Behr-Sigel’s Orthodoxy should also be called into question since her methods and teachings differ from the Fathers.
simply theological apophaticism but a vibrant theological tradition that is rooted in the Eastern Fathers and the Divine Liturgy that seeks to engage the modern world. In this way Bulgakov should be seen as not only an Orthodox theologian, but one of the greatest Orthodox theologians of the past century.

Nevertheless, Bulgakov’s Mariology is not without its faults. Bulgakov’s lack of attention to the historical Mary and the secondary status of women are unacceptable. Students of Bulgakov, therefore, are challenged by Johnson and feminist theologians to supplement Bulgakov’s Mariology with historical treatments of Mary as well as to correct his problematic exegesis of Genesis 2: 21-22. With regard to the latter, it is important to note that his treatment of Genesis 2:21-22 reflects his conformity to a traditional exegesis of this verse. Writing before feminist theory was considered acceptable by mainstream Christianity, he had no good reason to attend to. Moreover, although Bulgakov stresses Eve’s creation from Adam as an axiom of his anthropology, it unnecessarily complicates his thought. After all, in other places Bulgakov clearly states that the first two chapters of Genesis should be interpreted symbolically. Moreover, his Trinitarian interpretation of Genesis 1:27 gives enough good reason for his spiritual bisexuality and differentiation of the sexes that are the basis of his anthropology. At the same time it is important to note that his liberating vision of Mary that stresses Mary’s role in relationship to the members of the Church, and also her femininity, shares much in common with Bulgakov’s spiritual-daughter Elisabeth Behr-Sigel. Perhaps Bulgakov’s speculations on Mary may provide fertile ground for Orthodox feminists who are committed to upholding the veneration and esteem of Mary in Orthodox worship and the importance of retaining the differentiation of the sexes, but reject the traditional patriarchal structure of Marian theology that has tended to limit women to passive roles in the Church.

7 Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This study has examined Bulgakov’s Mariology primarily within his Sophiological works. My study places Bulgakov’s Mariology within the contexts of Russian Sophiology and

the Russian Religious Renaissance. With respect to Russian Sophiology, Bulgakov systematically develops the insights on Mary proffered by Vladimir Solov’ev and Pavel Florensky. I demonstrated that his *The Burning Bush* (1926) should be seen as the fullest development of Sophianic Mariology initiated by Solov’ev. The influence of the Russian Religious Renaissance is evident in his emphasis on sexuality and his attempt to systematize Russian devotion to Mary. Nevertheless, his Mariology is rooted in the devotion and worship of the Orthodox Church. The mediating principle for his Mariology is the patristic notion, *lex orandi lex credendi*. The Liturgy is his inspiration for his Sophianic Mariology. The feasts, prayers, biblical readings, and iconography associated with the Orthodox Liturgy are his main sources for his theological speculations about Mary. However, Bulgakov also incorporates the Church Fathers and the Councils into his thought. Bulgakov’s thesis that Mary is the pneumatophoric hypostasis is based on the veneration of Mary in the Liturgy, which attributed to her a role in salvation, e.g. the liturgical hymn “O Theotokos, Save us,” but also explains the teaching of the Council of Ephesus that Mary is the Theotokos. Bulgakov concludes that the only way to understand the Orthodox Church’s veneration of Mary, without sacrificing unique mediation or attributing an instrumental significance importance to Mary that would in effect be *de facto* Nestorianism, is to understand her veneration within the context of pneumatology. Mary is the first human hypostasis to be deified and share in the life and mission of the Holy Spirit. In this way Mary is the penultimate expression of human activity. She illustrates the human side of the Divine-Human synergy that is the economy of salvation.
Mary’s relationship to the Holy Spirit is expressed in the title of this study “the soul of the human race.”

Mary is the soul of the human race for two reasons. First, Mary is the model for discipleship. She is a human person who is completely deified by the Holy Spirit. She accomplishes the goal of the human race to become an all-human being, but also to participate in the mission of the Holy Spirit. Although Bulgakov presents an idealized image of Mary, his idealization is a “realized eschatology.” Humankind is called to participate in Mary’s glory, holiness, and mission albeit never approaching her intimate relationship with her Son. The pneumatological context for his Mariology balances his idealizations of Mary with his prophetic vision of Mary. Mary is the first “Spirit-Bearer;” however, every disciple is called to give their fiat and become “Spirit-Bearers” to be completely receptive to God in their life. To use Bulgakov’s terms, every human hypostasis’ vocation is to become a Divine Mother. Mary, therefore, stands among the disciples in the Church as the first to prophetically engage the Gospel. Every disciple is called to follow Mary’s prophetic and feminine example. Behr-Sigel expresses this with clarity: “In Mary and with her, we are all called, men and women, to a “feminine” attitude of welcoming grace, of giving and offering ourselves so that the new man, the total Christ, totus Christus, can be born in the Spirit in each one of us and in all of us together in the Church.”

But this, of course, means to live out the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is significant that the last words of Mary in the New Testament are “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:5) In this way Mary, as the revelation of the Holy Spirit, leads us to Christ and His will for humanity.

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911 Cf. Bulgakov, BB, p. 112.
912 Behr-Sigel, Ministry of Women in the Church, Introduction, Locations 602-605 of 5317.
Second, Mary is intimately close and present to each human person. She is the human hypostasis that is in the closest proximity to God and the advocate for humanity before God. She is the ladder that connects heaven to earth and allows for Christ to become incarnate. In this way there is no Incarnation without the Mother of God; and her humanity, which is the life and humanity of the Divine Son, Jesus Christ, is also our humanity. This insight prompted Bulgakov’s attempts to place the veneration of Mary at the forefront of the ecumenical movement. Mary not only gives Christ his humanity historically but also pedagogically. Thus, the lack of attention and veneration to Mary will result in “a maimed Christology.” As the hypostatized humanity of Jesus, Mary is Sophia. She does not hypostatize Christ or the Holy Spirit, but rather her human nature, Creaturely Sophia. Nevertheless, both the Son and the Holy Spirit are intimately close to her since they both hypostatize her human nature. However, the hypostatization of her nature by her Son that makes her salvation possible, but it is the Holy Spirit in the Holy Spirit’s hypostatization of Mary’s human nature that saves her. As the hypostatic image of the archetype of femininity, the Holy Spirit, Mary is the complete personification of Sophia in its feminine and creaturely form. She complements and completes the work of the Incarnation, insofar as she is the feminine counterpart to Her Son’s masculinity. Christ is not a male Sophia, for Christ as the Second person of the Trinity is above Sophia. It is through Christ’s maleness that the femininity or maternity of Mary and later the entire human race has a central role in salvation history. As Sophia, Mary permeates creation and created being so that she is present to each human hypostasis. She is the incarnation of the praying church, but also she co-participates in the activity of the Holy Spirit in salvation history, so that all are saved by Christ but by means of the Holy Spirit and the Mother of God.\(^\text{913}\) As Sophia,

\(^{913}\) Bulgakov, BB, p. 111.
Mary alone was chosen to partake in the mystery of the Incarnation, and she alone benefits from her intimate maternal relationship with her Son in heaven.

Given the challenges of feminism that has traditionally rejected the Mariological tradition due to its support of patriarchal structures and devaluing of women’s experience, Bulgakov’s Mariology is an important contribution to contemporary Mariology. In his account Mary does not devalue women but rather calls both men and women to actualize their femininity and live out the Gospel. Moreover, Bulgakov’s emphasis on gender provides valuable reflections for many Christians, including feminists like Elisabeth Berh-Sigel, who accepts the differences and mystery of the sexes. However, this is not to deny Bulgakov’s shortcomings, including his outmoded language and interpretation of certain passages from Scripture as well as the Christological problems his excessive emphasis on gender creates. Moreover, from a neo-patristic perspective, Bulgakov’s thought is problematic. Many of his speculations and methods lack a consensus of the Fathers, and Bulgakov does not respect the silence of the Orthodox Church on its veneration of Mary. Bulgakov’s lack of apophatism is a result of his modern and historical mindset.

Despite these shortcomings, Bulgakov’s *The Burning Bush* and systematic reflections on Mary in his essays and his two trilogies must be considered an important contribution to the study of Mary. Nevertheless, Bulgakov does not provide a western system of thought. Bulgakov theology is not a list of propositions that logically follow from premise to conclusion. Rather is represents a dynamic and interconnected meditation on the central tenets of the Orthodox faith. Mary is a central theme that we find throughout the matrix of his ideas. She is the culminating point of his anthropology, the starting point of his Christology, the end point of his ecclesiology, but also the fail-safe for Orthodox theology. Her place in the life of an Orthodox Christian, as
one who is ever-present and permeates daily devotion is directly reflected in Bulgakov’s thought. Bulgakov provides the only modern, systematic Orthodox Mariology in existence, and a noteworthy attempt to describe with theological acuity his experience of Mary in the Liturgy and the life of the Orthodox Church. Mary is the beginning and end of his meditation of God’s relationship with humankind that encompasses the last two decades of Bulgakov’s life. His reflection on Mary reveals the role and meaning of human synergy with God’s grace. Ultimately the goal and meaning of Christian existence is revealed in Mary who, with the Orthodox Church, ushers in the Second Coming with their proclamation: “Come Lord Jesus.”
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