



Barbara Hallensleben,
Regula M. Zwahlen,
Aristotle Papanikolaou,
Pantelis Kalaitzidis (eds.)

BUILDING THE HOUSE OF WISDOM

Sergii Bulgakov and Contemporary Theology:
New Approaches and Interpretations

 **Aschendorff**
Verlag

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Abstract

Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944) is one of the preeminent theologians of the 20th century whose work is still being discovered and explored in and for the 21st century. The famous rival of Lenin in the field of economics, was, according to Wassily Kandinsky, “one of the deepest experts on religious life” in early twentieth-century Russian art and culture. As economist, publicist, politician, and later Orthodox theologian and priest, he became a significant “global player” in both the Orthodox diaspora and the Ecumenical movement in the interwar period.

This anthology gathers the papers delivered at the international conference on the occasion of Bulgakov’s 150th birthday at the University of Fribourg in September 2021. The chapters, written by established Bulgakov specialists, including Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury (2002–2012), as well as young researchers from different theological disciplines and ecclesial traditions, explore Bulgakov’s way of meeting the challenges in the modern world and of building bridges between East and West. The authors bring forth a wide range of new creative ways to constructively engage with Bulgakov’s theological worldview and cover topics such as personhood, ecology, political theology and Trinitarian ontology.



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Bulgakov and Lot-Borodine as Shapers of Deification in the West

Mark McInroy

This chapter maintains that Sergii Bulgakov shaped twentieth-century perceptions of deification in the West through a frequently overlooked route, namely Myrrha Lot-Borodine's seminal studies of the doctrine published in 1932 and 1933 in the *Revue de l'histoire des religions*.¹ At a time when deification was primarily known in the West through Adolf Harnack's withering denunciation of the doctrine, and at a moment when many Russian theologians' works remained untranslated, Myrrha Lot-Borodine's groundbreaking articles presented the first sustained Orthodox defense of deification widely accessible to Western readers. This paper maintains, however, that in key regards Lot-Borodine's studies in fact functioned as a conduit through which Bulgakov's version of the doctrine was made known in the West, even though Bulgakov's influence on Lot-Borodine has often gone unrecognized.

Myrrha Lot Borodine: An Influential Figure in the Russian Diaspora

After a lengthy period of neglect, Myrrha Lot-Borodine (1882–1957) is at last beginning to receive sustained scholarly attention, as indicated by the recent upsurge of publications on her work.² Although she made contributions in

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- 1 Myrrha Lot-Borodine, “La Doctrine de la ‘déification’ dans l’Église grecque jusqu’au XI^e siècle,” *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 105 (1932): 5–43; 106 (1932): 525–74; 107 (1933): 8–55, 245–46.
- 2 Teresa Obolevich's recent monograph is the most substantial treatment to date: *Mirra Lot-Borodina: istorik, literator, filosof, bogoslov* (Saint Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2020).

a number of different academic arenas, her most enduring legacy will likely involve her treatment of the Christian doctrine of deification. Her articles on the doctrine played a pivotal role in making deification widely known in the West; particularly significant in this connection are the prominent French Catholic theologians who took note of her studies. Yves Congar, for instance, endorsed her depiction of deification in a review article in *La Vie Spirituelle* in 1935,³ and Jean Daniélou proclaimed in his preface to the republished edition of Lot-Borodine's studies, "Reading these articles was decisive for me. They crystallized something I was looking for, a vision of man transfigured by the divine energies."⁴ Later in his preface Daniélou remarks that he was led to the articles by either Henri de Lubac or Hans Urs von Balthasar (he cannot recall which one), giving further indication of the enthusiasm for deification Lot-Borodine generated among figures associated with *la nouvelle théologie*. Marie-Dominique Chenu also credits Lot-Borodine with his own turn to the Christian East; he openly acknowledges that it is to her "that I owe much of my appetite for Eastern theology."⁵ Other luminaries of French Catholicism influenced by Lot-Borodine include Étienne Gilson (a colleague of her husband, Ferdinand

See also Teresa Obolevich, "Myrrha Lot-Borodine: The First Female Orthodox Theologian," *European Journal of Science and Theology* 16, no. 3 (June 2020): 119–27; I.-M. Morariu, "Myrrha Lot-Borodine et la redécouverte de la théologie orthodoxe dans l'espace français," *Studia Monastica* 60, no. 2 (2018): 413–19; Andrew Louth, "Apophatic theology and deification: Myrrha Lot-Borodine and Vladimir Lossky," in *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 94–110; Michel Stavrou, "La Démarche néopatristique de Myrrha Lot-Borodine et de Vladimir Lossky," in *Les Pères de l'Église aux sources de l'Europe*, ed. Dominique Gonnat and Michel Stavrou (Paris: Cerf, 2014), 200–25; Heleen E. Zorgdrager, "A Practice of Love: Myrrha Lot-Borodine (1882–1954) and the Modern Revival of the Doctrine of Deification," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 64 (2012): 287–307; Fedor Poljakov, "Myrrha Lot-Borodine: Wegzeichen und Dimensionen des west-östlichen Dialoges in der russischen Diaspora," in *Festschrift für Hans-Bernd Harder zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Helmut Schaller (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1995), 401–13.

- 3 Yves M.-J. Congar, "La déification dans la tradition spirituelle de l'Orient, d'après une étude récente," *La Vie Spirituelle*, Supplement (May 1, 1935): 91–107. ET: "Deification in the Spiritual Tradition of the East (in the Light of a Recent Study)," in Yves M.-J. Congar, *Dialogue between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1966), 217–31.
- 4 Jean Daniélou, "Preface," in Myrrha Lot-Borodine, *La doctrine de la déification dans l'Église grecque jusqu'au XI^e siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 9–18, at 10.
- 5 Marianne Mahn-Lot, "Ma mère, Myrrha Lot-Borodine (1882–1954). Esquisse d'itinéraire spirituel," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* (2004): 745–54, at 752.

Lot), whose examination of Bernard of Clairvaux appeared shortly after her studies and treats deification at several points, with Lot-Borodine cited in the bibliography.⁶

Although mention of Lot-Borodine by name tends to wane as the twentieth century progresses, central features of her characterization of deification only grow more prominent.⁷ Most influential is her claim that Western theology cannot espouse deification because of its fundamentally different model of the God-world relation, particularly as displayed in its theological anthropology and view of grace. The notion that deification is not part of Western theology had been introduced—for different reasons—by Albrecht Ritschl and amplified by those in his “school,” especially Adolf Harnack.⁸ However, whereas the Ritschlian school had been highly critical of the doctrine, Lot-Borodine celebrates deification, upending the negative judgment among German liberal Protestants and provoking enormous positive interest in the doctrine.

For all of Lot-Borodine’s influence, however, what remains largely unrecognized is that the particular version of deification that she puts forward shares deep affinities with that of Sergii Bulgakov, so much so that in key regards she effectively serves as a spokesperson for his model of the doctrine.⁹ Those familiar with Myrrha Lot-Borodine may be surprised—if not deeply skeptical—at the claim that Bulgakov so significantly influenced her views. Scholars have tended to place Lot-Borodine firmly within the “neo-patristic” movement of Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky rather than the “modernist” approach of figures such as Bulgakov and Pavel Florenskii. As overstated as this opposition often is, such a characterization of Lot-Borodine has not arisen without reason. In an important account of her own theological inclinations, she mentions “the instinctive mistrust that all heresy inspired in me,” and she even specifies the targets of her suspicion as the “Gnosticism” of Soloviev and

6 Étienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1940).

7 Although Vladimir Lossky’s *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* would not appear for over a decade after Lot-Borodine’s articles, its significance for Western attitudes toward deification should not be overlooked.

8 See Mark McInroy, “How Deification Became Eastern: German Idealism, Liberal Protestantism, and the Modern Misconstruction of the Doctrine,” *Modern Theology* 37/4, 934–58.

9 Congar is one of the few figures who detects the significance of Bulgakov for Lot-Borodine’s view of deification.

Bulgakov.¹⁰ Similarly, Antoine Arjakovsky notes that Lot-Borodine attacked the “gnosis” of Dimitrii Merezhkovskii, and Arjakovsky also reports that Nicolai Berdiaev regarded Lot-Borodine as “too orthodox and very right wing.”¹¹ Perhaps most instructively, in 1938 Lot-Borodine published a defense of Florovsky’s *The Ways of Russian Theology* in which she signaled her support for a return to the “narrow way of the fathers.”¹² There would seem to be good reason to cast Lot-Borodine as a thoroughgoing traditionalist who deeply opposed figures such as Bulgakov.

Concerning Lot-Borodine’s treatment of deification in particular, there are even clearer reasons to suppose that she would stand with Florovsky. It was, after all, Florovsky who prompted Lot-Borodine to pursue deification in the first place. She reports that she heard him lecture on the topic at the Berdiaev Colloquy in 1928,¹³ and she even corresponded with him as she was composing her articles. She expresses her desire to consult him “in order to clarify some points which are still doubtful for me,” suggesting that he had a shaping influence on her studies.¹⁴ As one would expect based on these biographical details, Lot-Borodine’s articles mention Florovsky’s works at several junctures, and she additionally draws from a treatment of Pseudo-Dionysius published by Vladimir Lossky, seemingly cementing her place among neo-patristic figures.¹⁵ And yet, as will be shown by an examination of Bulgakov’s account of deification and its telling echoes in Lot-Borodine’s studies, it is neither Florovsky nor

10 Mahn-Lot, 748. The passage is complex. In spite of her concern about his alleged Gnosticism, Lot-Borodine describes Bulgakov as a “true genius of our diaspora.” Heleen Zorgdrager appears to have taken this positive assessment as an endorsement of Bulgakov’s position, but such an interpretation is questionable; Andrew Louth and Michel Stavrou both understand Lot-Borodine’s remarks as expressing concern about Bulgakov (in spite of some degree of admiration), not attraction to his views.

11 Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and their Journal* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 278, 411.

12 Myrrha Lot-Borodine, “Prot. Georgii Florovskii. ‘Puti russkogo bogosloviia,’” *Sovremennye zapiski* 66 (1938), 461–63. Cf. Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *George Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 197.

13 Georges Florovsky offered a brief treatment of deification published in Russian in 1928 as “Tvar’ i Tvar’nost’.”

14 Myrrha Lot-Borodine, Letter to G. Florovsky from of 24 July, 1931, Princeton University Library, Rare Books and Special Collections, Georges Florovsky Papers, Box 27, F. 30. Quoted in Obolevich, 121.

15 Vladimir Lossky, “La Notion des ‘analogies’ chez Denys le Pseudo-Aréopagite,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, 5 (1930): 279–309.

Lossky whom Lot-Borodine most decisively follows on the deification of the human being, but rather Bulgakov.

Sergii Bulgakov on the Sophianic Structure of Deification

Florovsky was not the only Orthodox theologian with an interest in deification in the early twentieth century. In fact, one can regard the doctrine as something of a contested topic within the Russian émigré community in Paris. Whereas Florovsky focuses on patristic models of deification, Bulgakov reformulates the idea through a critical appropriation of the identity philosophy of F. W. J. Schelling and the thought of Jacob Böhme. These interlocutors lead Bulgakov to advance a stunningly bold model of deification that centers on the “sophianicity” of humankind. Our examination begins with Bulgakov’s treatment of the topic in *The Burning Bush*, as this volume had a particularly powerful impact on Lot-Borodine.¹⁶

In that text, which was published in Russian in 1927, Bulgakov opens his discussion of deification with what he contends is the Orthodox understanding of the relationship between God and creation: “God in His love for creation abolished the abyss lying between Him and creation and made humankind for divinization. In its primordial condition, before sin, humankind had that power of divinization as the direct consequence of the harmonious structure of its spirit.”¹⁷ In this brief formulation Bulgakov makes two controversial points, each of which will be challenged by Florovsky. First, deification to Bulgakov involves *eliminating* the gap between God and creation. Second, human beings at their creation had the capacity for deification as a result of the very structure of their being.

Similarly bold remarks can be found in other works by Bulgakov. For instance, in *Philosophy of Economy*, he explains, “In their freedom people are gods, creatures potentially intended for divinization, capable of merging into the ocean of divine being—and fusing and merging are possible only for what is like and *of one substance* in the first place.”¹⁸ Along equally provocative lines, in *The Lamb of God*, Bulgakov claims, “Man has not a creaturely origin, but a

16 Lot Borodine also published a review of Bulgakov’s *L’Orthodoxie* in *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 107 (1933): 209–13.

17 Sergii Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, ed. and trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 36.

18 Sergii Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, trans. Catherine Eтуhov (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 207 (emphasis added).

divine origin. He is a created god. [...] Man [...] has within himself an uncreated, divine principle.”¹⁹ In *The Bride of the Lamb*, too, Bulgakov claims that man “in a certain sense is already divine according to creation.”²⁰

The careful reader will note that the above passages do in fact display restraints—even if they are subtly conveyed—on Bulgakov’s seemingly soaring anthropology. Competing with what appears to be an assertion of consubstantiality between divine and human nature in the first quotation is the notion that deification is merely a possibility, not an already present actuality.²¹ The same passage arguably specifies that human beings are gods only “in their freedom,” leaving open the possibility that other aspects of human beings are not divine. Along similar lines, in the final quotation above, Bulgakov holds that human beings are divine only “in a certain sense”; the human being is not God *tout court*.

Also important in this regard is the fact that—at certain moments, at least—Bulgakov maintains that deification is not based in human nature alone. As he puts this point in *The Burning Bush*, “Adam was, so to say, naturally blessed [...] He was not separated from God, and thus there was not even a place for opposition of the natural and the graced in their indivisibility, in the power of divinization of humankind which began with his creation.”²² Bulgakov maintains that nature and grace should not be contrasted with one another, and in fact he suggests that nature is always already graced, and that deification therefore occurs through the operation of both working in harmony with one another.

These nuanced qualifications will assuage some, but a striking vision of deification nevertheless remains. A number of Bulgakov’s readers express concern that the ontological distinction between God and humanity has been uncomfortably blurred if not entirely eliminated, an issue that intensifies as we turn to the sophiological aspects of Bulgakov’s anthropology.

Although the role of sophiology in the anthropology described thus far might not be apparent, in the discussion of Adam as “naturally blessed,” Bulgakov makes the connection clear: “This blessedness is not something arising from the outside, which could even not exist, but is rather interiorly, imma-

19 Sergii Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 137.

20 Sergii Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 115.

21 Ruth Coates identifies this tension, too. See her *Deification in Russian Religious Thought: Between the Revolutions, 1905–1917* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 166.

22 Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, 37.

nently grounded in humankind by a creative act, as by creaturely Sophia.”²³ Within humanity one finds creaturely Sophia, which with divine Sophia establishes a bridge between God and the world. Not so much a hypostasis herself as a means of “hypostaticity,” Sophia is that through which the divine is able to be manifested in the world.

Sophia, then, allows for the union of God and human in the incarnation, but also in additional “creaturely hypostases” that bear the divine image. As Bulgakov explains elsewhere in *The Burning Bush*, “The human being is created by God according to His image and likeness. This means that God imprinted on the human being His tri-hypostatic image and placed him in the world as if in His own place, and made him a creaturely god. [...] He was a personal bearer of Divine Wisdom, of creaturely Sophia.”²⁴

Crucially for Lot-Borodine, Bulgakov holds that Catholic theology, from medieval scholasticism to the present day, “annihilates the Sophianicity of humankind” through its doctrine of the *donum superadditum*.²⁵ This doctrine maintains that humanity in its originally created state possessed “neither immortality nor freedom from lust,” in Bulgakov’s characterization, but instead needed God’s grace to be superadded onto to its “pure nature,” which is in truth merely an impoverished shell of what human nature should be.²⁶ According to Bulgakov’s critique, the vulnerability of human nature to death and lust in Catholic theology means that human beings do not in fact bear the divine image within their nature. Bulgakov instead emphasizes the importance of “an ontological link, an internal necessity.”²⁷

From here Bulgakov goes on to insist that sophiology is the only way to develop the anthropology required for deification. He holds that “such a basis for anthropology can only be the doctrine of Wisdom as the pre-eternal foundation of creation, pre-eternal humanity, by virtue of which the earthly human is created according to the image of Christ the heavenly human.”²⁸ It is only through Sophia that human beings have the image of God within their nature. To Bulgakov, then, a sharp divide can be observed between the anthropologies of the Orthodox and Catholic churches, and the sophianic structure of humanity is the key marker of difference.

23 Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, 37.

24 Ibid., 15.

25 Ibid., 37.

26 Ibid., 15.

27 Ibid., 16.

28 Ibid.

Florovsky's Corrective: Deification despite Non-Consubstantiality

Florovsky's "Creation and Creaturehood" has been viewed as an implicit challenge to Bulgakov, and it is not difficult to grasp the reasons for such a characterization. Immediately after broaching the topic of deification, Florovsky explains that, as the human being is deified, an "immutable, unchangeable gap"²⁹ remains between the human and the divine, and he next emphasizes the "impossibility of created nature's transubstantiation into the divine."³⁰ Along similar lines, elsewhere in his article he insists on the "non-consubstantiality" between God and the world.³¹ In contrast to Bulgakov's suggestion that one must be of the same substance as God in order to merge into the divine being, Florovsky unequivocally holds that we cannot be changed in our substance into God.

Driving home the difference between the divine and human natures, Florovsky quotes Macarius of Egypt, noting that although "the divine Trinity inhabits the soul, which through God's grace keeps itself pure, she only does so to the extent of everyone's ability and spiritual measure, *not as the Holy Trinity is in herself* [...] for God cannot be contained by a creature."³² With this text as crucial support, Florovsky maintains that "from the outset it was understood that there is an insurmountable divide between the two natures, and a distinction was made between divinity by nature (*kat' ousian* or *kata physin*) and divinity by communion (*kata metousian*)."³³ In clear opposition to Bulgakov's sophiologically grounded version of deification, Florovsky holds that the distinction between God and humanity remains even as human beings are drawn into the divine life.

Additionally crucial for our examination, Florovsky emphatically holds that deification occurs not on the basis of human nature, but instead through divine grace. In this effort, he marshals considerable textual evidence from Maximus the Confessor, who will emerge as the key patristic figure in Lot-Borodine's studies. The following passage is worth quoting at length:

29 Georges Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood," in *Creation and Redemption: Volume 3 of the Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1976), 43–78, at 74. Newly translated as "Creation and Createdness," trans. Alexey Kostyanovsky, with assistance from Olena Gorbatenko, in *The Patristic Witness of Georges Florovsky: Essential Theological Writings*, ed. Brandon Gallaher and Paul Ladouceur (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 33–63.

30 Florovsky, "Creation and Createdness," 60.

31 Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood," 46.

32 St. Macarius of Egypt, *De amore*, 28, PG 34.932A. Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood," 61.

33 Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood," 62.

In the writings of St. Maximus, “Those who are saved receive salvation *by grace, not by nature* [Eph 2:5],”³⁴ and if “in Christ the whole fulness of the Godhead dwelt *by nature, in us God dwells not fully, but only by grace.*”³⁵ Therefore the future deification for St. Maximus means *becoming like God by grace*; in his words, “we will appear like him, in virtue of deification by grace” (*kai phanōmen autōi homoioi kata tēn ek charitos theōsin*).³⁶ However, even as the creature partakes of divine life “in the union of love,” “wholly and completely co-inhering with the whole God” (*holos holōi perichōrēsas holikōs tōi Theōi*) and sharing in his divine attributes, it still remains outside God’s nature (*chōris tēs kat’ ousian tautotēta* [without identity according to essence]).³⁷

Florovsky goes to significant lengths in his use of this material to *contrast* nature and grace; he does not describe deification as the result of nature and grace working together, and he instead suggests that deification occurs through grace without nature playing a noteworthy role.

In sum, then, Florovsky’s account of deification emphasizes the distinction between God and creatures, the enduring non-consubstantiality between God and the world (even in the face of any change that God might effect within created nature), and the notion that we are deified by grace to the exclusion of nature. Lot-Borodine, as we shall see, puts forward a view of deification that opposes each of these points.

Lot-Borodine’s Bulgakov-Inspired Version of Deification

It is unlikely that Lot-Borodine would have missed the challenge Florovsky issued to Bulgakov. And yet, with the points of distinction clearly outlined, Lot-Borodine unexpectedly opts for Bulgakov’s version of the doctrine rather than that of Florovsky. One observes instructive departures from Florovsky’s position in three interrelated aspects of Lot-Borodine’s presentation: she advances a competing interpretation of Maximus the Confessor that suggests one is deified on the basis of one’s nature; she contests Florovsky’s view that grace could operate on the human being to the exclusion of nature; she blurs

34 St. Maximus the Confessor, *Capita Theologiae et Oeconomiae Centuria*, I, 67, PG 90.1108B.

35 *Ibid.*, *Cap. theol. et oecon. cent.*, II, 21, PG 90.1133.

36 *Ibid.*, Ep. 43: *Ad Ionannem cubicularium*, PG 91.640C.

37 St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigu.* 41, 222b. Florovsky, “Creation and Createdness,” 62.

the distinction between God and creatures so assiduously upheld by Florovsky, most clearly in her explicit challenging of the non-consubstantiality between God and creation. Lot-Borodine's preference for Bulgakov can also be observed in her mention of him at one of the most decisive interpretive junctures in her treatment, and his influence can be detected elsewhere, especially surrounding Lot-Borodine's critique of the *donum superadditum* in Western theology.

Concerning Maximus, whereas Florovsky had used him in order to demonstrate that deification occurs through grace, and not on the basis of nature, Lot-Borodine deploys Maximus in order to advance the opposite claim. According to Lot-Borodine, "Maximus considers the *noûs* [...] this cap of the intellectual soul, as naturally deformed. [...] St. Maximus, as well as other Fathers of the Eastern Church, does not hesitate to call the man 'the created god' (*le dieu créé*). That in all the strength of the term, without mitigating anything."³⁸ Lot-Borodine sees a robust deformity *within* human nature, and in this context she explicitly gestures toward Bulgakov's importance for her interpretation of Maximus. Immediately following the above quotation, she explains that the human being is, "as will be said by a prominent representative of the Russian doctrine of Sophia, Father Bulgakov, a true 'terrestrial hypostasis of God' (*une véritable 'hypostase terrestre de Dieu'*); according to St. Maximus, of the Word 'through whom all things are.'"³⁹ In this quotation, Lot-Borodine moves from a claim for natural deformity to the significantly bolder view of the human being as a *hypostasis* of the Word.

Complicating matters, however, Lot-Borodine does at other points dutifully convey that deification occurs through grace. And yet, close scrutiny of her model of the nature–grace relation reveals that she blurs the line between the two, often to the point of entirely collapsing grace into nature such that it is a part of the constitution of human beings at their creation. For instance, she claims that "Adam should have been a participant, by right of birth, to glory. In other words, *the supernatural would have been the true nature of man in earthly paradise.*"⁴⁰ To Lot-Borodine, humanity as initially created has the supernatural within itself as its "true nature." The elision of the distinction between nature and grace is most marked in the following, near-paradoxical formulation: "The grace of divine adoption is *native*, incorporated in man."⁴¹ As a result, it cannot be that we are deified by grace and not by nature, as Florovsky claims.

38 Lot-Borodine, "La doctrine de la déification," I, 23.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 21 (emphasis added).

41 Lot-Borodine, "La doctrine de la déification," II, 546.

Lot-Borodine's reliance on nature itself (i. e., without mention of grace) grows more prominent as she deploys her anthropology to insist that the West completely lacks a doctrine of deification. Interweaving key points from Bulgakov's critique of the *donum superadditum* and Étienne Gilson's then-recent work on Augustine, Lot-Borodine launches a criticism of Augustine's view of human nature that renders deification entirely impossible, in her estimation. In so doing, however, she is moved to insist more clearly on the distinctiveness of the East's view of human nature as such. She seizes on a remark in Gilson's *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine* in which the author explains, "There is in the creature a kind of original lack (*manque originel*)."⁴² From this starting point she further claims that, within his or her nature, the human being to Augustine has a "pre-disposition to imperfection, if not to sin."⁴³ The fact that the human being is "drawn from nothingness" implies an "idea of decay" within his model of human nature.⁴⁴ In fact, according to Lot-Borodine, under Augustine "our decay became the trademark of the human species."⁴⁵ This could not contrast more sharply with "the ideal divinity of our species" upheld by "the Greeks."⁴⁶

Having drawn from Gilson, Lot-Borodine next widens the scope of Bulgakov's critique of the *donum superadditum* (which for him is limited to medieval and modern Catholicism) such that it also applies to the *ancient* Western church. She insists that in Augustine "the immortality of the first man consisted only in not having to, and not being unable to die; nor did Adam's rectitude and *amor imperturbatus* belong to man's own nature."⁴⁷ Although she does not mention Bulgakov by name at this particular juncture, her criticism closely follows his appraisal of the *donum superadditum*, and the strong suggestion of her remark is that human beings need immortality and *amor imperturbatus* in their nature as such.

Lot-Borodine similarly betrays her desire for a robust view of human nature in a comment on Augustine's account of pre-lapsarian humanity. She explains, "The state of 'justice' where our ancestors were in paradise was not, strictly speaking, natural to them in the Augustinian system: it was a *donum superadditum*, a gratuitous privilege of God."⁴⁸ Adam was able to remain in paradise not

42 Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine*, trans. L. E. M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), 148. Lot-Borodine, "La doctrine de la déification," I, 29.

43 Lot-Borodine, "La doctrine de la déification," I, 29.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 29, n. 1.

47 Ibid.

48 Lot-Borodine, "La doctrine de la déification," I, 29.

through his nature, but only through the gift of God's grace, indicating that primordial humanity is bereft of justice and immortality in Augustine's thought. Later Lot-Borodine suggests that, because human nature in itself is possessed of this deep deficiency, the image of God for Augustine is but a distant reflection. "Once removed by the fact of the fall, the *donum superadditum*—which is a supernatural grace, from the beginning—the mystical resemblance to God darkens and disappears: no more direct communication with the Creator."⁴⁹ In sharp contrast to Maximus' "deiform nous," Augustine advances an anthropology in which human nature is profoundly alienated from God.

Lot-Borodine does not explicitly insist that deification be developed through sophiology; however, like Bulgakov, she suggests that the doctrine of deification demands an anthropology in which human beings have the supernatural within themselves at their creation, and she even holds that human beings are created in their inmost structure as hypostases of God. In fact, in what is surely the most instructive moment in her treatment of the doctrine, Lot-Borodine proposes that deification requires a view of the human being as *consubstantial* with God. In a remark that goes considerably further than the earlier blurring of the distinction between the supernatural and the natural, she explains that Augustine cannot espouse a doctrine of deification, "since there can be no consubstantiality (*consubstantialité*), and therefore interpenetration, of divine nature and human nature."⁵⁰ Although one might be tempted to view this remark as an infelicitous moment of excess, I would suggest that Lot-Borodine's formulation is better understood as a telling echo of Bulgakov's model of deification, which as we have seen suggests that the human being must be of the same substance as God in order to be deified.

Conclusion

Myrrha Lot-Borodine effectively defined what deification is for several generations of theologians in the West. In claiming that hers is in key respects a Bulgakovian version of the doctrine, this paper establishes a largely unappreciated facet of Bulgakov's significance, as his model of deification ultimately shaped perceptions of the doctrine at a crucial moment in modern Western scholarship. Evidence for Bulgakov's formative influence in this regard can be found in Congar's 1935 article, in which he reiterates without criticism the most controversial point that Lot-Borodine draws from Bulgakov. Congar explains,

49 Ibid., II, 547–48.

50 Ibid., I, 20.

“The East speaks of ‘deification.’ It consists in realizing the likeness to God in becoming ‘consubstantial’ with God.”⁵¹ Shortly thereafter, Congar even drops the scare quotes around the contentious term: “Deification [is] the realization of the soul’s consubstantiality with God in virtue of a progressive illumination of being.”⁵² Congar rather surprisingly accepts, then, that deification does indeed involve consubstantiality between God and the human being, and his endorsement of this characterization performs significant work in disseminating the view in modern Western theology.

Concerning characterizations of Lot-Borodine in contemporary scholarship, it is certainly true that patristic figures play a crucial role in her work. However, inasmuch as Lot-Borodine reads a figure such as Maximus through Bulgakov, this paper demonstrates that mere use of ancient Christian theologians does not itself signal alignment with a “neo-patristic” approach. Instead, what becomes clear is that the patristic materials are a contested site that is being claimed by both neo-patristic and modernist figures. As a result, Myrrha Lot-Borodine emerges from this study a considerably more complex figure than she is often made out to be, one who cannot be tidily encompassed with classifications such as “neo-patristic,” much less “traditionalist” or “right-wing.” She appears as a highly intriguing, even enigmatic theologian who merits further examination for a full grasp of her subtle and often unexpected views.

Finally, these findings prompt contemporary scholars to trouble yet further the dichotomy often drawn between neo-patristic and modernist circles in the Russian diaspora in the early twentieth century. This chapter suggests noteworthy influence and borrowing across that divide, and it therefore demonstrates that advocates of the two approaches were not by any means cordoned off from one another. Instead, one observes here the kind of exchange one might expect of a vibrant (if frequently contentious) intellectual community in which ideas are perpetually proposed, tested, and in some cases adopted even when one might otherwise oppose the views of the individual in question. In this regard it is surely significant that Lot-Borodine conducted her investigations of deification in the early 1930s (before distinctions between positions hardened in 1935), but it suggests that, for a time at least, there was greater intellectual exchange across lines of difference in the Russian émigré community than is often thought to have taken place.

51 Congar, “Deification,” 224.

52 *Ibid.*, 226.