



Barbara Hallensleben,
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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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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Building the House of Wisdom. Editors' Introduction	11
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12520-5	

PERSONHOOD AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Sergii Bulgakov's Christology and Beyond	25
Rowan Williams	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12172-6	

Masks, Chimaeras, and Portmanteaux: Sergii Bulgakov and the Metaphysics of the Person	43
David Bentley Hart	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12173-3	

Bulgakov and Lot-Borodine as Shapers of Deification in the West	63
Mark McInroy	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12174-0	

" <i>Transcende te ipsum</i> ": Faith, Prayer and Name-Worship in Bulgakov's <i>Unfading Light</i>	77
Ivan Ilin	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12175-7	

The Kenotic Iconicity of Sergii Bulgakov's Divine-Humanity: Doctrinal, Anthropological, and Feminist Considerations	91
Sarah Elizabeth Livick-Moses	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12176-4	

Sergii Bulgakov's Fragile Absolute: Kenosis, Difference, and Positive Disassociation	107
Jack Louis Pappas	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12177-1	

The Authenticity of Creativity: The Philosophical and Theological Anthropologies of Nikolai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov	123
Deborah Casewell	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12178-8	
Bulgakov on Mangodhood—or, Satan after Schelling	137
Justin Shaun Coyle	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12179-5	

POLITICS, ECONOMY, AND ECOLOGY

Seven Days of <i>Narod</i> : Sergei Bulgakov’s Christian Socialist Newspaper	153
Catherine Evtuhov and Regula M. Zwahlen	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12180-1	
Is It All the Greeks’ Fault? Reconsidering the Byzantine Legacy in Sergius Bulgakov’s <i>By the Walls of Cherson</i>	177
Nikos Kouremenos	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12181-8	
“The Sophia Dispute” in the Context of Political Ontology	193
Alexei P. Kozyrev	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12182-5	
Sophiology and Personalism, Foundations of the New Political Science in the Twenty-First Century	209
Antoine Arjakovsky	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12183-2	
Sergii Bulgakov’s Chalcedonian Politics of Personhood	221
Nathaniel Wood	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12184-9	
The World as the Household of Wisdom: Political Theology and Philosophy of Economy	235
Dionysios Skliris	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12185-6	

Rethinking the Language of Economics as a Systematic Christian Response to Economic and Ecological Crises in the Thought of Sergii Bulgakov	247
Tikhon Vasilyev	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12186-3	
Bulgakov's Ecology	259
Austin Foley Holmes	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12187-0	

SOPHIOLOGY

The Reception of Palamite Theology in the Sophiology of Sergii Bulgakov	275
Liubov A. Petrova	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12188-7	
An Unfinished Dispute. How is it Possible to Criticize Bulgakov's Sophiology at the Present Time?	289
Natalia Vaganova	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12189-4	
Sophiology, Ascesis and Prophecy	301
Joshua Heath	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12190-0	
Mariology as Personalized Sophiology. Sergii Bulgakov's Chalcedonian Theology	317
Dario Colombo	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12191-7	
The Training for Dying and Death: A New Reading of Bulgakov's Sophiology	331
Paul L. Gavrilyuk	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12192-4	

 CREATION AND ONTOLOGY

Sergii Bulgakov's Early Marxism: A Narrative of Development	351
Caleb Henry	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12193-1	
<i>Creatio ex sapientia</i> in Bulgakov's <i>Unfading Light</i> : The Influence of F. W. J. Schelling	365
Taylor Ross	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12194-8	
Sergii Bulgakov's Chalcedonian Ontology and the Problem of Human Freedom	381
Brandon Gallaher	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12195-5	
Sergii Bulgakov: Between Kenotic Theology of the Event and Trinitarian Ontology	409
Antonio Bergamo	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12196-2	
From Social Trinity to "Linguistic Trinity": Sergii Bulgakov's Contribution to Analytic Theology	419
Nikolaos Asproulis	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12197-9	
Sergii Bulgakov: From Grammar to Wisdom	435
John Milbank	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12198-6	

ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVES

Father Sergii Bulgakov’s “Karamazov’s excursus” 463
Pavel Khondzinsky
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12199-3

Ships in the Theological Night? Sergius Bulgakov and
Liberation Theology 475
Graham McGeoch
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12200-6

“Your Labor Is Not in Vain.” Sergii Bulgakov’s Sophiology as
a Key to a (Protestant) Theology of the Kingdom of God 489
Oliver Dürr
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12201-3

Sergius Bulgakov and Modern Theology 501
Paul Ladouceur
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12202-0

The Vision of Unity. The Ecumenical Thought of
Fr. Sergii Bulgakov 521
Adalberto Mainardi
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12203-7

List of Contributors 535

Mariology as Personalized Sophiology. Sergii Bulgakov's Chalcedonian Theology

Dario Colombo

“The heart and the soul, the personal center of creation, is the Virgin Mother”¹—a very provocative sentence in Bulgakov’s work *The Bride of the Lamb*, especially for me as a Christian of Protestant origin. This article attempts to show why Mariology is not only central to Christian theology, but necessary. That said, I hope I don’t meet the same fate as Bulgakov, who was not allowed to speak about Mary at the First World (Ecumenical) Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne 1927. He did it anyway and so will I.² In this contribution I will argue that in a Christian theology that starts from God incarnate, we cannot ignore Mary.

The Book *The Bride of the Lamb* “is the third and concluding volume of a theological trilogy devoted to the study of *Divine-humanity*, a fundamental truth of Christianity.”³ By 1939, *The Bride of the Lamb* was fully prepared for printing but had to be postponed due to the outbreak of the Second World War. Bulgakov did not live to see the publication of what he himself called the most

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- 1 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), xviii.
 - 2 Cf. Barbara Hallensleben, *Ökumene als Pfingstgeschehen bei Sergij N. Bulgakov*. In: *Ökumene. Das eine Ziel—die vielen Wege*, ed. Iso Baumer and Guido Vergauwen 1995, 156–58. Bulgakov says in his report on this conference: “But first the question must be posed, directly derived from the acceptance of the Nicene Creed, of the meaning and power of the veneration of the Godmother [...]. This is the question that most divides the Christian world, and the treatment of it must be brought to full clarity. All this presupposes a long and difficult road of study, discussion, and debate. However, the disputants are no longer enemies, but friends, seeking to understand one another.” Sergii Bulgakov, *K voprosu o Lozanskoj konferentsii*, in: *Put’ 13* (1928), 71–82: 82. That long road is taken here, with the attempt to understand a friend.
 - 3 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, xvii.

important part of his work on Divine-humanity. In view of the horror of the war, Bulgakov emphasizes:

The truths contained in the revelation of Divine-humanity, particularly in its eschatological aspect, are so unshakable and universal that even the most shattering events of world history, which we are now witnessing, pale and are nullified in their ontological significance in the face of these truths insofar as we perceive these events in the light of that which is to come. And that which is to come is the Church in its power and glory, together with the transfiguration of creation.⁴

Ecclesiology and Eschatology mean hope for the world, which is founded not in chaos, but in God who became human (Christology) to redeem the world in and through the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology). In this act of God, humanity is involved. What role does Mary play in Divine-humanity? To answer this question, we must first clarify how Bulgakov develops his theology.

In the preface to the first part of Bulgakov's trilogy, *The Lamb of God*, he outlines his way of doing theology: In order to formulate a doctrine of Divine-humanity, one must "develop a Chalcedonian theology."⁵ The question which he is trying to answer is the following: "How is the incarnation of God possible, what does it presuppose and what does it include?" In his argumentation, he intends to avoid the one-sidedness of both pantheism and transcendentalism.⁶ In order to achieve this, a *Chalcedonian theology* is needed: Jesus Christ is *one* person in *two* natures, perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity.⁷ Within a non-Chalcedonian theology, Jesus is viewed as *only* God (or *only* seemingly human) or *only* human. The first way leads to pantheism, the second to transcendentalism. Only a Chalcedonian theology does not fall into a one-sidedness. I will argue that Bulgakov's Chalcedonian theology is of utmost importance for the Mariological question.

In my view, this is an important addition to Walter Nunzio Sisto's book about Bulgakov's Mariology: *The Mother of God in the Theology of Sergius Bul-*

4 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, xvii–xviii.

5 This statement comes from Bulgakov's preface to the book *The Lamb of God*. However, this preface was omitted by the English translator in the edition otherwise used here.

6 In *The Bride of the Lamb*, Bulgakov speaks more of cosmism and dualism.

7 Peter Hünemann, Heinrich Denzinger (DH), *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*. 43rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 301–02.

gakov. *The Soul of the World* (New York: Routledge, 2018).⁸ He has taken too little time to point out the Chalcedonian disputes, which does not explain well enough why, according to Bulgakov, Mary must be called the heart and soul, the personal center of creation. Apollinarius, for example, who plays a central role in Bulgakov's investigation, is not mentioned at all. Therefore, I am trying to fill a gap regarding that matter.

I will argue that a Chalcedonian theology leads directly to Sophiology. If Jesus is fully God and fully man, something is thereby said about creation. God and the world cannot be understood as fundamentally different from each other. I will also argue that a Chalcedonian theology leads to Mariology. The divine Logos is the person of Christ and thus cannot be understood as a created person. Who, then, is God's human and created counterpart? According to the Bible, it is the people of Israel. In this context, Mary must be understood as the culmination of this narrative, for she conceives and gives birth to the God who becomes man. Therefore, I want to bring Mariology back into the conversation of a Chalcedonian theology. Or put the other way around: A Chalcedonian theology always leads to Sophiology and Mariology.

Chalcedonian Theology

The possibility of the incarnation always was and remains the most fundamental problem of Christology: How can the infinite God become a finite human without giving up his divinity and without humanity being subsumed into divinity? The first attempts to answer the unification of divinity and humanity in Christ were proposed by Irenaeus († around 200) and Athanasius († 373) with a soteriological argument: "God assumed the whole man in order to save and deify him."⁹ While this emphasizes the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ, the question of how this union *is possible* has not been answered.

8 Sisto's conclusion on Bulgakov's Mariology: Mary is the pneumatophoric hypostasis. Mary is the first human hypostasis (person) to be fully deified. Mary illustrates the human side of the divine-human synergy of the economy of salvation. That means: God involves a created human hypostasis in the salvation of the world. Mary is the New Eve and the heart and the soul of the world, the complete personification of Sophia in its feminine and creaturely form. Sisto calls Bulgakov's Mariology *anticipated eschatology*—in her womb she receives salvation itself. That is why meditation on the role of Mary in salvation history ultimately sheds light on what incarnation means.

9 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 3. Cf. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III,19,1; Athanasius, *De incarnatione Verbi*, 54.

According to Bulgakov, Apollinarius asked this question in its radicality for the first time.¹⁰ The question is not only that of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, but rather about how this is thinkable without contradiction. The basic axiom of Apollinarius is that “two perfect [complete] principles cannot become one.”¹¹ Therefore, if the perfect God were to unite with the “perfect” human, there would be two perfect principles existing in two natures. The question is: If the divine and human natures were to become one, would the human nature not be destroyed? Apollinarius therefore speaks of “mixing” (*synkrasis*).¹² This is where the central problem of Christology becomes clear:

How can one understand the *union* of the divine essence and the human essence in the God-Man without transforming this union into a duality, into nothing more than a certain harmonization [...]? In other words, how can one assure their real unification while preserving the authenticity and autonomy of each of the essences without the absorption of the one by the other [...]?¹³

According to Bulgakov, Apollinarius has posed the real question of Christology: How is the unification of divinity and humanity conceivable? His heresy claims a composite nature of Christ,¹⁴ which ultimately negates the freedom of humanity, because the perfect divine nature dominates the defective human nature and can thus only perfect it at the price of its annulment: “The [human nature] must therefore be subjugated, made subordinate to the divine nature [...] and therefore it cannot be perfect, that is, complete.”¹⁵

Bulgakov takes up the crucial Christological question of Apollinarius, as he was misunderstood and condemned because of it. This led to the essential question’s being suppressed and only resurfacing when Nestorius, Bishop of Antioch († 451), began to deny the title *Theotokos* for Mary.¹⁶ Nestorius did not reject the title completely, but wanted it interpreted and limited in a certain

10 “Apollinarius was the first to consider a fundamental problem of Christology: What is the Divine-Humanity? Or, how is the Incarnation possible? What does it presuppose?” Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 4.

11 Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 5.

12 Cf. *ibid.*, 6.

13 *Ibid.*, 7.

14 *Ibid.*, 10.

15 *Ibid.*, 5. For a brief summary of the meaning of Apollinarius, see *ibid.*, 17 f.

16 Cf. *ibid.*, 40 f.

way.¹⁷ He was interested not in a Mariological question, but in a Christological. He wanted to maintain both the divine and the human natures of Christ. If Christ assumed humanity wholly, then human nature must also remain as such. Bulgakov traces Nestorius' thought through his work *Liber Heraclidis (LH)*. In it, Nestorius uses the vague term *prosopon* and develops it further to be able to state unity and duality in Christ. It is important to point out a major difficulty in the development of early Christology, indeed of theology as a whole: *the problem of terms*. Not only the bilingualism of Latin and Greek, but also the different use of the same terms in the same language and their change of meaning over time make it difficult to clearly determine the meaning of a theological position. The very terms *prosopon*, *ousia*, *hypostasis*, *physis*, etc. can sometimes denote different things and sometimes the same thing, depending on who is using them and in what context.¹⁸

A literal translation of *prosopon* is 'face, countenance, mask'. The problem is that Nestorius uses the term *prosopon* to express both unity and duality in Christ. He speaks of a *natural prosopon* and a *prosopon of union*. Nestorius thus uses the term *prosopon* (as *natural prosopon*) on the one hand to designate the peculiarities of two natures which remain distinct even after unification. Thus, the need for redemption belongs to the peculiarity of human nature, holiness to divine nature. On the other hand, Nestorius uses *prosopon* (as *prosopon of union*) to express unity in Christ. This *prosopon of union* belongs to each of the two natures, which in turn have their corresponding *prosopa*. In Bulgakov's words:

In *The Bazaar of Heracleides*, Nestorius insistently and repeatedly develops the idea that the two natural *prosopa* constitute one *prosōpon* of union, Christ.¹⁹

According to Bulgakov, Nestorius' great achievement is to have clearly stated the duality of natures in Christ. However, he was unable to explain their union.²⁰ If the complete man is to be assumed, then the human nature must not be dissolved in divinity. Nestorius thus keeps the duality of natures, as Chalcedon later will do too: *Jesus Christ has two natures*, one fully divine and

17 Nestorius "only insisted that it be defined more precisely. In a polemic against a particular Christological doctrine, he proposed, as more precise, the term 'Theodokos' (bearer of man and of God)." Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 41.

18 Cf. *ibid.*, 3 f.

19 *Ibid.*, 43.

20 Cf. *ibid.*, 45.

one fully human. Nestorius did not see that the unity of the person is already implied in this statement. As soon as the same term (*prosopon*) is used both for the distinction of the *two natures* and for the *unity*, no clarity is achieved. In the end, the term does not matter: Nestorius could have already anticipated Chalcedon if he had said that Christ is one *prosopon* in *two natures* without also using the term *prosopon* to distinguish the two natures. For it is also possible to use terms like person and hypostasis, not only to express the unity, but also to distinguish the two natures.²¹ In this way, these terms would also lead to a heretical Christology, because they simultaneously express the unity and duality in Christ.

In contrast to this is the position of Cyril of Alexandria († 444). Cyril is particularly disturbed by the weak term union (*sunapheia*) that Nestorius uses to express the unity in Christ.²² He rejects it because it does not sufficiently express the oneness of Christ and thus gives rise to a two-sons doctrine. In his view, the duality in Christ must be carried by unity: The *hypostasis* bears the two natures. He thinks of this union so radically that he speaks of a completely united nature in Christ. Thus, Cyril emphasizes the other side of Christology to which Chalcedon will adhere: *Jesus Christ* is *one hypostasis* bearing a perfectly unified nature. Cyril, however, falls into the one-sidedness complementary to Nestorius and does not see clearly enough how the duality of natures must be co-stated. According to Bulgakov, Cyril owes his opponent the answer as to how this union is to be understood. He saves himself in the “paradox of faith”:

In the final analysis, St. Cyril ends the theological debate by an appeal to the authority of faith: “Do not inquire, I ask you, into this matter [...] such a union [of soul and body] is unexplainable. [...] Soul and body are inseparable from Divinity.” His argument is purely soteriological: From the religiously indisputable fact of the reality of our existence and our salvation, it follows that if the Word had not become flesh and had not suffered by trials and temptations, He would not be able to help those who are tried and tempted, and His sufferings would not do us any good. “Does a shadow suffer?”²³

21 This is also alarmingly evident in modern Christology. I refer to Aaron Riches’ book *Ecce homo. On the Divine Unity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2016), in which he proves the ecclesiastical-theological affirmation of the oneness of Christ dogma-historically.

22 Cf. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 41.

23 *Ibid.*, 31 f.

Nestorius and Cyril thus accuse each other of negating the reality of salvation in the incarnation. Nestorius accused Cyril of fusing natures, and Cyril accused Nestorius of doubling the persons.²⁴ Both emphasize a necessary side of Christology. Jesus Christ must be one person (hypostasis/prosopon). In this respect, Cyril emphasizes a truth: It is not possible to speak of two centers of unity in Christ, because otherwise God would not have become human, but would only have settled in an already existing person. Nestorius also emphasizes such a truth: This one-person Jesus Christ must preserve in himself the two natures—the divine and the human—because otherwise humanity would be dissolved into divinity.

This dispute found a temporary end in the dogmatic formula of the Council of Chalcedon:

Following therefore the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man [...] We confess that one and the same Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, must be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion or change, without division or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one Person [...]²⁵

The truth about Christ can only be formulated if *one person* and *both natures* are affirmed. This is the theological root of a concept that Bulgakov uses over and over: the *antinomy*. An antinomy consists of two contradictory statements, each of which is necessary and must therefore be held. Chalcedonian theology can thus be described as an antinomian form of theology: Jesus is fully God and fully human. The antinomy binds divinity and humanity together in the one-person Jesus Christ. A one-sided emphasis on the divinity or humanity of Jesus always becomes heresy (pantheism or transcendentism). It is about a theology in which thesis and antithesis are not dissolved in a higher synthesis, but are *held together in* a higher synthesis, without confusion and without separation.

According to Bulgakov, even the Chalcedonian formula does not solve the Christological problem, but represents a new birth, insofar as the formula is neither the result of Antiochian-Nestorian nor Alexandrian-Cyrrilic theology:

24 Cf. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 41.

25 DH 301–02.

The Definition of Chalcedon is the *synthetic* resolution of the dialectical antithetics that we have in the Christology of the schools of Antioch and of Alexandria. In a certain sense, this definition says both “yes” and “no” to both schools, raising them to a higher unity.²⁶

Bulgakov tries to show the dialectical structure of early church history. The thesis of Cyril is the unity of the God-Man, which finds its heretical expression in Monophysitism, Monotheletism and Monoenergism. The antithesis of Nestorius is the duality of natures in the God-Man, which finds its heretical expression in Ditheletism and Adoptionism. The doctrine of Chalcedon embraces both: “the thesis and the antithesis, the bi-unity of the God-Man and the unity of the hypostasis in the duality of the natures [...]”²⁷ *Chalcedonian theology is antinomian theology*.

That Jesus Christ is *one* person in *two* natures is essential for understanding the importance of Mariology. But before this can be examined, we must take another step. As already emphasized, Chalcedon leaves us above all with a conceptual tension: How does one interpret this conceptual tension? How does one do theology after Chalcedon? Is an antinomian theology even possible? This tension, according to Bulgakov, can be endured only with Sophiology.

Sophiology as the Natural Foundation of Theology

Bulgakov is not simply concerned with *the relationship between divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ*. He further asks: *How is the unification of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ possible?* The formula of Chalcedon shows that this question is self-evident:

The negative formula of the Council of Chalcedon cannot be understood as a *prohibition* against positive definitions; it can be understood only as a *preliminary* definition, incomplete, inexhaustive, awaiting continuation.²⁸

26 Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 56 f.

27 Ibid., 18. I am aware that in the logic of my presentation Nestorius should have formulated the thesis and Cyril the antithesis. Cyril, however, is chronologically earlier, which is why in Bulgakov’s account he is also the one who formulates the thesis. However, I chose Nestorius first because the real dispute about Christology only begins with his rejection of a certain way of using the title of Theotokos.

28 Ibid., 195 f.

The Chalcedonian formula answers the question as to the relationship between divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ, and thereby raises the question of the God–world relationship: How is it possible that Jesus is fully God and fully human and what must creation be like, to enable the incarnation? In other words: the Christological question becomes a sophiological question:

The central point from which Sophiology proceeds is that of the relation between *God* and *the World*, or, what is practically the same thing, between *God* and *humanity*. In other words we are faced with the question of the meaning and significance of Divine-humanity—not only insofar as it concerns the God-human, the incarnate Logos, but precisely insofar as it applies to the theandric union between God and the whole of the creaturely world, through humanity and in humanity.²⁹

The Chalcedonian formula answers the question as to the relationship between divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ. Bulgakov asks in his Sophiology how this relationship is possible. The Christian doctrine of the incarnation becomes the decisive starting point. The belief in the incarnation of God “presupposes the existence of absolutely necessary dogmatic assumptions in the doctrine of God and humanity.”³⁰ These presuppositions are unfolded in Sophiology. In Christ, an original unity is presupposed, which bears this duality. The one-person Jesus bears the two natures perfectly, “without confusion or change, without division or separation.” In this way, incarnation and the Chalcedonian formula presuppose certain conditions for the God-world relationship:

*It is no alienation for God to enter a community of life with humanity and the world.
Or: God can become human without giving up his divinity and humankind can receive God without losing their humanity.*

This is what Sophiology in its core means and only in this way can the Chalcedonian formula be taken seriously. Sophiology thus is a Chalcedonian antinomy for the whole of theology: *Sophiology is Chalcedonian theology*. This has considerable implications for the doctrine of creation. Sophiology arises from the reflection on the dogmatic presuppositions that necessarily follow from a Chalcedonian theology: If Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human, it cannot be an alienation or even a contradiction for God himself to enter a community of life with his creatures. On the contrary, humanity, indeed ulti-

29 Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia. The Wisdom of God* (Hudson: Lindisfarne Press, 1993) 14.

30 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 18.

mately the whole of creation, was created for the reception of God. These are dogmatic presuppositions that a Chalcedonian theology necessarily requires: Creation cannot be thought outside of or in contradiction to God. In a certain sense we must speak of creation in God, or rather of creation as a part-giving of God's life.

This idea can be explored by the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Bulgakov emphasizes: "Nothingness" does not exist. We only know the concept because we derive it from being. We cannot think "nothing" because we know nothing only as a negation of being, that is, as a conceptual deduction from the concept of being. Therefore, creation out of nothing cannot mean: God creates "something" out of "nothing". This "nothing" does not exist. In Bulgakov's words:

In fact, such an extra-divine nothing simply does not exist. It is by no means the limit to divine being. Divine being is limitless. Nothing is by no means like an ocean that flows around this being. Rather, it is divinity itself that is an ocean without any shores.³¹

If creation out of nothing cannot be understood as creation out of something that is next to God, it must be said that God creates "out of himself" to give space to creation in himself: The eternal-being God is with his essence (his "nature") the foundation of the finite-temporal creature. Creation out of nothing thus only means "that the world exists in God and only by God, for the world does not have within itself the ground of its own being."³² Bulgakov calls this foundation of creation in God: *Sophia*. God is the fullness of being and therein the foundation of creation. Everything comes from God and has its foundation in God. In Bulgakov's words:

The creation of the world is included in God's sophianic self-positing and consists in the fact that the Divine being in Sophia receives *another being in the world*. The Divine Sophia exists in a dual mode: in her own mode, which belongs to her in eternity; and in the creaturely mode, as the world. Only such an identification of the two modes of Sophia, with their simultaneous differentiation, can explain why, although God is the Creator, this does not change his divinely sophianic being or introduce in the latter a non-divine or extra-divine principle.³³

31 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 43 f.

32 *Ibid.*, 6.

33 *Ibid.*, 52.

Creation should neither be understood monistically as God, nor dualistically outside of God, but in an antinomy that holds together both the eternity of God and the finitude of creation:

The fullness of the truth compels us to affirm both the one and the other: The world is eternal in God, for in Him all is eternal, as in its eternal prototype, the Divine Sophia; and the world exists, as such, as a creation, in temporality or becoming. The two are incompatible abstractly-logically, but, ontologically, they mutually condition each other.³⁴

Chalcedonian theology leads to Sophiology: The antinomy of Jesus Christ as fully God and fully human has its foundation in the antinomy of God and its creation. A theology that takes the Chalcedonian formula as its starting point becomes Sophiology, that is, a doctrine of God-humanity, a doctrine of the God–world relationship. And that is why we must ask the question about Mary. After all, she is the one who has the most intimate relationship with God.

Mariology as Personalized Sophiology

So far, the Chalcedonian formula has been examined in regarding the antinomy between the *two natures* of Christ: Jesus Christ bears the two natures perfectly. This statement has significant Christological and Anthropological consequences: In Jesus Christ there is no separate human person, but the divine Logos is the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the divine Logos who became human: “The Word became flesh” (Joh 1:14). The presupposition of a human person alongside the divine person in Christ becomes—as is evident in Nestorius—a two-sons doctrine, which annuls the unity of Christ and thus negates the incarnation of God. In Christ, God himself assumed humanity—that is, the nature of humanity—and approached human beings personally.

This raises the question as to a personal counterpart: In Jesus Christ, it is not humanity that personally says yes to God, but God personally says yes to humanity. This confronts us with the fundamental question of salvation: If Jesus Christ is not the counterpart of God, if he is not a created person, but God incarnate, that is, the uncreated divine person as human, how does salvation personally arrive at humanity?

At this point it becomes clear why the Virgin Mother is the heart and the soul of creation: Mary is the one who personally says yes to God, conceives and

34 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 70.

gives birth to the incarnating God. If theology is to hold on to the personal counterpart of humanity to God, Mary and thus Mariology must form the intersection of theology. If God became human, then no greater devotion can be imagined than that expressed by Mary in her response to Gabriel: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). If God became human, then Mary is the highest possible form of union between a created person and God. Christ is the God-Man who has fully assumed humanity, and Mary is the one who has realized God-humanity as a human being in the highest way. In short: *Mary is the personal center of creation*. If this is not taken seriously, as Bulgakov accuses Protestantism of doing, then "the Virgin Mary is only an instrument for the Incarnation, inevitable, but still something external, an instrument which is laid aside and forgotten when the need has passed".³⁵ Thus, it is not possible to hold on to "the sanctification and the glorification of human nature."³⁶ Only in Mary does it become apparent what God-humanity means for human beings, because the God-humanity of Christ is and remains the God-humanity of God who became human. Mary's God-humanity is the creaturely personal side of the God-humanity of humanity, to which every human being is called.³⁷

This leads us to the question of history: So far, no attention has been paid to Mary's connection to the rest of humanity—a danger that is only too evident in Mariology. If one were to stop at this personal relationship between God and Mary, it would in any case become incomprehensible why the history of Israel, that is, God's salvation-history with his people, exists at all. The time of the Incarnation would become an arbitrary point in time, and the question why this did not already take place *in principio*, would pose a lot of problems for any theodicy. Bulgakov accuses the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception of this flawed understanding which does not take seriously the fullness of time (Gal 4:4), because through this dogma

the whole human side of the preparation for God's incarnation becomes insubstantial and unimportant. Essentially the meaning of *the genealogy* of Christ the Saviour

35 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, trans. Lydia Kesich (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 116.

36 *Ibid.*, 116.

37 At this point, the question of the human nature of Jesus Christ in relation to his person would have to be further reflected. But here there is only space for a short sophiological hint: The entire creation, that is, every smallest speck of dust participates in God's essence (nature), and it is precisely this creation that God accepted in a natural way in his incarnation (kenosis) and deified in his resurrection (theosis). In short: The unified God-human nature of Christ is the divine and creaturely Sophia fallen into one.

is cancelled. In fact, given such an understanding this act of restoration of *iustitiae originalis* could have come at any moment of history, and not in the fullness of time, and generally speaking, history as the *common task* of humanity, as the sole and coherent act which has the incarnation as its centre, does not even exist in such an understanding.³⁸

Whether this applies to the dogma is not the subject of this article. However, it is essential to note that Mary relates to the history of Israel, as the Magnificat expresses:

For he who is mighty has done great things for me [...] He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever. (Lk 1:49, 54–5; ESV)

Mary is the culmination of God's history with his people, with Israel, and therefore Mary is the personal center of creation: All human beings are called to be a counterpart to God. This began in the history of Israel (Abraham, Moses, etc.). But so far, the full union has only taken place once: in Mary, the mother of God. In its essence, Mariology is therefore about indicating the historical-personal place where the God-humanity of human beings has already become reality: namely in *Mary*. *Mariology is thus personalized Sophiology*: The antinomy of the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, which is revealed in a Chalcedonian theology and outlined as Sophiology, can only be held together in Mariology.³⁹ Recently Aaron Riches has stated a similar thesis:

Here I claim that the Jesus-Mary relation is so integral to the incarnational fact, and therefore to a coherent Christocentrism, that a Christology without a full Marian account fails to be incarnational in any meaningful way and is reduced to mere abstraction.⁴⁰

38 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush. On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 51.

39 Sisto makes the same point: "Mary is Sophia inasmuch as she is the actualization of Godhumanhood from the perspective of humankind (i. e., she demonstrates how God involves humankind in God's revelation and saving work)". Sisto, *The Mother of God in the Theology of Sergius Bulgakov*, 113. But what should be clearer in this article is the Chalcedonian foundation of this statement.

40 Riches, *Ecce homo*, 17. What is missing in Riches is the reference to Sophiology (or something like it) as the basis or presupposition for the incarnation. Of course, Sisto stresses this point too: "Mariology provides a corrective function for Christology against

Only Mariology allows there to be a human-personal counterpart to God that is not lost when the infinite God appears on the stage of finitude. There is no better way to express this than to say: “The heart and the soul, the personal center of creation, is the Virgin Mother.”

Conclusion

A Chalcedonian theology, as I have tried to show here, will unfold on two sides. On the level of nature, it leads to Sophiology. That Jesus Christ possesses both natures has its foundation in the theology of creation: God and the world are neither the same nor opposed to each other, but God is the one who sustains the world in himself. On the level of the person, it leads to Mariology. That the divine Logos is the person of Christ leads to the question of a created human counterpart to God and this is found in the history of Israel, in the history of the Church, and, of course, in Mary.

Since God became human, Mariology should be understood as personalized Sophiology: The God-humanity of humanity, which is realized in Mary. Without Mary, there is no counterpart to God at the climax of salvation. Without Mariology theology remains incomplete. Positively formulated: Only in Mary and in the reflection on her can the relationship between God and humankind be held together, by which humanity is truly accepted. Only with Mary as the personal center of creation can the title of Bulgakov’s greatest work be understood: *The Bride of the Lamb*.

What happened in the case of Mary, was that God himself entered the world and this is the vocation for the entire creation. Because ultimately it is the entire church, the Bride of the Lamb, that awaits its wedding. In this respect Mariology is hope for the world, because the coming one comes not as an oppressor but as the Lord of love. He comes as the one who can assume humanity without forcing and destroying it. He comes as the same one who has already walked, is walking and will walk the path of history with the persons of humanity, and it is precisely through this that God enables humanity to realize Divine-humanity:

And in the face of this Coming Church, the prayer of faith, love, and hope should cry out again and again in one’s heart: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him that heareth say, Come! [...] He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly! Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:17, 20).⁴¹

non-Chalcedonian theology. How we view Mary is the litmus test to determine if our Christology is orthodox.” Sisto, *The Mother of God in the Theology of Sergius Bulgakov*, 156.

41 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, xviii.