



Barbara Hallensleben,  
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# 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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## Ships in the Theological Night? Sergius Bulgakov and Liberation Theology

*Graham McGeoch*

Sergius Bulgakov is widely regarded as among the most influential Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century. His reputation has been enhanced in recent years by translations of his work into different languages (particularly English), and by his reception in the Anglo-American world, or Western theology, through contributions from the likes of Rowan Williams and John Milbank.<sup>1</sup> Bulgakov's influence is evident, too, in other worlds and other theologies. There is still no translation of Sergius Bulgakov's major work into Portuguese, although some work has appeared in Spanish.<sup>2</sup> Despite this language limitation, aspects of his theology can be found in Latin American Liberation Theology.<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I will explore some aspects of Sergius Bulgakov's theology that appear in Liberation Theology and highlight some major theological themes that Bulgakov and Liberation Theology share. I will also consider the 'silences' in Liberation Theology towards Bulgakov, all the more surprising because Bulgakov's contemporary, friend and intellectual foil—Nikolai Berdiaev—exerts a strong influence on early Liberation Theology.

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- 1 Regula M. Zwahlen. "Introduction," *Studies in East European Thought*, vol. 6, no. 3–4 (2012), 159.
  - 2 Francisco José López Sáez has translated and published *El Paráclito*, Sígueme, Salamanca 2014. He is currently translating *The Bride of the Lamb*.
  - 3 In the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to Liberation Theology meaning Latin American Liberation Theology. I am aware that Liberation Theology is no longer exclusive to the Latin American region, or indeed to Christianity.

## Sergius Bulgakov in Translation

Orthodox theologians like Brandon Gallaher acknowledge that Bulgakov's growing influence is, in part, due to the translation into and dissemination of his work in English.<sup>4</sup> Bulgakov's work appeared in academic journals in Europe and North America during his lifetime, but translations of his major trilogy only appeared in the twenty-first century in English. Two major translation initiatives of the Orthodox Church in Latin America largely overlook Bulgakov, giving preference to the work of Paul Evdokimov, Georges Florovsky, Christos Yannaras and John Zizioulas.<sup>5</sup> Some of the work of Paul Evdokimov and John Zizioulas has been translated into Portuguese and Spanish, respectively, by Roman Catholic publishing houses.

Paul Valliere has noted, "The Latin Americans showed little interest in Russian thought."<sup>6</sup> The reasons for this lack of interest include language and ideology. For example, Sonia Maria de Freitas claims there is an "academic silence" in the literature about Russian Émigrés in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> She attributes this to ideology. Russia was committed to communism in the twentieth century, while dictatorships in many Latin American countries were anti-communist. Furthermore, the Brazilian academic journal *Teoliteraria* dedicated a whole edition to Russian Theology & Literature in 2018. The edition hoped to explore Christianity without 'Western' constructs.<sup>8</sup> Articles reflected on the work and contributions of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Mikhail Bulgakov, Sergius Bulgakov, Paul

4 Brandon Gallaher, "Antinomism, Trinity, and the challenge of Solov'evian pantheism in the theology of Segij Bulgakov," *Studies in East European Thought*, vol. 6, no. 3–4 (2012), 206.

5 [www.fatheralexander.org](http://www.fatheralexander.org) and [www.ecclesia.org.br/biblioteca](http://www.ecclesia.org.br/biblioteca) (access 2024/01/26).

6 Paul Valliere, "The Influence of Russian Religious Thought on Western Theology in the Twentieth Century," in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, and Randall A. Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 660–76: 671.

7 Sonia Maria De Freitas, "Identity, Religion and Resistance of Russian people in Brazil," in *Migration and Public Discourse in World Christianity*, ed. Afe Adogame, Raimundo Barreto, and Wanderley Pereira Rosa. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019): 99–116: 99. Sonia Maria de Freitas is a Brazilian historian. Her work is perhaps symbolic of some of the work now just beginning in Latin America in relation to Orthodox Christianity. Normally, we can find some ethnographical or historical studies of 'foreign national' communities—Russian, Greek, etc.—which may or may not make explicit the study of religion within these communities.

8 Alex Villas Boas, Antonio Manzatto, Marcio Fernandes, Lubomir Zak, "Teologia e Literatura Russa: Editorial," *Teoliteraria*, vol. 8, no. 16 (2018), 4–10: 8.

Evdokimov, Andrei Tarkovskii, Pavel Florenskii and Nikolai Berdiaev<sup>9</sup>. Despite the mention of Sergius Bulgakov in the Editorial, reference to his work only appears in a footnote in one of the articles.<sup>10</sup>

Language is obviously a barrier. Yet, it is important to remember that the first generation of Liberation Theologians all studied in Europe or North America.<sup>11</sup> Language was not necessarily a limitation to accessing theological work. Furthermore, some of the most influential Liberation Theologians trained in France, Bulgakov's place of exile and creativity.<sup>12</sup> Notable Liberation Theologians who studied in France include Juan Luis Segundo, Gustavo Gutierrez (they both met for the first time in 1950s Francophone Europe<sup>13</sup>), Camilo Torres, Pablo Richard, Enrique Dussel, and Ronaldo Muñoz, not to mention the French-speaking Belgian theologian José Comblin. In a later generation, Elsa Tamez also studied in France. (Leonardo Boff studied in Germany.) There is no doubt that these first-generation Liberation Theologians are schooled in the French *nouvelle theologie* under the influence of Henri de Lubac, and in the Paris salons of Christian Humanism influenced by the work of Jacques Maritain and the intellectual discussions that engaged Roman Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox.

During this period, Nikolai Berdiaev emerges as an important influence on Liberation Theologians. Juan Luis Segundo is a major interpreter of Berdiaev's ideas, basing many of his books on an exploration of the key Berdiaev categories of 'personhood' and 'freedom'. In *El Hombre de hoy ante de Jesus de Nazaret*,

9 Boas et al., "Teologia e Literatura Russa", 9.

10 Lubomir Zak, Marcio Fernandes, "O romance como teologia: reflexões em diálogo com Fiódor Dostoiévski," in *Teoliteraria*, vol. 8, no. 16 (2018), 11–32: 18. Moreover, the footnote refers to an Italian translation of Bulgakov's work: *Lo spirituale della cultura* (2006).

11 Furthermore, the Liberation Theologian and journalist, Frei Betto spent extended periods in the USSR in the 1980s.

12 We are speaking about a period roughly from the late 1940s to the 1970s. After the 1970s, with the exceptions of those persecuted by the military dictatorships in the region, there is a turn to regional or national theological formation in Liberation Theology mirroring the import substitution policy followed by Latin American governments. For a classic account of this process in Latin America see F.H. Cardoso and E. Faletto. *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

13 Gustavo Gutierrez, "Uma Amizade para Toda Vida," in "Dialogando com Juan Luis Segundo," ed. Afonso Maria Ligório Soares, *Ciberteologia—Revista de Teologia & Cultura* II, no. 3 (2006), 239–41. Both Gutierrez and Segundo studied for periods in France and Belgium in the 1940s and 1950s.

Segundo asks a question inspired by his interpretation of Berdiaev, “how are we to establish one goal above all the rest? That is the question. But it is obvious that this goal cannot really be known as the satisfactory one ahead of time by any empirical means. Therefore, every human being must take a chance on life, choosing as his or her supreme goal something whose value is not known in a personal, experiential way”.<sup>14</sup> This question reappears in different forms in Segundo’s subsequent work, even his most well known work in the English language, *The Liberation of Theology*, when he considers the freedom *from* and freedom *to* (for) discussion through the lens of Protestant contributions (Martin Luther and Paul Lehmann) and the shifts in Marxist thought, particularly under the influence of Eric Fromm.<sup>15</sup> Segundo is above all concerned with the fact that ‘freedom’ must be put into practice if it is to be liberation, but he recognizes that the moment it is practiced it has concrete historical limitations.

Sergius Bulgakov is interested in this discussion, too. He explores ‘freedom’ and ‘necessity’ in the *Philosophy of Economy*, particularly in relation to historical materialism. Bulgakov’s rejection of historical materialism<sup>16</sup> is one of the major differences between him and early Liberation Theologians. I will discuss this further at another point in this chapter.

Bulgakov and Berdiaev, in different ways, broach similar themes. Segundo, and other Liberation Theologians, appear to be unaware of Bulgakov’s writings on these themes. Instead, Liberation Theologians consistently turn to Berdiaev when discussing human freedom. In addition to Juan Luis Segundo and Rubem Alves, José Comblin became a late convert to theme of human freedom in Liberation Theology.<sup>17</sup> Previously Comblin had misconceived human freedom as restricted to a bourgeois concept.<sup>18</sup> When Comblin does turn to the theme of human freedom—over thirty years after Segundo—he turns to the example of the Zapatista uprising in Mexico<sup>19</sup> and to work of Nikolai Berdiaev.<sup>20</sup> In between the publication of the books by Alves and Segundo, and Comblin, theological students in the region—both Protestant and Roman Catholic—read Berdiaev (mainly in French) trying to find a Christian response to the

14 Juan Luis Segundo, *El Hombre de hoy ante de Jesus de Nazaret* (Madrid: Cristandad, 1982), 16.

15 Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976), 150.

16 Sergei Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2000), 278.

17 Rubem Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1969).

18 José Comblin, *Vocação para a Liberdade* (São Paulo: Paulus, 1998), 181.

19 *Ibid.*, 7.

20 *Ibid.*, *Vocação para a Liberdade*, 15.

military dictatorships in the region. (Libraries of Dominican and Protestant seminaries discreetly held copies of Berdiaev's work).

## Political Theology

Sergius Bulgakov's theology is a political theology. He was active in Russian politics before his exile.<sup>21</sup> After entering the Church, he produced a number of political theology reflections, including on the nature of the Church in relation to politics and polities, the experience of God in the modern world, and personhood. His reflections on personhood will prove important to Orthodox theology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indeed, personhood makes helpful preliminary distinctions between individual rights and human dignity—Bulgakov presents an altogether more social and communal understanding of the human being<sup>22</sup>—which have rumbled on through theological and political discussion of human rights into the twenty-first century.

Bulgakov's political theology advanced an example of Christian socialism independent from a Church which was, in his view, in collaboration with an imperial state. Bulgakov advocated for a Christian conception of politics independent of clericalism and Church interests. He developed a theological focus of reaching the poor and working classes in Russia, harbored a deep suspicion and offered a critique of nationalisms in Church and theology, and explored human freedom [liberation] rooted in love.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, the recent work by Robert F. Slesinski is worthy of note. Slesinski pays attention to Bulgakov's preaching, not only his scholarship.<sup>24</sup> This helps to place Bulgakov in the liturgical setting of Orthodoxy, but it also underlines the importance of the being of the Church as a political and theological praxis for Bulgakov, something crucial to Liberation Theology.

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21 It is beyond the scope of this chapter, but Catherine Evtuhov's study of the Russian Silver Age ("a spiritual and cultural movement of great intensity") reflects on Sergius Bulgakov's contributions and commitments. *The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy, 1890–1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

22 Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy*.

23 For a fuller discussion of these aspects of Sergius Bulgakov's theology, see Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 36–40.

24 Robert F. Slesinski, *The Theology of Sergius Bulgakov* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017).

Bulgakov's political theology is an Eastern theology. His Eastern roots, and rejection of Western theological constructs, is clearly presented in *The Comforter*, his dogmatic exploration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> This Eastern theology distances Bulgakov from some premises of Liberation Theology. Early Liberation Theologians are Western. I use the term 'Western' here to denote theologians from the Latin Church (either Roman Catholic or Protestant). I am aware that reading this first generation of Liberation theologians—mostly trained in Europe, and grappling with issues internal to Western theology—in this way is now highly contested. Indeed, it is rejected by some of those who interpret Liberation Theology as a decolonial theology or epistemology of the South.<sup>26</sup> While Sergius Bulgakov and Liberation Theology differ due to their Eastern or Western roots, they are quite similar in their critique of Western rationalism in theology. Bulgakov uses sophiology to advance this critique, while Liberation Theology uses the 'option for the poor'.

More importantly, Sergius Bulgakov and Liberation Theology are major contributors to the political theology of Christianity and Marxism. Olivier Clement noted that Liberation Theology faces "the problem of the contemporary encounter between Christianity and Marxism—or rather, very concretely, the encounter of Christians and Marxists in a 'Third World' suffering from the shock of adjustment to modern civilization."<sup>27</sup> One of the consequences of this encounter in Liberation Theology is the use of the Marxist concept of history (historical materialism) to articulate salvation history<sup>28</sup>. This sets Liberation Theology on a quite different course of political theology to Bulgakov.

Sergius Bulgakov changed his mind about historical materialism as a political theory of history. In the *Philosophy of Economy*, he decisively abandoned

25 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2004).

26 I maintain that the early Latin American Liberation Theologians are Western in terms of theology due to their formation in Europe and the US, and due to the bibliographies that underpin their early works. For example, Rubem Alves' book *A Theology of Human Hope* (1969), while later promoted (particularly by Protestants in the region) as the first publication of Liberation Theology, actually engages extensively with the theology of Karl Barth and the philosophy of language of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Likewise, the pioneering work of Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (1971), is firmly rooted in a theological dialogue with Johann Baptist Metz, Karl Rahner and Jurgen Moltmann, among others.

27 Olivier Clement, "Notes and Comments: Some Orthodox Reflections on Liberation Theology," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 29 (1985), 63–72: 64.

28 Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM, 2001), 151.



the Marxist concept of history in favor of a Christian theory. Bulgakov was increasingly ill at ease with the lack of human freedom in the Marxist concept of history. His development of Sophiology as an alternative to historical materialism is one of Bulgakov's major political theology contributions to human freedom. Bulgakov's is a freedom from determinisms. Liberation Theology's is a freedom from oppression.

### Sergius Bulgakov and Liberation Theology

Aristotle Papanikolaou sees in Bulgakov's theology an anticipation of themes circulating in Liberation Theology.<sup>29</sup> Specifically, he identifies a struggle for justice on the side of the poor (and the need for Christians to engage with trade unions and be involved in education of the poor), and the need for theology to use the social sciences to engage in policy and political discussions with wider society.<sup>30</sup> According to Papanikolaou, Bulgakov is also keen to develop a Christian vision to counter the atheism underpinning some Marxist analysis related to human freedom (or personhood).

Papanikolaou's first two observations relating to the struggle for justice on the side of the oppressed is also recognized and interpreted as a key element in Liberation Theology by two other Orthodox theologians, Athanasios N. Papathanasiou and Pantelis Kalaitzidis. Papathanasiou distinguishes between social critique and social action in the life of Gregory of Palamas, in a reflection on Patristics and Liberation Theology.<sup>31</sup> The former is present, the latter absent from the theology of Palamas. Therefore, according to Papathanasiou, Palamas offers a possible form of Liberation Theology that stops short of Christian praxis. Liberation Theology would not accept this interpretation. Liberation Theology is first an action, and secondly a critique. This is why Papanikolaou's earlier additional observation, *on the side of the oppressed*, becomes so important in any discussion of social justice/option for the poor in Liberation Theology.<sup>32</sup>

Pantelis Kalaitzidis links the emergence of Orthodox political theology with Patristic traditions, and with specific contexts in Russian theology in the early

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29 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 38.

30 Ibid., 39.

31 Athanasios N. Papathanasiou, "Liberation Perspectives in Patristic Thought: an Orthodox Approach," *Scientific Review of Post-Graduate Program 'Studies in Orthodox Theology*, vol. 2 (2011), 419–38.

32 Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political*, 38.

twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> He highlights the contributions of Bulgakov and Berdiaev, noting, like Papanikolaou, that political theology emerged in Orthodox theology long before the debates of the 1960s in Western and Liberation Theology. The attempts of Bulgakov and Berdiaev to articulate a Christian socialism certainly predates the 'Christians for Socialism' movement in the 1970s in Chile.<sup>34</sup>

Kalaitzidis also notes that Bulgakov develops a political theology independent of Church and State—something key to Liberation Theology. Although Kalaitzidis notes that Bulgakov does this with some degree of reticence.<sup>35</sup> Bulgakov's decision to appeal to theology and Christianity as the basis of a more authentic understanding of the human being and society in the face of historical materialism in Marxism most clearly distances him from Liberation Theology. The decision by Liberation Theology to deploy 'social analytic mediation'—and thereby Marxist analysis of society, at least in the early writings—moves it discreetly in the opposite direction to Bulgakov.<sup>36</sup> Bulgakov finds historical materialism (and Marxism) unconvincing in its understanding of the human being and human freedom. Liberation Theology finds historical materialism (and Marxism) convincing as a tool of social analysis. It is the different stance taken by each in relation to historical materialism (albeit with different subject matter in mind: Bulgakov on the human being, Liberation Theology on society) that enables us to perceive why 'Christians for Socialism' throughout Latin America, and Liberation Theology do not necessarily turn to Bulgakov's work. His contribution is bypassed.

Bulgakov's critique and practice of social justice did include reaching out to the poor, as a Christian praxis. Liberation Theology calls this 'the option for the poor'. The work of the Protestant missionary Richard Shaull is a good example of this Christian vision in Liberation Theology.<sup>37</sup> Shaull was elected to a Trade

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33 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Eastern Orthodox Thought," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, eds. William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott. (London: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2019), 97–110.

34 Teresa Donoso Leoro, *Historia de los Cristianos por el Socialismo en Chile* (Santiago: Editorial Vaitea, 1975). This book documents the story of the movement in Chile. Notable in the movement is a focus on a critique of capitalism as a false God (based on the critique of Walter Benjamin). Notable too is the complete absence of reference to the work of Bulgakov and Berdiaev.

35 Kalaitzidis, "Eastern Orthodox Thought," 105.

36 Clodovis Boff, *Teologia e Prática* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1982).

37 Richard Shaull was a North American missionary working in Latin America. On completing his studies at Princeton in 1941, under the influence of John Mackay, he was sent to Colombia by the Board of World Missions of the Presbyterian Church USA

Union Chapter in a periphery of Sao Paulo and he lived in a communal house in a working class neighborhood with seminary students and manual workers, where, in addition to group bible study, the house provided adult literacy classes to manual workers.<sup>38</sup> He had previously done something similar while a missionary in Colombia. Latin America is littered with examples like Shaull in the twentieth century. However, Shaull's Christian praxis, while committed to the struggles for justice and the use of the social sciences, was actually rooted in the theology of Karl Barth. Shaull's Christian praxis, sometimes erroneously interpreted as a form of Christian socialism, is in fact the proposal of a 'third way'—a Christian way—between capitalism and socialism.

Instead of bringing Sergius Bulgakov and Liberation theologians together—as Papanikolaou 'anticipates'—the question of Christian socialism as a viable and tenable vision is deeply contested within Liberation Theology. Shaull's example and theology contest it. Moreover, it is also deeply contested, in part, due to the third factor identified by Papanikolaou, namely the atheist premise underpinning some Marxist (and Christian) visions of humanism and human freedom. Furthermore, it is deeply contested in some parts of Liberation Theology because it is a 'Western' import into the region.

The use of the social sciences—heavily advocated by Liberation theologians—is technically known as 'social analytic mediation'. It is always recognized as the *a priori* to the theological task proper. However, there is considerable confusion about the relationship between theology and the social sciences in Liberation Theology today, and the role of the social analytic mediation played by the social sciences in the theological task. This confusion is not unique to Liberation Theology and is perhaps indicative of wider symptoms troubling theology today.

Pantelis Kalaitzidis attributes the reticence of Orthodox Theology to engage with the social sciences as a direct consequence of the dominant paradigm of "Return to the Fathers" (a form of de-Westernization) in twentieth-century Orthodoxy at a time when other theological trends were grappling with modern

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(PCUSA). He worked for eight years in Colombia amidst rural and urban poverty, finally settling in a favela in Barranquilla. From there he organized workers in factories, developed a national literacy course, and built houses in rural areas. He left Colombia (reluctantly) in 1950 and then decided to study at Union Theological Seminary in New York under Reinhold Niebuhr, completing his doctorate at Princeton under Paul Lehmann. Shaull attributes his interest in Latin America to John Mackay, and his interest in social revolution to the theology of Paul Lehmann. He was Rubem Alves' teacher.

38 Richard Shaull, *Surpreendido pela Graça*. (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2003), 120–22.

biblical studies, social sciences, hermeneutics, and contextual theologies.<sup>39</sup> In other words, Orthodox Theology turns from the Sophiology of Soloviev and Bulgakov to the neo-Patristic synthesis of Florovsky and Lossky at the same time that Liberation Theology is turning from Scholastic theology to the social sciences. Does Bulgakov simply fall between the cracks of both movements?

Yes and no, is probably the answer to this question. Bulgakov clearly conceives of theology differently from Liberation theologians. Bulgakov foregrounds the study of specific doctrines in his trilogy—*The Lamb of God*, *The Bride of the Lamb*, and *The Comforter*—addressing Christology, Ecclesiology, and Pneumatology on the basis of sophiological insights.<sup>40</sup> Christology, Ecclesiology and Pneumatology are favorites of Liberation Theology, too, with notable contributions from Jon Sobrino and Leonardo Boff.<sup>41</sup> However, for the most part, Liberation theologians do not foreground the study of specific doctrines. This is because of ‘the option for the poor’, or emphasis on Christian praxis. Nor do they base theology on sophiological insights. Rather, Liberation Theology foregrounds the ‘non-person’ and it sets out to describe the experience of God based on the ‘non-person’.<sup>42</sup>

This different conception of theology has not prevented fruitful engagement between Sergius Bulgakov’s theology and Liberation Theology. Bulgakov’s influence is often subtle, and is mainly derived ‘second-hand’ by way of Paul Evdokimov’s theology. Paul Valliere notes that Leonardo Boff engages with Bulgakov’s sophiology and Evdokimov’s use of Bulgakov’s sophiology in articulating the *theotokos*. Boff’s book, *The Maternal Face of God*, reflects on the feminine revelation and salvation of God—a discussion that he frames as *theotokos*.<sup>43</sup> It is clearly partly derived from Evdokimov’s discussion in his book, *La Mujer y la Salvacion del Mundo*.<sup>44</sup> It is less clear from Boff’s engagement

39 Pantelis Kalaitzidis, *Orthodoxy and Political Theology* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 76.

40 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008); Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (ibid., 2004) and Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (ibid., 2001).

41 Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroad* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002) and Leonardo Boff, *Igreja: Carisma e Poder*. (Petropolis: Vozes, 1981). Specific discussions of the Holy Spirit normally appear in reflections on Spirituality. Hugo Assmann, Leonardo Boff, Segundo Galileu, Ivone Gebara, Pablo Richard, and Jon Sobrino, amongst others, have contributed to a vast literature on Liberation Spirituality.

42 Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Verdade vos Libertará* (São Paulo, Loyola, 2000), 22.

43 Leonardo Boff, *The Maternal Face of God* (London: Collins, 1989).

44 Paul Evdokimov, *La Mujer e la Salvacion del Mundo* (Salamanca: Sigueme, 1980).

with Evdokimov that he is in any way directly aware of Bulgakov's sophiology influencing Evdokimov's discussion.<sup>45</sup>

## Silences

The silence in Liberation Theology with regard to Sergius Bulgakov does not indicate an absence, as the previous section demonstrated. However, the silence is surprising for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is an established Russian diaspora in Latin America. Russian literature (in translation) circulates widely in the region with Dostoevsky being a particular favorite among the Latin American cultural elites. Secondly, while Bulgakov is often overlooked, Berdiaev's works are influential in political and theological circles in Latin America. Thirdly, Bulgakov's political theology discusses themes widely resonant in Liberation Theology.

The silence is not surprising if Juan Lios Segundo's Liberation Theology is the framework. He intentionally produces a 'theology for atheists'. Bulgakov's theological intent—a religious solution to the ills besetting Russia—is of no interest to a theologian like Segundo, who lives in the most atheist society in Latin America.<sup>46</sup> Bulgakov, of course, after flirting with Marxism, developed a theology decidedly absent of 'atheist premise', instead rooted in the Divine-Human ideas of Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus, the Confessor, John of Damascus, and given expression in the Sophiology of Vladimir Soloviev. Segundo moves his theology in a decidedly different direction in Latin America: "I will not hide from the reader that I feel seduced by the idea to revisit—with more logic and method, if possible—the task proposed by Milan Machovec: to write a Jesus for atheists. In other words, to tear from religion or its theoretical interpretation (theology) the monopoly of interest and explanation about Jesus."<sup>47</sup>

Segundo's silence is indicative of the wider silence in Liberation Theology with regard to Sergius Bulgakov.<sup>48</sup>

45 Boff, *The Maternal Face of God*, 78.

46 For the avoidance of doubt, the theology of J. L. Segundo has no interest in re-Christianizing Uruguay, or bringing religion back to Uruguay.

47 Juan Luis Segundo, *A História Perdida e Recuperada de Jesus de Nazaré* (São Paulo: Paulus, 1997), 8. My translation. In the English translation of Machovec's book, the title is "Jesus for Marxists". In Latin America—in both Spanish and Portuguese—the title is changed slightly to "Jesus for Atheists". For this reason, Juan Luis Segundo writes about Jesus for Atheists.

48 The silence is even more intriguing due to the "French connection" in the formation and experience of many of the first generation of liberation theologians. It is also sur-

The silence on the sophiology of Bulgakov is worthy of note. Based on Soloviev's sophiology—where the Sophia is sometimes she, sometimes he, sometimes it—the recent Feminist and Queer Liberation theologies would be enriched by engaging Bulgakov's sophiology. For Liberation Theology, exploration of the body of God and the human body have been fundamental.<sup>49</sup> However, largely, with the exception of Juan Luis Segundo and later Marcella Althaus-Reid, Liberation Theology assimilated Western philosophical groundings of personhood (French existentialism) and continues to make use of social analytic mediation to critique Phallocentric Theology. Bulgakov's sophiology offers an altogether unexplored theological theme for Feminist and Queer Liberation Theologies.

## Conclusion

In this short chapter, I have pointed to themes from Sergius Bulgakov's theology that appear in Liberation Theology. I have also indicated where some Liberation Theologians have engaged with Bulgakov in a more direct (or mediated) way. The work of Paul Evdokimov and Nikolai Berdiaev being of special note for Liberation Theologians. Despite the overlap of theological themes, the theological methodology of Bulgakov and Liberation Theology appear quite distinct. In particular, while Bulgakov appears concerned to offer a specifically Christian response to modernity, Liberation Theology opts to adopt and integrate aspects of modernity, including atheism, into its theological project. This places Liberation Theology firmly within the Western sphere of theology, even as a decolonial theology. Bulgakov's approach is Eastern, and at varying moments of his work, he is not shy in commenting on Western theology and its deficiencies. Those critiques would largely apply to Liberation Theology too.

However, it would be wrong to dismiss the links between Bulgakov's theological endeavors and Liberation Theology's praxis. Indeed, I think that Sergius Bulgakov and Liberation Theology can appear as ships in the theological night.

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prising because liberation theologians are aware of Russian theology and appear to read Russian theology even if they do not always quote Russian theologians in their own work. For example, pastoral agents working with the poor translated *The Russian Pilgrim into Portuguese*, and José Comblin introduces the translation. Furthermore, the Dominican theologian (and journalist) Frei Betto (more recently anti-poverty advisor to President Lula da Silva in Brazil) spent extensive time in Russia studying and networking during the 'Cold War'.

49 Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* (London: SCM, 2004).

Not as ships passing each other silently in opposite directions, but ships sailing silently in the same theological waters (in parallel) in isolation of each other. Ripples are felt now and again, but neither ship is sure of where those ripples come from. Both conceive the theological night differently and therefore each ship can easily misread the stars that chart the course as they make their way towards the Divine reality.