

# All Things Shining: Sergii Bulgakov's Theology of Beauty

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*"Oh, my soul. Let me be in you now. Look out through my eyes. Look out at the things you made. All things shining."*

—Terrence Malick, *The Thin Red Line* (1998)

*"It seems frightening to place the salvation of the world upon beauty."*

—Vladimir Solovyev, *"Beauty in Nature"*<sup>1</sup>

Everything is more than itself. Everything shines. It shines because all things are transparent; and beauty, glory is the shining of God through all things: *theophaneia*. Our essay will explore in Bulgakov's theology the structure of this shining, in both God and creation, in both the Divine and the Creaturely Sophias. This structure is the fundamental iconicity of all of reality. For Bulgakov, iconicity and beauty, considered together, are quite simply the process of salvation as divinization.<sup>2</sup>

## Iconicity, Trinity, and the Divine Sophia

Bulgakov tied this common experience of the shining of beauty to "the image and radiance of Divine glory." For him "earthly beauty" was "the sheen [*otblesk*: reflection] of heavenly, sophianic beauty."<sup>3</sup> Divine or Heavenly Beauty was divine being (Sophia-ousia) or the love of God as Trinity. According to Bulgakov, the Absolute God exists as a Tri-hypostatic uni-substantial Spirit, Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity. This fully

hypostatized unknowable divine essence—Sophia—is his pre-eternal unchangeable bliss.<sup>4</sup> To be God is to be free but this freedom is a necessary reality for God insofar as he is the pure act of love as self-positing (*actus purissimus*). This perfect unchangeable bliss of God is his free but necessary act of revealing himself to himself as a Trinity of self-giving, self-exhausting, self-emptying hypostases in and by his common *ousia* of love. God's *ousia* or divinity (*theotes*) is the Divine Sophia who is his pre-eternal activity (*actus purissimus*) of loving himself as Trinity: "But such self-positing of itself in the Other and through the Other is *Love as an efficacious act*, the ontology of love."<sup>5</sup> God is love, and, as Love, he is the Holy Trinity."<sup>6</sup> God's divine nature, being as love, is transparent to the hypostases that live in and by it.

Sophia is described, in a phrase lifted from Solovyev, as God's own "divine world."<sup>7</sup> Being the divine world, Sophia is God's life and power as wisdom, glory and divine corporeality rich with "the pan-organism of ideas, the organism of the ideas of all about all

<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Solov'ev, "Beauty in Nature" in Vladimir Wozniuk, ed. and trans., *The Heart of Reality: Essays on Beauty, Love, and Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 29.

<sup>2</sup> See Teresa Obolevitch and Randall A. Poole, eds., *Evgenii Trubetskoi: Ion and Philosophy* (Eugene: Pickwick Pub, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 260.

<sup>4</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 222–23.

and in all” which are the “pre-eternal proto-images [*pervoobrazy*: prototypes] of creation” upon which the world is planned and ordered, which he possesses as his own particular content.<sup>8</sup> Sophia in the life of love of the divine hypostases is imprinted with the Son’s image through the love of the Spirit between the Father and the Son. This is the proto-image of the heavenly man or “Godmanhood/divine humanity” (*Bogochelovechestvo*), which is divine, after the *Logos*, and human, after Sophia who is divine corporeality as the pre-eternal and all-embracing essence of human corporeality.

Another way Bulgakov articulates Sophia is as the icon of Divinity, the eternal Idea (*ideia*)-Image/Type (*obraz*)-Icon (*ikona*) of God (these terms are often used interchangeably) and the content of the Prototype/Proto-image of God as Trinity. The Father is the Proto-principle (*Pervonachalo*) and Proto-image (*Pervoobraz*) of God, inexpressible mystery, and he is revealed through his “two hands” (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.6.1), the “dyad” or “bi-unity of the Image of God,” the Son and Spirit. The Father as Proto-image reveals himself in the begetting of the Son as the perfect Image of the Father, but this happens through the Son being overshadowed by the Spirit in the procession of the Spirit from the Father, so that we can say the Spirit is the Image of the Son. But when we look at the image of God in its content or essence, we see that it is identical to the Proto-image of the Father and is the life of Divinity and the Proto-image for creation, and this is the Divine Sophia: “This icon of Divinity in himself is his self-revelation, the absolute content of Divine life, in the Word of all words (‘All things were made by him’), accomplished by the life-giving Spirit [. . .] the living and life-giving Idea of all ideas in their perfect

all-unity and perfect all-reality, and therefore it is the Divine world, or the world in God, before its creation [. . .] called *Hokhmah*, Sophia, the Wisdom of God”<sup>9</sup>

### Divine Sophia as Divine Glory: Trinity and Self-Revelation

This theology of the image of God as a dyadic self-revelation of the Father God through his Son and Spirit underlies Bulgakov’s theology of divine glory, for Sophia is “divine glory” or the “glory of God.”<sup>10</sup> God’s glory exists quite apart from creation. It is God’s life before the foundation of the world, as Christ himself says in his High Priestly Prayer: “Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made” (John 17:5). But glory is always glory concerning something and in this case it is God’s glory “about his Divinity which is being revealed,” that is, God takes joy or delights in himself, in seeing himself in Beauty, in contemplating his own self-revelation as Wisdom.

But God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has a particular ontological order of his hypostases with the assumption of the Father as God proper (*ho Theos*) or the *monarchos* of the Trinity and of his “self-revelation” of himself as Father God to and by himself as Son and Spirit, equally God.<sup>11</sup> God the Father first reveals himself to himself in Sophia as the Wisdom of the Word, self-knowledge, and he does this by revealing himself in Sophia in the second hypostasis, the *Logos*. But then God’s self-revelation as Divine Glory follows on his self-revelation as Wisdom because God takes glory in himself as Wisdom. Thus God’s self-revelation as Glory reposes as it were on his self-revelation as Wisdom. But if God’s self-revelation

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<sup>5</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, trans. Christopher Bamford et al. (Hudson: Lindisfarne, 1993), 23-36.

<sup>6</sup> Sergii Bulgakov, “Главы о Троичности,” *Православная мысль*, 1 (1928): 68.

<sup>7</sup> Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 101ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 112 and 126 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>9</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Icons and the Name of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 52–53. Trans. modified.

<sup>10</sup> Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 108.

<sup>11</sup> See Joshua Heath, “Sergii Bulgakov’s Linguistic Trinity,” *Modern Theology*, 37.4 (October 2021): 888–912 and compare Brandon Gallaher, “Antinomism, Trinity and the Challenge of Solov’evan Pantheism in the Theology of Sergij Bulgakov,” *Studies in East European Thought*, 64.3-4 (2012): 205–25.

in Wisdom is in the Logos then it follows that his self-glorification of himself as glory about Wisdom is his self-revelation in the Holy Spirit as the third hypostasis: “In other words, *Sophia as Glory belongs to the Holy Spirit*.”<sup>12</sup> The Son or Word and the Spirit, as was said above, form a dyad and “bi-unity”; the Spirit reposing on the Word (God revealing himself to and by himself as Wisdom and a Glory about that Wisdom) reveals in Sophia the Father God so that when we say the prayer “Thine is the kingdom [Father], the power [Son], and the glory [Spirit]” (Matt. 6:13) we are speaking of the complete self-revelation in love of the Holy Trinity. In short, the Divine Sophia as God’s essence or *ousia*, being both Wisdom and Glory, is the “self-revelation in *bi-unity*” of the Son and Spirit as God of the Father God, that is, “she is the self-revelation of the Holy Trinity as the Father in the Son and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>13</sup>

### Iconicity and The Creaturely Sophia: Image/Type and Proto-Image/Prototype

“God” is not only the Absolute, the immanent Trinity, but he is also the Absolute as Relative, the economic Trinity. He exists, in the sense of divine *energy*, by a freedom where he can remain himself in renouncing the bliss of his essence by changing the mode by which he enacts that essence, entering into becoming as “a special form of the *fullness* of being.” God limits himself by embracing change and process in the creation and redemption of the world, and in this way reveals himself not only eternally to himself but in the world as well as Wisdom and a Glory about Wisdom.<sup>14</sup> God as the Absolute-Relative limits himself in the manifestation of his Divinity. Indeed, God sacrificially limits himself “in the name of love for creation” creating the

world by pouring forth outside of his limits into becoming or “extra-divine but divinely posited non-being, i.e. creation.”<sup>15</sup> Creation, as the spilling out of the love of God into nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) is described by Bulgakov as the mixing with nothing or “immersion in ‘becoming’” of the divine Sophia (as the “Prototype of creation”) in the “capacity of created Sophia.”<sup>16</sup> Put otherwise, God hypostatically establishes his own essence or being, his proper divine world, his eternal beauty or glory, the divine Sophia, as “becoming divinity.”<sup>17</sup>

If the Divine Sophia is the icon of Divinity or eternal Proto-image then the creaturely Sophia or the world as the Divine Sophia immersed in becoming is the “creaturely icon of Divinity” or the image reflected from the proto-image. All the eternal proto-images of the world contained in the Proto-image of Sophia are “seeded” in the creaturely Sophia. God’s relationship to creation is founded on iconicity just as his eternal life can be understood iconically. It can be seen as an eternal-temporal reflection of the divine glory, proto-image shining down to worldly type or image: “In general, all *iconicity* is based on this relation between the trihypostatic God and His Image, the Word of God, which is the world’s Proto-image in Divinity Itself, and on the relation of the world’s Proto-image to the world as its creaturely image.”<sup>18</sup>

The Spirit, as the “Spirit of Beauty”, has a unique role to play in creation. The Holy Spirit goes out of the eternity of the Godhead, where he is dependent on the Son as the hypostatic love of Father and Son, and “becomes, as it were, the becoming of the world, the realization of its content,” as the Father’s love for his Son in and through creation.<sup>19</sup> In becoming the becoming

<sup>12</sup> Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 110.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>16</sup> Bulgakov, “A Summary of Sophiology,” appendix to “Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov: Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the *Unfading Light*,” trans. Brandon Gallaher et al., *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 49:1–2 (2005): 43.

<sup>17</sup> Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 126.

<sup>18</sup> Bulgakov, *Icons*, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Bulgakov, *Lamb of God*, 130.

of the world, the Spirit clothes nature in beauty, grounds its images of the Created Sophia in the pre-eternal proto-images of the Divine Sophia so that one may say that “beauty is the exteriorized sophianicity of creation that ‘clothes’ the latter; it is the reflection of the eternal mystical light of the Divine Sophia.”<sup>20</sup>

### Iconicity and Divinization: “Beauty Will Save the World”

The process of creation and indeed redemption as love can also be viewed as the general process of *entheosis* or divinization by which God, as the Proto-image of creation, the Divine Sophia, becomes “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28) in the world, the Created Sophia, as image. We shall use divinization as a framework for exploring in Bulgakov’s thought the generation of beauty as iconicity and iconization. Since the nature of God is Godmanhood, Divine Sophia, as proto-image, being divine humanity, one can interpret *entheosis* as the gradual accomplishment of Godmanhood in the world through the image of the Creaturely Sophia being raised to union with its proto-image. Quite understandably, given that God in essence is Godmanhood, this entheotic process takes form above all in humanity or Man who is a “concentrated world” or microcosm. As the summit of creation, humanity itself, as an “anthropocosmos,” reflects God’s headship. Man bears the image of God or the sophianic proto-image of Godmanhood in his hypostasis “whereby created Wisdom lies.”<sup>21</sup> As Bulgakov put it: “Man is a microcosm; he unites within himself the world; humanity contains the image of the world; it is the *eikon of eikons*, for it is the image of God.”<sup>22</sup>

Man realizes in beauty, as the “artist of the world,”<sup>23</sup> the likeness of this im-

age in his freedom. Indeed, man was and is called to transfigure the world, to beautify it by his work, to re-create in the world that which pre-exists in the divine world,<sup>24</sup> raising the image to its divine proto-image so that created types/images/forms become wholly transparent to the uncreated proto-images contained in the divine world of Sophia just as the being or love of God of the Divine Sophia is wholly transparent to the hypostases. In short, man as God’s beautifier, cooperating with the Spirit, is called sophianically to unite the divine and created Sophias in himself, type uniting with prototype, image aligned with proto-image. In the context of the fall, this sophianic economy takes the form of participating in the divine regeneration of creation in Christ in the Church by being bearers of the light of the resurrection in a dark world.

### Iconicity and Art

Given that God is iconic and the structure of reality reflects God’s fundamental iconicity, proto-image reflecting in its image, glory shining out and blazing into creaturely beauty, Bulgakov sees that all things in creation have an inner order or interiority—perceptible form or image. This immanent order refers to an eternal proto-image of the entity, the proto-image becoming embodied in it to the extent that the entity is transparent to its divine foundation. Bulgakov sees nature and art as being structured iconically, and so it is not surprising that “Beauty in nature and beauty in art” are seen as “manifestations of divine Sophia, of the Soul of the world” and said to “have one essence.”<sup>25</sup> The artist fashions images or icons (on the level of the Created Sophia) which are beautiful because they are “ideas which have become transparent” to uncreated “rays of the

<sup>20</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 202.

<sup>21</sup> Bulgakov, “Summary,” 43.

<sup>22</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, “Religion and Art” in *The Church of God*, ed. E. L. Mascall (London: SPCK, 1934), 181.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>24</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy*, trans. Catherine Evtuhov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 145ff.

<sup>25</sup> Bulgakov, *Unfading Light*, 261.

truth of things, their ideas" (divine Sophia). The artist, to borrow an image from Wordsworth, "see[s] into the life of things,"<sup>26</sup> and Bulgakov calls this the "inward aspect of the object [. . .] the primordial idea of the object." The work of art represents the "ideal form" and through "this transparency of the idea reproduced in an artistic manner" there is a process that "transforms it into Beauty." The artist is revealing things, uttering and showing forth things kept hidden from the foundation of the world (Psalm 78:2, Matt. 13:35), that is, he reveals the eternal proto-images blazing out in beauty in the poem or painting. But going yet further, since art is human and personal, the artist, for Bulgakov, becomes the "focus" of "all the rays of beauty of the whole world" converging on him as "creator of the world's symbols." Art, therefore, is said to be a "revelation in beauty" both in the world and in man himself insofar as it is "the self-revelation of man as the image of God" echoing "the world in its ideal thought-images."

Bulgakov, being influenced by Russian symbolism, sees this transparency of all reality to God and the divine archetypes, which is crucial for understanding beauty and glory, in the form of symbolism. The artist unites the created form "with its objective meaning, its *idea*, that the two are merged into one" so that all art is a living symbol of "the ideal foundation of the world and of its empirical reality, about which a great poet (Goethe) said: '*Alles vergängliche ist nur ein Zeichniss* [All things transitory are only symbols].'"<sup>27</sup> Here he appeals to the first two of the last eight lines from *Faust*, where the "Chorus Mysticus" famously closes with the words, "*Das Ewigweibliche/ Zieht uns hinan* [The Eternal Feminine/ Draws us upwards]", which, for Bulgakov,

clearly would have a link to the Divine Sophia.<sup>28</sup> Alternatively, Bulgakov speaks of the basic task of art being the "iconization of being" by revealing the word, idea, or thought-icon of reality. He plays on Aristotle's famous description of humanity as a *zōon politikon* (*Politics*, I.ii, 1253a1) and states that Man is "an artistic being"<sup>29</sup> insofar as he is both "*Zōon poiētikon*" and "*eikonikon*."<sup>30</sup> As an iconic animal, he first sees the images of all that exists in reality (*Zōon eikonikon*) by receiving them into himself and reflecting them "to the extent they themselves ask to enter him" but then having taken them into his being "he also creatively assimilates and reproduces them" as a poetic or iconizing or symbolizing animal. Humanity's reflection is in no way passive but active: "Man actively participates in this iconization of being. [. . .] *In and through himself* he finds the icons of things, for he himself is in this sense the *pan-icon* of the world."<sup>31</sup>

The iconographer, above all, has the capacity of "noetic seeing" or the vision of the idea of the thing or person being iconized, the whole "world of noetic beauty," then recreating it in paint.<sup>32</sup> Every icon has three levels of reflection, levels of beauty, which the iconographer must mediate and witness to spiritually. The iconographer recognizes first the thing being iconized and the physical icon of that thing and then, secondly, the original thing itself and its proto-image which dwells in the thing (both of these are on the level of the creaturely Sophia). Finally, the iconographer perceives the "eternal proto-image" as it exists in God's divine world of eternal ideas-thoughts (the level of the Divine Sophia). In short, the iconographer is a visionary peering into the very heart of reality, which is the heart of God: "the artistic icon is the icon of the real icon of the ideal thought-image."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>26</sup> William Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," in *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.49, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Bulgakov, "Religion and Art," 179–81.

<sup>28</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust: Eine Tragödie*, ed. Günther Fetzer (München: DTV, 1977), 351.

<sup>29</sup> Bulgakov, *Icons*, 43–44.

<sup>30</sup> Bulgakov, "Religion and Art," 181.

<sup>31</sup> Bulgakov, *Icons*, 43.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–50.

## Becoming Transparent to God: Divinization

But turning back to the stages of *entheosis*, we must remember that man in his freedom stumbles when faced with temptation and falls, thus obscuring the image of God that is only restored to its full glory by the incarnation. In Christ, one has not only the redemption of man but his deification. Christ's perfect humanity, which is the created Sophia, "becomes completely transparent" to his perfect deity or the Divine Proto-image, the Divine Sophia which has "kenotically adapt[ed] itself to the measure set by the created Sophia."<sup>34</sup> In other words, in Christ the created Sophia, as Image, is glorified or deified by being raised by the Spirit to its Heavenly Proto-image, the Divine Sophia, in the hypostatic union. If one can say that the world was created based on the love of God then it would be just as accurate to say this also in regard to the incarnation, which is "the second and concluding act of the creation of the world." Redemption, therefore, is not understood merely forensically; in and by redemption God purposely divinizes the created by supplementing with his own eternity that which is lacking in creaturely becoming. Man is called from all eternity in the divine counsel to be saved in Christ as the Lamb slain before the creation of the world and this call "to become Godmanhood [. . .] is also the primordial foundation of creation."<sup>35</sup>

However the entheotic process is not accomplished exclusively by the Son in the incarnation; the Father reveals wisdom (Sophia) concerning the Son through the glory about that wisdom accomplished by the Holy Spirit, as the "Spirit of Beauty."<sup>36</sup> Thus, at Pentecost, a "union between heaven and earth, between God and the crea-

ture," is effected "in the hypostasis of the Spirit." The Spirit brings into the world the life of Christ, bringing into a real remembrance the teaching of the Lord in his Church, the Body of Christ, whereby the world is led to the second coming and its general transfiguration and resurrection. The Church is not only the community of believers in Christ but the theandric reality of the Divine Sophia in the Creaturely Sophia, the Proto-image united with its Image. Man is saved, that is, sanctified and deified, in this Body by participating in the hypostatic union. The image of God which man bears as the summit of the Created Sophia as Image is raised to the level of, or identified with, its Proto-image in the Divine Sophia "in the same way as the two natures were united in Christ."<sup>37</sup> In this way, God becomes "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28), beginning in the Church and spreading out to embrace the whole created cosmos until the Kingdom comes and there is only the glory of God and the lamp of the Lamb (Rev. 21:23). Thus, the Church is the privileged site of the Sophianic world process by which God becomes all in all or, more technically, the process by which the Created and Divine Sophia, Image and Proto-image, are perfectly united. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, for Bulgakov, the inner life of God, Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity, and the Divine Economy can be understood as a process of sophianic iconization, elaborating the famous maxim of Dostoyevsky that "Beauty will save the world."<sup>38</sup>

### Beauty and the Divine Liturgy

Bulgakov's whole theological vision was "Ecclesial/Churchly" (*tserkovnii*) in a sophianic sense because he saw the Church as the privileged site of the transfiguration of the world, seen

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<sup>34</sup> Bulgakov, "Summary," 44.

<sup>35</sup> Bulgakov, *Агнец Божий* (Moscow: Общедоступный Православный Университет, 2000), 364 [my own translation—sentence missed by translator: *Lamb of God*, 344].

<sup>36</sup> Bulgakov, *Comforter*, 201.

<sup>37</sup> Bulgakov, "Summary," 45–46.

<sup>38</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Constance Garnett (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Classics, 1996), 356.

above all in the Divine Liturgy, which he understood as simultaneously an ascent of earth to heaven and a descent of heaven to earth. Sophianically, in Christ at his Theophany, where the Word of the Father proclaims him as his beloved Son (the Wisdom and Power of God) and this Word is confirmed by the Spirit resting on him as divine Glory about that Wisdom, one has the perfect unity in diversity of the Created Sophia (worldly beauty—type/image) and the Uncreated Divine Sophia (the divine glory—prototype/proto-image). Liturgy, and above all the Eucharist, is also just such a unity in diversity of beauty and glory, a theophanic moment of God revealing himself gloriously in and by the community, his Living Body, the Church.<sup>39</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, a student of Bulgakov, in his masterful memorial sketch of Bulgakov “Three Images,” argues forcefully for Bulgakov’s Orthodoxy precisely on the basis of the liturgical rootedness of his theological vision of beauty. Sophiology, quite simply, is a liturgical theology of beauty and the vehicle of beauty is iconicity.<sup>40</sup> Here is Schmemmann’s third memory of Bulgakov where he describes the glory, the unearthly beauty of Bulgakov’s early morning Thursday liturgies he attended weekly with Matushka Juliana Schmemmann:<sup>41</sup>

The third memory I have of Father Sergii, the third image, is not related to a brief moment in time, nor to one brief encounter with him. This memory is of Father Sergii standing before the altar, serving the Liturgy. In his last years, because of his illness and the absence of a voice, he served only early morning liturgies. Because of the apparatus which was substituting for his throat, he served in very light white vestments. What do I remember here? I will say—not

the “beauty” of his serving, for, if by beauty you mean rhythm and fluidity of movements, or intentional solemnity, “dexterity,” in this case we have to say that Father Sergii served, well, “not beautifully” at all. He never learned to cense properly. And there was in all his movements something angular and jerky, precisely not fluid and not rhythmic. But, speaking about his serving, remembering it, you cannot avoid but use the awkward and ponderous old Church Slavonic expression: Father Sergii served, indeed, *liturgized*. But there was in that very stiffness and in those abrupt gestures something that returned to the origins, that joined itself to the forces of nature, that took after an ancient pagan priest or Old Testamental high priest. He did not only perform a “settled” rite, traditional in all its details. He dissolved in it to its ends, to its very limits and one had the impression that the liturgy was celebrated for the first time, fell from heaven and was raised up from the earth for the first time. The Bread and the Chalice on the altar, the flame of the candles, the smoke of the incense, those hands raised towards heaven: all that was not merely a “service.” Something was celebrated there for the whole of the created world, something pre-eternal, cosmic—“terrible and glorious,” in the Slavonic sense of these liturgical words. And it seemed to me that it is not by accident that the writings of Father Sergii are so often made heavy, it seems, by liturgical slavonicisms; they resonate so often themselves with the distinctive glorifications of the divine services. Here this is not a stylization. For the theology of Father Sergii, at its depths, is precisely and above all “litur-

<sup>39</sup> See Andrew Louth, “The Eucharist in the Theology of Fr. Sergii Bulgakov,” *Sobornost*, 27.2 (2005): 36–56 and Mark Roosien, “The Common Task: Eucharist, Social Action, and the Continuity of Bulgakov’s Thought,” *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies*, 3.1 (2020): 71–88.

<sup>40</sup> See Andrew Louth, “Sergii Bulgakov and the Task of Theology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 74.3 (August 2009): 243–57.

<sup>41</sup> See Brandon Gallaher, “Bulgakov’s Ecumenical Thought,” *Sobornost*, 24.1 (2002): 25–26.

gical”—it is the revelation of an experience received in the divine services, the transmission of this mysterious “glory” which penetrates the entire worship, of this holy sacramental “mystery” in which it is rooted and of which it is “the epiphany.” The manifestation of God but also of the world such as God created it, of the divine roots of creation destined to be filled with God, that God may be in it as “all in all.” It appears to me—but what can I “prove scientifically”?—that it is precisely the reality, the complete and utter assurance of this liturgical experience, that was first in the life of Father Sergii, that “pushed” him to search for new words and definitions, and it is there, and not in books or the influences of ideas, that the true source of his “sophiology” can be found. No matter what Father Sergii may have later “built” about this notion, defining it theologically, bringing it back to “Sophia,” what is first and authentic here is the experience—which is truly Orthodox!—of the divine service, of the liturgy as “heaven on earth,” as a revelation of “sophianicity,” of “goodness” transfigured, of the beauty of creation.

And this is why his best pages are not those in which he endeavours to “define” in substance the indefinable “hypostasisless” Sophia—but those that reflect the light and the joy of his experience and vision of the divine services.<sup>42</sup>

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### Conclusion: The Cultivation of God’s Glory

Bulgakov saw creation as the objective showing forth of things in beauty, apprehended subjectively by man. This showing forth of things is understood as those things’ mysterious transparency to the divine depths, to the eternal proto-images or groundless ground of created reality. This beauty could therefore only be understood in the Trinitarian event of revelation in Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected according to the Scriptures in the midst of creation, creating thereby a new Eden, the Church, which radiates the divine glory. Part of being a Christian is the cultivation of God’s glory through worship; above all it is in the liturgy where we discover the awe and the beauty, the participation in the divine energies which divinize, making us with our brothers and sisters in Christ into icons of the Holy Trinity. ✱

<sup>42</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, “Три образа,” *Вестник РСХД* 101–2 (III–IV 1971): 18–19.



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