

Orthodox Panentheism: Sergius Bulgakov's Sophiology

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1. Theism, Pantheism, Panentheism, Monotheism

Not only the use of language as a whole but also its philosophical use is changing all the time. For example, some philosophers start to use a certain philosophical term in a sense which is not at all its original sense. In this sense, they *misuse* the term; but instead of censuring this, others imitate them; the misuse catches on, and soon the misuse becomes normal, and thus ceases to be a misuse—at least within certain philosophical circles. This is what happened to the term »phenomenology«: formerly, it was used by philosophers—very properly, in view of its etymology—to designate a human science which is dedicated to *the description of the phenomena* (of some stripe or other); nowadays, many philosophers use it exclusively for designating something which, presumably, not only humans but also mice, bats, and even bugs have: *phenomenology* (i.e., conscious experience, which is full of *what-it-is-like*).

And this—the replacement of the original use of a term by its misuse, which then becomes normal and ceases to be a misuse—is precisely what seems to be happening to the term »theism« these days. Formerly, it was used by philosophers—again, very properly—to designate a position which acknowledges *the existence of at least one god*. In fact, the present use of the term in such combinations as »polytheism,« »monotheism,« »henotheism,« or »tritheism« in no way contradicts this former use, and one would expect that the same is true of its use in the combinations »pantheism« and »panentheism.« *But no:* Quite a few philosophers nowadays believe that *pantheism* and *panentheism* are so far from entailing *theism* that these positions entail *the negation of theism*—also known (formerly at least) as *atheism*.

Contrary to this somewhat infelicitous replacement of an original meaning by a new meaning (a replacement which can seem to turn pious Spinoza into an *atheist*), I will describe a version of pantheism/panentheism which is not only, in the old sense, *theistic* (as is Spinoza's version of pantheism/panentheism) but also *prosopon-theistic* (as Spinoza's is not): a version which acknowledges a *personal* god, but *no* impersonal god. What I have in mind is the Christian panentheism of the Russian-Orthodox philosopher-theologian

Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944). Bulgakov's speculative theology, as will be seen, is thoroughly Christian and at the same time thoroughly panentheistic. In a sense which will become plain, it is a panentheism which is *orthodox* according to the Abrahamic tradition (what Spinoza's panentheism is not), and even *orthodox* according to the *Christian* tradition; it is another question whether Bulgakov's panentheism is also *Orthodox* (it certainly is not quite *Roman Catholic*).

Note that it does not matter much whether one says »panentheism« or »pantheism«; for if these two terms are accorded their most reasonable interpretations, then they—and, of course, also the corresponding adjectives »panentheistic« and »pantheistic«—are logically equivalent. It cannot be that there is a god with whom everything is identical; otherwise (by the logical laws of identity) *this table* would be identical with *this shoe*, which is plainly not the case. And it cannot be that everything is a god: plainly, neither *this table* nor *this shoe* is a god. Thus, two *prima facie* possible interpretations of the term »pantheism« are simply absurd. The most reasonable interpretation of it is this: »pantheism« designates the doctrine that *the world* is a god. Now, it is natural to understand the term »the world« in its most comprehensive sense, the sense according to which *everything is in the world*. Indeed, it is mandatory to understand it in this way if one wishes to interpret the term »pantheism« by making use of the term »the world«; if one used a less comprehensive sense of the term »the world,« then one would not do justice to the meaning of the word »pan« in »pantheism.« It follows that *pantheism entails panentheism*: If the world is a god, as pantheism holds, then—because *everything is in the world* (which is an analytic, broadly logical truth)—everything is in a god,¹ just as panentheism holds. It also follows that *panentheism entails pantheism*: If everything is in a god, as panentheism holds, then—because *everything is in the world*—that god (in whom everything is) and the world (in which everything is) are in each other; which can be *literally true*—*literalness* being required at this level of abstract metaphysical discourse—only if they are (numerically) identical; hence the world is a god, just as pantheism holds.

Note also that panentheism (and therefore also its logical equivalent: pantheism) entails monotheism with respect to the concept of an *all-including* god (though *not* with respect to the concept of a god *simpliciter*). According to panentheism there is an all-including god: *g*; suppose there is another

1 »Everything is in a god« is here to be taken in its logically strong interpretation: *Some god is such that everything is in him (her, it)*, not in its weak interpretation: *Everything is such that it is in some god*. Only the logically strong interpretation of »Everything is in a god« is true to the normal sense of the word »panentheism.«

all-including god besides g : g' . Since both gods are all-including, g' is in g , and g is in g' . Therefore (according to the required metaphysically literal—*mereological*—reading of »is in«), g and g' are identical. Thus, the assumption that there is another all-including god besides g is refuted and the final conclusion from the premise of panentheism is that there is one and only one all-including god. Monotheism with respect to an all-including god is not yet monotheism *simpliciter*, or (unre)strict(ed) monotheism: besides the *one* all-including god, there may be other gods, gods that are not all-including. However, for thinkers for whom the concept of an all-including god is the only legitimate concept of a god, it is indeed true that *strict* monotheism follows from panentheism. For them, monotheism *simpliciter* results from panentheism in virtue of the fact—just demonstrated—that monotheism *with respect to an all-including god* follows from panentheism; for, for such thinkers, the one all-including god must be *the one god*.

2. Spinoza and Bulgakov

Spinoza, the most famous pantheist in the history of philosophy (so far, at least), was also a panentheist and strict monotheist; in his metaphysics, the logical connections of the three »theisms« which were pointed out in the preceding section do certainly not fail to be manifest. Paradigmatically, in Proposition XV of the first part of his *Ethica*, he asserts of the One Substance: »Whatever is in God, and nothing can be, nor can be conceived of, without God.«² There is a parallel of this in Bulgakov, who—presumably without having Spinoza in mind at all—asserts:

Nothing can exist outside God, as alien or exterior to him. [...] There is only the one God in his divine Wisdom, and outside him nothing whatever. What is not God is *nothing*.³

Bulgakov does not mean to propose that what is not identical to the one God does not exist; for obviously there are many things which are not identical to the one God but exist nonetheless. He means to assert (with rhetorical emphasis) that everything (everything which *is*, everything which exists) is in God, and that what is not identical to God cannot exist, cannot *be, without God*. The

2 My translation. For the Latin original, see (for example) Spinoza 1977: 34.

3 Bulgakov, *Sophia. The Wisdom of God* (Bulgakov 1993): 72 and 148; the italics and the capitalization—as all italics and capitalization (or lack of it) in quotations in this essay—are already in the edition quoted from (the reader may be sure of this).

consonance in thought between Spinoza and Bulgakov is evident. In other respects, however, the two pantheisms of these two thinkers are very different indeed. The difference is not that Spinoza is a pantheist, and Bulgakov is not:⁴ qua *pantheists*, as we have seen, both thinkers are also *pantheists* (the two italicized words being accorded their most reasonable interpretations). The differences are the following: (1) Bulgakov employs more than one concept of a god, Spinoza only one (namely, only one of the god-concepts Bulgakov employs: the concept of an all-including god). (2) Bulgakov employs more than one concept of a world, Spinoza only one (namely, only one of the world-concepts Bulgakov employs: the concept of an all-including world). (3) Spinoza's cosmotheology is perfectly static; Bulgakov's cosmotheology is dynamic and, as a consequence, has a historical dimension—which is completely absent in Spinoza's. (4) For Bulgakov, a god must be a person; for Spinoza, a god must be a non-person; as a consequence, Bulgakov's pantheism is *prosoption-theistic*, Spinoza's is not. Obviously, this last difference between the two thinkers is the most important difference. In what follows, I will explore Bulgakov's pantheism in some detail; keeping Spinoza's pantheism in mind will certainly provide a useful point of comparison.

3. Two Christian Dogmas

Bulgakov developed his own pantheism—as a part of »sophiology«—mainly in six theological publications: the so-called »minor« trilogy (*The Burning Bush* [1927/2009] on the Virgin Mary, *The Friend of the Bridegroom* [1927/2003] on John the Baptist, *Jacob's Ladder* [1929/2010] on the angels), and the so-called »major« trilogy (*The Lamb of God* [1933/2008] on Christology, *The Comforter* [1936/2004] on Pneumatology, *The Bride of the Lamb* [posthumously 1945/2002] on Ecclesiology).⁵ As a compendious source of Bulgakov's views, I shall use his own outline of sophiology, *Sophia. The Wisdom of God*.⁶ In

4 Due to thinking (locally) *too small of the world*, identifying it not with *the all* but with space-time, Bulgakov does think that he is only a pantheist, not also a pantheist; see *Sophia*: 72.

5 The first number in the square brackets indicates the year of publication of the original work in Russian, the second number indicates the year of publication of its translation into English. The English titles are the titles of these published translations. (One of the English titles does not accord well with its Russian original: »The Burning Bush« should rather be »The Unburnt Burning Bush.«)

6 That book is the revised edition of a book published in 1937, *The Wisdom of God: A Brief Summary of Sophiology*, which itself is a translation from a (so far) unpublished manuscript in Russian.

addition, I shall quote from *The Lamb of God* (and, finally, from a book called *A Bulgakov Anthology*).

Bulgakov's panentheism seeks to be compatible with, and indeed to positively incorporate, two central dogmas of orthodox Christianity: the Dogma of the Trinity (*the Nicene dogma*), and the Dogma of the Two Natures in Christ (*the Chalcedonian dogma*). The Dogma of the Trinity (it can be found *more or less* explicitly expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitanian Creed) consists in the assertion that there are three divine *hypostases*—or *persons*: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—of one and the same divine *ousia*—*substance*, or *essence*, or *nature*.⁷ The Dogma of the Two Natures in Christ consists in the assertion that Christ is the incarnate second person of the Trinity (the Son) in two distinct natures (essences), one divine and one human, which natures are united in Christ »unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably.«⁸

Bulgakov rightly remarks:

We must here draw attention to the meager interest displayed in the doctrine of the one Ousia in trinitarian theology. [...] It may even be said that the conception of Ousia has remained in the lifeless scholastic form in which it was taken over from Aristotle. It [...] had been more of a theological symbol than a theological doctrine. Such a state of things could not last forever, and sophiology has come in our time to [...] reveal the meaning of this symbol.⁹

Indeed, giving to the *ousia* of the Trinity—to the identical nature of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the great measure of theological attention it deserves is a necessary (though certainly not a sufficient) condition for entering into sophiology and into Bulgakovian panentheism.

7 The consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit with the other two hypostases is left very much implicit in the Nicene-Constantinopolitanian Creed (in contrast to the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son). But later the term »consubstantial [*homoousios*]<« was extended to the whole Trinity (see *Sophia*: 24).

8 The quotation is from »The Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon« (see Schaff 1900: 262-265).

9 *Sophia*: 53 (fn). See also *ibid.*, 24: »[T]he doctrine of the relationship between the three hypostases [...] has been to a certain extent elucidated in the process of the Church's dogmatic creativity. But [...] the doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity, as well as the actual conception of substance or nature, has been far less developed and, apparently, almost overlooked.«

4. The Divine Sophia

The fundamental sophiological definition is this: The Divine Sophia is the *unfolded* Divine Ousia (Divinity, Godhead), the one nature of the three persons of the Trinity *unfolded* as to *content* (Divine Wisdom) and *manifestation* (Divine Glory).¹⁰ Bulgakov differentiates between Wisdom and Glory as distinct but inseparable aspects of the Godhead (the Divine Ousia) *in its self-revelation—in its unfoldedness*, as one should say in order to emphasize the purely ontological, entirely non-epistemological character of the *self-revelation* that is meant here.¹¹ It is important to keep in mind that the fundamental relation between the Divine Sophia and the Divine Ousia is (numerical) *identity*, since, of course, the *unfolded* Divine Ousia is identical (as is the *enfolded* Divine Ousia) with the Divine Ousia. The relationship between the Divine Sophia and the Divine Ousia is, therefore, the same relationship as the relationship between the *standing* Socrates and Socrates (and the *sitting* Socrates, to boot), except for the fact that the different »ways of givenness« (to use Fregean terminology) of the Divine Sophia (the *unfolded* Divine Ousia) and the Divine Ousia (*simpliciter*, »Ousia as such« [*Sophia*: 54]) have nothing to do with the passage of time whereas they do have something to do with the passage of time in the case of the *standing* Socrates and Socrates. Saying it far less clearly but in Bulgakov's own words: »[U]sing an abridged and simplified terminology, we can say: the divinity in God constitutes the divine Sophia (or glory), while at the same time we assume that it [the divine Sophia, the divinity in God] is also the ousia [as such]: Ousia=Sophia=Glory.«¹²

It is evident from this quotation that the Divine Sophia can also be defined as »the divinity in God,«¹³ that is, as the Divine Ousia (Godhead) *in God*, in other words, as the Divine Ousia *as hypostatized (had, possessed) by God*. This second definition does not only cast light on the first—the Divine Sophia *as the unfolded* Divine Ousia—(for the *unfoldedness* of the Divine Ousia, in Wisdom and Glory, is seen to be due to its being *hypostatized by God*), it also displays the fundamental relationship between God and the Divine Sophia: Since God hypostatizes (has, possesses) his *ousia*: Divinity, Godhead, the Divine Ousia,

¹⁰ *Sophia*: 31-33.

¹¹ In defining the Divine Sophia, Bulgakov himself prefers to speak of *revelation* (rather than *unfoldedness*): »Sophia is Ousia as revealed« (*Sophia*: 54); »the two persons [the Word and the Spirit] together disclosing the Father in one revelation—Sophia« (*Sophia*: 98).

¹² *Sophia*: 33.

¹³ For this definition, see also *The Lamb of God* (Bulgakov 2008): 107.

he hypostatizes the Divine Ousia inevitably *just as it is hypostatized by him*,¹⁴ which is by definition (the *second* one) the Divine Sophia—*alias*, again by definition (now the *first* one), the *unfolded* Divine Ousia (*unfolded* in Wisdom and Glory). Or as Bulgakov himself says it: »[T]he one personal God possesses [hypostatizes] but one Godhead, which is expressed [unfolded, revealed] at once in Wisdom and Glory.«¹⁵

But what is *God* for Bulgakov? The last quotation implies that God is a person for Bulgakov. In fact, Bulgakov—whether he would be ready to admit it or not—believes that the three persons of the Trinity, each hypostatizing the Divine Ousia (see the Nicene dogma), collectively constitute *yet another person*, the one God: »The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who are three distinct divine persons, together constitute one God.«¹⁶ Clearly God, thus conceived of, is not identical with either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit; he is the whole group, or »family,« of the three. And yet (see above) he is a person for Bulgakov and hypostatizes the Divine Ousia (and thereby, *ipso facto*, the Divine Sophia). The following quotation makes it explicit *how* the one personal God hypostatizes the Divine Ousia:

[T]he first thing one must say about the Divine Person is that, as trihypostatic, this Person is equally real in one hypostasis [of the Divine Ousia] and in three hypostases, that this Person is the pre-eternally realized reciprocity of love that totally vanquishes personal isolation and identifies three in one, while itself existing by the real being of these personal centers.¹⁷

Yet, the fundamental problem remains: If God is to be the entire Trinity *and* a person, then one is confronted (*a*) with the difficulty that it seems impossible that a group of distinct persons is a person (it would seem that three consciousnesses with three distinct subjects of consciousness cannot also be or form one consciousness with one subject, no matter how much high-quality love there is between the three subjects)¹⁸ and (*b*) with the difficulty that if the three persons *together* were indeed *another* person (in spite of apparent impossibility), that then, undoubtedly, there would be a *fourth hypostasis* of the Divine Ousia,

14 Consider for comparative illustration: Since I carry my load, I carry my load inevitably *just as* (i.e., *precisely in the manner*) *it is carried by me*.

15 *Sophia*: 32.

16 *Sophia*: 23.

17 *The Lamb of God*: 95.

18 But listen to Bulgakov, who is not touched by any such misgivings whatsoever: »These three centers in the Holy Trinity are equally real and equally subjects, so to speak. Each of them is a separate, equally divine I, but all three are one Divine I in its absoluteness—the consubstantial and indivisible Trinity.« (*The Lamb of God*: 190.)

consubstantial with the other three—which is contrary at least to the spirit of the Nicene-Constantinopolitanian Creed. It seems that Bulgakov would have done better to let the Trinity be a non-person, just as every human family that consists of two, three, or more persons is (ontologically) a non-person. But then, if he had done so, *who* would have been *the one personal god* that not only Bulgakov but every prosopon-theistic monotheist—that is, *in practice* every believer in the Abrahamitic tradition—believes in?¹⁹

Be that as it may, Bulgakov is eager to rebut the objection (no doubt actually raised against his sophiology) that the Divine Sophia—the *unfolded* Divine Ousia—is *a fourth hypostasis*.²⁰ He seems unaware of the fact that, according to his theological views, already the Trinity appears to be *a fourth hypostasis*. Yet Bulgakov does certainly not believe that God (for him, the Trinity) is a *primary, non-derivative* hypostasis of the Divine Ousia: God—the trihypostatic, triune God: the Trinity—is a hypostasis (»a trihypostatic hypostasis«²¹) of the Divine Ousia only in virtue of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit being hypostases of the Divine Ousia. The Divine Sophia, in turn, is, by definition (the second one), the Divine Ousia *as hypostatized by God*—that is, as hypostatized *by each person of the Trinity*; but it is, for all that, not a hypostasis at all. Being hypostatized does not turn the Divine Ousia into a *hypostasis*: by being hypostatized it does not become an *individual which is bearer of an essence*; it stays an essence. However, what hypostatization does do to the Divine Ousia is to make it *be* in a certain manner, namely, makes it *be as hypostatized by the hypostatizer* (i.e., *unfolded* in such and such a way):

The three persons of the Holy Trinity have one life in common, that is, one Ousia, one Sophia. Nevertheless this *unity* of divine life coexists with the fact that the life of each of the hypostases in the divine Ousia-Sophia is determined in accordance with its own personal character [...]. One and the same Sophia is possessed *in a different way* by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [...]

19 This question is, of course, pressing only for Christians, not for Jews or Muslims. What a Christian prosopon-theist, qua prosopon-theist, cannot do is to assert godhood of the Trinity and deny personhood to it (since for a prosopon-theist, although there is a god, there is no impersonal god). I suggest that a Christian (trinitarian and monotheistic) prosopon-theist had best accept only the familiar three divine persons (in this sense, *three gods*), one of which, however, is *the one personal god in the highest sense*, since he is the origin of the other two (and of *everything* to boot): the Father Almighty. *He*, I believe, is what a Christian (trinitarian and monotheistic) prosopon-theistic pantheism must refer to as God, and *not* the Trinity, as Bulgakov believes.

20 See *The Lamb of God*: 105; *Sophia*: 35.

21 *The Lamb of God*: 189.

The tri-unity of the hypostases is reflected in the threefold modality of the one Ousia-Sophia of the Godhead.²²

In the unfolding of the Divine Ousia into the Divine Sophia—which is the *unfolded* Divine Ousia—the Son and the Holy Spirit are the disclosing (revealing) hypostases, the Father the disclosed.²³ Thus the Son and the Holy Spirit are, so to speak, *closer* to the Divine Sophia than the Father.²⁴ This makes it possible to say such things as that the Son (or Logos) is »Wisdom in person,«²⁵ and that »the Holy Spirit too *is* Wisdom,«²⁶ »the personal Spirit of Wisdom.«²⁷ But Bulgakov urges that the »is« which is used here must not be literally understood as the »is« of (numerical) identity; it is the »is« of predication and of representation at once: of *representative predication: exemplariness* (with respect to the revelation of the Divine Ousia). Indeed, one can say that »the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Trinity ›is‹ [...] Ousia or Sophia,« but one cannot (within orthodoxy) reverse these »is«-statements,²⁸ which shows that they are not literally *identificative*; properly understood, they are *predicative*: »Each of these [each of the triune hypostases] in its specific way possesses Sophia and in this sense is Sophia.«²⁹ Those »is«-statements cannot be literally identificative because »Sophia [...], once more, is *not* a Hypostasis, but only a quality belonging to a Hypostasis, an attribute of hypostatic being.«³⁰

This latter Bulgakovian assertion, however, must be a massive understatement; for a few pages further on, Bulgakov speaks of »the common scholastic misunderstanding which makes Wisdom no more than a particular ›property‹ or quality, comprised in the definition of God, and therefore devoid of proper subsistence.«³¹ One might even conclude that Bulgakov is contradicting himself here. This is not really the case; but it is certainly difficult to find the proper ontological place for Bulgakov's Divine Sophia. For Bulgakov, the Divine Sophia is, indeed, not a *hypostasis* (that is, not an *individual which is bearer of an essence*); *a fortiori* the Divine Sophia is not a »fourth hypostasis.« However, »she too loves. [...] Sophia loves God without being a hypostasis.«³²

22 *Sophia*: 37 and 38.

23 *Sophia*: 46, 98, 105-106.

24 *Sophia*: 52.

25 *Sophia*: 98.

26 *Sophia*: 46.

27 *Sophia*: 98.

28 *Sophia*: 52.

29 *Sophia*: 53.

30 *Sophia*: 52.

31 *Sophia*: 54.

32 *The Lamb of God*: 105.

And God loves Ousia-Sophia: »It is loved by the Holy Trinity as life and revelation. [...] All life in God, in itself, is love. [...] Apart from this the tri-hypostatic relation between God and his Ousia is inconceivable.«³³ Is the Divine Sophia then a *person* (though not a hypostasis!) for Bulgakov? Certainly not: »Sophia is not a person,« he declares.³⁴ But he also declares: »[W]e must insist on the full ontological reality of Ousia-Sophia.«³⁵ Then, what *is* the Divine Sophia?—*ontologically*, in addition to what its (two) definitions say about it? From the following five quotations it emerges that the Divine Sophia is for Bulgakov the *subsistent* (though non-hypostatic) *life of God*: »Ousia, and therefore Sophia, exists for God and in God, as his subsistent divinity« [or equivalently: »exists for the persons of the Trinity and in them, as their subsistent divinity«]; »the nature of God (which is in fact Sophia) is a living and, therefore, loving substance, ground, and ›principle‹; »Ousia-Sophia is the life of a hypostatic spirit, though not itself hypostatic«; »Sophia is not [a?] hypostatic being, but she is a living *entity*. The divine world is alive, for nothing nonliving can be conceived in God«; »Sophia [...] is his eternal divine life.«³⁶

Two difficulties need to be pointed out here: (I) In what does the fine distinction between »subsistent« and »hypostatic« consist such that the Divine Sophia is subsistent (an *individual substance* in some legitimate sense) but *not* hypostatic (not a hypostasis)? (II) How can the Divine Sophia be at once a *life* (that is, something that *is lived*) and *alive* (that is, *living*)? For answering these questions it does not help to be told that »the nature of spirit is not a thing, but a living principle, even though it is not personal.«³⁷ Nor does it help to remember the following lines from a poem by William Butler Yeats: »O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?«³⁸ For, do we really not know in the case in question, in the divine case, *Those Who Live* (»the dancers«) from *The Life* (»the dance«)? It certainly seems that we *do* distinguish two ontological sides here and are quite right about this. Bulgakov himself writes: »Ousia-Sophia is distinct from the hypostases, though it cannot exist apart from them and is eternally hypostatized in them.«³⁹ If this is correct, Ousia-Sophia cannot be two things at once: be what is hypostatized and be one of its hypostatizers; Ousia-Sophia cannot both *be*

33 *Sophia*: 35.

34 *The Lamb of God*: 107.

35 *Sophia*: 55.

36 In the order of quotation: *Sophia*: 55, 35, and 34; *The Lamb of God*: 105-106; *Sophia*: 54. See, moreover, the quotation footnote 22 refers to.

37 *Sophia*: 34.

38 »Among School Children,« Yeats 1980: 117.

39 *Sophia*: 34.

The Life and *be among* Those Who Live (those who live The Life). It would seem that Those Who Live are the three persons of the Trinity (and in a derivative, secondary sense also the Trinity itself) and that the Divine Sophia is The Life they live and love. This chimes well with Sophia being a non-person and a non-hypostasis, but it agrees ill with Sophia's supposed ability to love God. If the Divine Sophia is not alive after all (since those who live in the divine region are, it would seem, only the three persons of the Trinity and, in a derivative sense, the Trinity itself), how can Sophia *love*, if only in a non-personal, non-hypostatic way?⁴⁰

The way out of this apparent impasse is to hold that the Divine Sophia is not only The Life, the divine life, but also has *subsistence* (hence *individuality*), but subsistence *in a weak sense*—subsistence in the strong sense would be hypostaticness, which Sophia has not. This non-hypostatic subsistence enables it to live and to love, to be a *subjectum* (*hypokeimenon*) of life and love—albeit in a *modified*, a non-hypostatic sense. Thus, the »fine distinction« between *subsistent* and *hypostatic* that question (I) addresses is, in fact, a distinction within the concept of subsistence itself: it is the distinction between *weakly subsistent* and *strongly subsistent* (or *hypostatic*).

This, of course, is not yet a sufficient answer to question (I): one would still like to know *what* the fine distinction between weak and strong subsistence consists in. Well, perhaps this distinction is primitive, undefined—in fact, indefinable. Then, in order to get used to it, it may help to consider that it is not an *ad hoc* invention; for the ontological situation of the Divine Sophia is by no means a singularity. An analogue of it is found in juxtaposing *the humans* with *humanity as hypostatized by the humans*. In contrast to the humans themselves, humanity as hypostatized by the humans is not a hypostasis (for otherwise it would be a human being, which it is not); yet one can say that it *subsists* (and is, therefore, an individual), that it subsists *in a weak sense*. This makes it possible to say, *in a modified sense*, that humanity as hypostatized by the humans *lives and loves* (though it loves not always what it should love). *In the normal sense*, however, it neither lives nor loves; in the normal sense, the humans, its hypostases, live and love (and not always what they should love). It is precisely this latter fact which makes it also true to say that humanity as hypostatized by the humans is *the (loving) life* of (all) the humans.

40 On Sophia's non-personal, non-hypostatic love of God, see *Sophia*: 35.

5. The Divine Sophia and the Creaturely Sophia

Even more than his identification of the Divine Sophia with the divine life, Bulgakov's identification of »her«—the *unfolded* Divine Ousia—with *the divine world* brings out Sophia's *unfoldedness*, Sophia's *richness*. The two identifications may, in fact, go side by side, as in the following quotation: »The life of God in His Divinity, or the divine world as an objective and living principle, is precisely what Scripture calls Sophia, or the Wisdom of God.«⁴¹ But each of the identifications also occurs by itself, without the other, which fact has already been demonstrated for »Sophia = the divine life« and which, as follows, is also demonstrated for »Sophia = the divine world«: »Sophia as the Divine world, as the fullness of Divinity [...], is not only the Wisdom but also the *Glory* of God.«⁴² For the purpose of discerning the pantheism in Bulgakov's work and the character of that pantheism, Bulgakov's identification of the Divine Sophia with the divine world is rather more telling than his identification of »her« with the divine life. The former identification becomes especially revealing of Bulgakov's views if one takes into account *what* »the Divine world, as the fullness of Divinity«—the (in Wisdom and Glory) *unfolded* Divine Ousia, the Divine Sophia—*comprises*: »Sophia, as the ›world‹ of God, represents a ›pan-organism‹ of the ideas of all in the all,« and »[t]he divine Sophia, as the revelation of the Logos, is the *all-embracing unity*, which contains within itself all the fullness of the world of ideas.«⁴³ A very momentous conclusion follows: If the Divine Sophia, the divine world, contains *all ideas* (that is, all types, all forms in the Platonic sense), really *all* of them, then the divine world (Sophia) must be—*among other things*⁴⁴—the prototype of *the created world*, of creation, of »the world« (in the usual acceptance),⁴⁵ which means »that the species of created beings do not represent some new type of forms, devised by God, so to

41 *The Lamb of God*: 107. Consider here once more (because the instance is particularly striking, occurring in one and the same sentence) Bulgakov's letting the Divine Sophia be at once *a life* and *something living*. There is a way to make (some) sense of this (see the previous section), but straightforwardly understood it is nonsense: a life does not live, and something living is not a life.

42 *The Lamb of God*: 108.

43 *Sophia*: 59 and 69.

44 This caveat is justified in view of what Bulgakov himself says: »That inner self-revelation of God which is described as fullness in reference to his Wisdom and Glory can also be defined as the ›world‹ of God in reference to the personal life of the Deity itself.« (*Sophia*: 59.) The ideas in the divine world that concern the personal life of the Deity—of the three persons of the Trinity—are presumably not exhausted by the ideas in the divine world that concern the created world.

45 See *Sophia*: 65.

speak, *ad hoc*, but that they are based upon eternal, divine prototypes.«⁴⁶ Thus, the ground of *the (created) world* is the Wisdom of God (the Divine Sophia). »To admit this,« Bulgakov says, »is to affirm, in a sense, the fundamentally divine character of the world, based upon this identity of the principle of divine Wisdom in God and in the creature.«⁴⁷ Furthermore, he comes to the conclusion: »The world exists in God: »For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things« (Rom. 11.36).«⁴⁸

However, *understood literally*, this conclusion does not yet follow. What, at this point, is *in literal acceptance* reached (that is, if one has followed Bulgakov so far and accepts his views) is this: The prototypes of the species of the created world are (*not* literally in God, *not* literally in the Trinity, but literally) in the divine world, that is, in the *unfolded* Divine Ousia, in the Divine Sophia, and »the [created] world bears within it the image and, as it were, the reflection of the divine prototype.«⁴⁹ From this piece of prosopon-theistic Platonism it does not follow that, in particular, the world in time and space is (or exists) in God, in the (sufficiently) literal sense that literal panentheism requires. *A fortiori* it does not follow that *everything*, the world qua totality of being (and not only the space-time world and its parts), is literally in God. There is, thus, at this point still a considerable gap that separates Bulgakov from true panentheism.⁵⁰ In order to close the gap, it will be necessary to make one considerable compromise: We will have to allow that any given *x* is already *literally in God* if it is literally in the unfolded Divine Ousia, the Divine Sophia (which is *not* God, as has become amply clear by now), *or else* if it *perfectly exemplifies* (in particular, *perfectly hypostatizes*) something which is literally in the Divine Sophia. Thus, it is true (let's say it is true)—*literally true*—that »God contained within himself

46 *Sophia*: 70.

47 *Sophia*: 71.

48 *Sophia*: 72.

49 *Sophia*: 64.

50 Bulgakov, to boot, locally—see *Sophia*: 72—confuses *panentheism* with *space-time-panentheism*: the doctrine that the *space-time* world (everything in *space-time*, including *space-time* itself) is in God. *Space-time-panentheism* is certainly *not* logically equivalent to *space-time-pantheism*: the doctrine that the *space-time* world is God. In harmony with this non-equivalence, Bulgakov accepts—at *Sophia*: 72—*space-time-panentheism*—to his mind there: *panentheism*—and rejects *space-time-pantheism*—to his mind there: *pantheism*. There is nothing wrong about this from the orthodox Christian standpoint; but Bulgakov is wrong to believe that this is the correct general attitude of a *pantheist vis-à-vis pantheism* (compare footnote 4); it cannot be correct if panentheism and pantheism are taken in their maximal and most reasonable—their »true«—conception (as they are taken in this essay and, on the whole, also by Bulgakov); for then they are, as we have seen, logically equivalent.

before the creation of the world the divine prototypes [...] of all creatures.«⁵¹ But it is true in virtue of these prototypes being contained in the Divine Sophia (which, too, is *in* God, but not in the same sense in which the prototypes are *in* the Divine Sophia; a transitivity of *in*-being is out of the question here).

Bulgakov asserts that the (created) world »exists outside God« on the same page (*Sophia*: 72) where he also asserts that »[t]he world exists in God.« He is not contradicting himself, since, at this point, the world's »existence in God« is *not* meant literally by Bulgakov (not even meant by him in the *extenuated* literal sense just introduced): as we have seen, it only means for Bulgakov that the created world is an image and reflection of the divine world, rather in the sense of Plato and Plotinus. Bulgakov states this view also in the following way, and thereby gives a decidedly prosopon-theistic (therefore non-Plotinian) and sophiological turn to it:

[I]n creating the world [...] from ›nothing‹ God [...], in the divine Sophia, unites the world with his own divine life. Insofar as the creature is able to bear it, God communicates Sophia, the creaturely Sophia, to creation. [...] Sophia unites God with the world as the one common principle, the divine ground of creaturely existence. Remaining one, Sophia exists in two modes, eternal and temporal, divine and creaturely.⁵²

If *this*—this prosopon-theistic Platonism—were all there is in the direction of panentheism in Bulgakov's thought, then Bulgakov could, after all, not really be counted as a panentheist. But it is not all, of course.

6. Bringing the (Created) World Home

The last quotation in the previous section suggests that the creaturely Sophia, Sophia in the temporal mode, is identical to the Divine Sophia, Sophia in the eternal mode. That the Divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia are identical is, in fact, Bulgakov's view⁵³—*a somewhat rash* view. For is it really true that the *entire* unfolded Divine Ousia—the *entire* Divine Sophia, the *entire* divine world—is reflected in creation? On consideration, the view that the creaturely

51 *Sophia*: 64.

52 *Sophia*: 73 and 74.

53 See *Sophia*: 76. Bulgakov is unaware that there is no paradox in an identity with rather different *modes of givenness* (as Frege would say) of the identicals; for this reason, he thinks that the (alleged) »identity in distinction, and distinction in identity« between the Divine and the creaturely Sophia »is the primary and ultimate antinomy of sophiology« (*ibid.*).

Sophia is a *proper essential part* of the Divine Sophia—namely, that entirety within it which is reflected in creation—seems closer to the truth than the simple assumption of their identity (see footnote 44).

Now, the divine world and the Divine Sophia are *perfectly congruous* with each other, are even (necessarily) *identical*, as we have seen. Numerical identity, however, is out of the question for the *created* world and the *creaturely* Sophia, as long as the created world is what it is and not, *per impossibile*, something else than it is—and it must be emphasized in this context that the creaturely Sophia is called »creaturely« qua being reflected in creation, but *not* qua being created, since it is an essential—and presumably proper—part of the uncreated Divine Sophia; whereas the created world is indeed something created—something created from »nothing.« *Perfect congruence*, in contrast, is certainly not out of the question for the *two* (which are *necessarily two*): the created world and the creaturely Sophia. Yet, *so far*, the created world and the creaturely Sophia are not perfectly congruous with each other—far from it; they are only on the way to perfect congruence; *at present*, their congruence is only rather partially realized:

The fundamental mark of the created world is becoming, emergence, development, fulfillment. [...] The world of becoming must travel by the long road of the history of the universe if it is ultimately to succeed in [perfectly] reflecting in itself the face of the divine Sophia, and be ›transfigured‹ into it. The creaturely Sophia, which is the foundation of the being of the [created] world, [...] is at present in a state of potentiality, *dynamis*, while at the same time it is the principle of its [the world's] actualization and finality.⁵⁴

Here we have the dynamical and teleological—and therefore *temporal*—aspect of Bulgakov's panentheism (which aspect is absent in Spinoza's). *History* is metaphysically important to Bulgakov—who did take biblical eschatology seriously and was, moreover, a receptive reader of the German idealists (of Hegel in particular). In fact, there is according to Bulgakov a predetermined end to history: this end is the perfect congruence of the created world with the creaturely Sophia, which congruence *ultimately*—at the end of time—matches the eternal identity of the divine world with the Divine Sophia. The end of history is, in other words, the perfect (that is, as perfect as possible) exemplification of the creaturely Sophia by the created world—»pan-entheosis, or simply pantheosis, the complete penetration of the creature by Wisdom,«

54 *Sophia*: 75.

as Bulgakov puts it.⁵⁵ *This* is God's predetermined plan for the created world, which plan, nevertheless, is *not* deterministic:

God shall be all in all, and divine Wisdom fulfilled in the created [world]. This accomplishment has an inner inevitability and predeterminacy, which yet does not suppress created freedom. For that freedom is not substantive but rather modal; it determines not the ›what‹ but the ›how,‹ not the existence and final issue of the cosmic process, but only the manner of its accomplishment.⁵⁶

The end—panentheosis/pantheosis—is already fixed from eternity, the way to it is not, but is a matter of creaturely—specifically, of *human*—free choice in the course of time, in *history*. For this reason the arrival of »the end of the world« may take a longer or a shorter time:⁵⁷ its date is not predetermined but depends on human freedom. There are, indeed, »limits to the penetration of creation by Wisdom, involved in its [creation's] freedom to develop«⁵⁸—but only *temporary* limits; for »freedom unto evil has no substantive foundation, no resources to endure to eternity, and sooner or later must inevitably wither before the radiance of Wisdom.«⁵⁹

Evidently, Bulgakov's panentheism is an *eschatological panentheism*. But what is *the point* of this metaphysical »arrangement«? What is its deep meaning, which may win heads and hearts and dispose Christians (first of all, Bulgakov himself) to believe in it? Bulgakov himself anticipates an acute critical question: »Is not the creation of the world, as it were, a sort of duplication of the divine Sophia?«⁶⁰ The first thing that can be said in seeking to answer these three questions is this: »God created the world only that He might deify it and himself become all in all to it.«⁶¹ Thus, creating the world is not merely a matter of »the force of God's love overflowing beyond the limits of its own being to found being other than his own«⁶² (although it is a matter of *that*, too). For the love of God for the created world is of a peculiar kind (as the second-to-last quotation intimates); it is a love that *ultimately raises up*: a love »to the end that he [God, in the person of the Son] might [...] raise the creaturely up

55 *Sophia*: 147.

56 *Sophia*: 146.

57 See *The Lamb of God*: 436-437.

58 *Sophia*: 126.

59 *Sophia*: 147.

60 *Sophia*: 76.

61 *Sophia*: 136.

62 *Sophia*: 73.

to the heavenly«⁶³ (as Bulgakov puts it, speaking of the ultimate purpose of the kenosis of the Lord).

Now, for God there is no raising-up (of anything at any time) without *first* having thrown down (something at some time): if *the former* is to be accomplished by him, *the latter* must have been done by him *first*. Thus, what John Donne writes at the end of his »Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse« is entirely appropriate metaphysically: »Therefore that he may raise the Lord throws down.«⁶⁴ God's creating from nothing is, metaphysically, a *throwing-down*. This wording certainly has a *negative* ring to it. There are considerations that more than justify that wording. The questions at the beginning of the preceding paragraph become especially disquieting if one considers that there is a *dark side* to the proposed metaphysical »arrangement«: When Bulgakov says (as already quoted above) that »[t]he fundamental mark of the created world is becoming, emergence, development, fulfillment,« he could have added—and he would have told the truth—that a very conspicuous mark of the created world is also *destruction, submergence, degeneration, frustration*. Bulgakov is not blind to this; he is not blind to *negativity*, to *evil*: he imputes it to human (and angelic) freedom.⁶⁵ Yet, in view of what we know about the world, this imputation is rather hard to believe to be true; for destruction, submergence, degeneration, frustration—and the staggering amount of pain and suffering they entail—and *death* seem *natural* features of the world. They were present long before the appearance of humankind, and they would have been present even if humankind had never existed. Angels do not seem to have anything to do with them, and what these features certainly seem *not* to be (except for very minor parts of them) is »wages of sin« (cf. *Romans* 6:23). But if they are indeed *natural*, how can the consequence be avoided that God, in creating, *intended* them? Are they not, in the main, consequences of the inexorable rule of the laws of nature, in other words, of *the laws of God* (enforced by God)? It seems, thus, that the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (*John* 1:29) is not only the lamb who takes away the sins the world—more precisely speaking, its inmates—committed (countlessly many, doubtless), but that it is also the lamb who takes away *the sin the world is*⁶⁶—committed by the world's creator, by creating and upholding it: a *necessary* sin, necessary for the realization of *raising-up* love (without which God, who is Love, *the paradigm of love*, could

63 *Sophia*: 89.

64 Gardner 1982: 90.

65 *Sophia*: 145-147.

66 Note in this context that the original Greek (of *John* 1:29) has the singular »the sin,« not the plural »the sins«: ἴδε ὁ ἄμωδός τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου.

not be),⁶⁷ indeed of *deifying* love, but nevertheless *a sin against the good, a wrong that must be righted*.

7. Anthropocentric Panentheism

Bulgakov, however, appears to be far from these *unorthodox* ideas (although they are adumbrated in Schelling's so-called *Freiheitsschrift*,⁶⁸ which Bulgakov may have read). It is in their consequence that, like the creation and progression of the world to its end, so also the *kenosis* of the Son of God is a *throwing-down* (indeed, to the bottom of hell), but a *throwing-down* for love, terminating in a glorious *raising-up*. It is in their consequence that the divine-human drama of Christ, with its terrible climax and astounding anti-climax, is last but not least a just self-punishment of God for the sin of creating (a sin it seems to be, even though the creating is love-enabling), a divine expiation and atonement, *which*, in the end, becomes God's true and glorious self-justification: *the perfect theodicy*—*perfect* not least because a form of love, *raising-up love*, is extended in it, first of all, to a person of the Trinity itself (which fact, without the drama, would not have existed); and *perfect* not least because amnesty and glorification is handed to the sinning creature *for free: raising-up love again*—if the sinning creature wants it and accepts it. Bulgakov, however, seems far from these thoughts; instead, he merely repeats the *orthodox* Christian view (which, it would seem to me, is not the entire truth):

Many texts [of the New Testament] express the general idea that Christ offered the redemptive sacrifice in His blood and took upon Himself the sins of the world. This is a fact irrefutably attested by Scripture and just as irrefutably obvious for our immediate religious consciousness. In Christ we become reconciled with God. Christ is the intermediary for us; by faith in Him we recognize that we are justified before God.⁶⁹

67 Love, and especially raising-up love, cannot be without negativity it overcomes, and an arena—the (created) world—is needed for negativity and the love by which it is overcome. Thus it is quite true what Bulgakov says: »There is no God without the world« (*The Lamb of God*: 399), although there is no »natural necessity« to this world-God relation, only a »free necessity« (*Sophia*: 73): the necessity of love. Note, incidentally, that Bulgakov immediately adds the following remarkable coda to the sentence just quoted (from *The Lamb of God*): »and there is no world outside of God: the world is in God.«

68 The full title in English: *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*.

69 *The Lamb of God*: 343.

This—the *voluntary-scapegoat-soteriology*, as one might term it—is the ground Bulgakov declares *we* (we human beings), and he among us, are standing on (though, of course, this is can be obvious to us only if we are Christians). It is a part of the conspicuous *anthropocentrism* of Bulgakov's panentheism. This anthropocentrism goes much further than the anthropocentrism of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, where we read that because of us human beings and because of our salvation *the Son*—»true god of [from; out of] true god,« but certainly a god in a different sense than the sense in which the entire Trinity is God for Bulgakov—descended from heaven and became himself a human being and was crucified for us. Already in the Creed it is all for *us* and because of *us*. In fact, Bulgakov's anthropocentrism not only exceeds the Creed's, it exceeds also the Bible's:

[H]umanity [i.e.: humankind, the entirety of the humans] was really made to be lord of creation. [...] Through humanity, created Wisdom can inform the formless elements, the *tohu-bohu* of matter, until it becomes an extension of the human body [!]. [...] [A]ll in history can and must be wrought out by humankind in human fashion. For in Divine-humanity is included the whole fullness of humanity [i.e., the ideal human form], with its freedom and creativity.⁷⁰

The created world belongs to humanity [i.e., humankind]. [...] Humanity [...] is the representative of all creation [...] In this sense we may say the world is humanity, which includes in itself the formality of all the rest. [...] God's image in creation is the human form. [...] This ›image‹ is the *ens realissimum* in humanity, it establishes a true identity [a perfect relation of representation?] between the image and its prototype, which involves not only the ›divinity‹ of humanity on account of the image of God in it, but also a certain ›humanity‹ of God.⁷¹

Bulgakov makes the proud statement (no doubt in humility): »There is something in human beings which is directly related to the essence of God [i.e., the Divine Ousia].«⁷² What is it? »It is no one natural quality, but our whole humanity, which is the image of God. [...] It lies within us, something as yet unrevealed, yet surely to be revealed, if only when ›God shall be all in all

70 *Sophia*: 140 and 141. Note that Bulgakov is of course not advocating humanistic triumphalism (be it capitalist or socialist): »The Satanic principle in humanity is only strengthened by its unspiritual technical conquest of nature ›in its own name.« (*Sophia*: 140.) What he really has in mind (*ibid.*) is »a good and true humanization of nature, accomplished in the name of Christ.«

71 *Sophia*: 77 and 78. There are two deviations from this truth: »The secularist divorce of the human from the divine principle in humanity, with its sequel in the idolatry of the human, is an error; but equally false is the denial of the human principle in the name of the divine.« (*Sophia*: 141.)

72 *Sophia*: 79.

(1. Cor. 15.28).⁷³ Now, according to »the doctrine of Divine-humanity or of Sophia«⁷⁴ (which, no doubt, is the same doctrine as »the doctrine of Sophia, the divine Wisdom in creation«⁷⁵), »the fullness of Divine-humanity shall be attained, when God shall be all in all.«⁷⁶ From these quotations (which underscore the dynamic character of Bulgakov's panentheism) and previous expositions in this essay it can be gathered (a) that Divine-humanity is identical with the Divine Sophia (which is thus provided with yet another identification,⁷⁷ in addition to its identification with the *unfolded* Divine Ousia, with the Divine Ousia *as hypostatized by God*, with the divine life, and with the divine world) and (b) that, therefore, the ideal form of *creaturely humanity* is contained in Divine-humanity (since every ideal form is contained in the Divine Sophia: in Divine-humanity), but is not yet fully realized, though it will be. Moreover, in the perspective of Bulgakov's anthropocentrism (see »the world is humanity [that is, is epitomized by humankind],« quoted above), this creaturely humanity is a perfect representation of the creaturely Sophia: »[Creaturely] humanity is⁷⁸ the created form of divine Wisdom,⁷⁹ which [i.e., divine Wisdom] is simply God's nature revealing itself [i.e., the *unfolded* Divine Ousia].«⁸⁰ In its present appearance, creaturely humanity—and thereby the creaturely Sophia—is seriously impaired by the defects of its exemplifiers (bearers, hypostases): »Obviously, in humans, created Wisdom is obscured by sin.«⁸¹ As has become amply clear, this will not remain so forever.

73 *Sophia*: 79.

74 *Sophia*: 102.

75 *Sophia*: 114.

76 *Sophia*: 112.

77 Further evidence for this identification: »[T]he Son and the Spirit [...] are two, yet the bond which unites them appears in the one self-revelation they share in Sophia, alike in eternal Divine-humanity in God and in the appearing in time among human beings of the God-human.« (*Sophia*: 102.) Moreover, Bulgakov speaks of »heavenly humanity, Sophia« (*ibid.*, 99). No doubt, he is using the shorter name »Sophia« in abbreviation of the longer »Divine Sophia« (as he often does).

78 This cannot well be the »is« of numerical identity, it must be the »is« of (perfect pars-pro-toto) *representation*; it can therefore be replaced by »represents.«

79 Bulgakov should have said »the creaturely part of divine Wisdom« instead of »the created form of divine Wisdom.« For the creaturely Sophia, which he is here referring to, is, properly speaking, not *created*, though it is *creaturely* by being exemplified by creatures; and it is not a *form* but a *part* of the Divine Sophia (Bulgakov even proposes its identity with the Divine Sophia, as we have seen in section 6).

80 *Sophia*: 88. It is not accurate to say that God's nature »reveals itself.« Properly speaking, it is revealed by its hypostases.

81 *Sophia*: 88.

8. The Work of Salvation

Bulgakov anthropocentric sophiology—»Divine Sophia as humanity«⁸²—is a panentheism which is *Christian*; being Christian, it has not only eschatological but also Christological, Pneumatological and Mariological aspects. What will be fully achieved *in the end*—that is: *the pan(en)theosis*, the perfect congruence of the created world with the creaturely Sophia (via *perfect* creaturely exemplification of the forms in the creaturely Sophia), the greatest ontologically possible union of the created world with the Divine Sophia,⁸³ with the divine world—is begun *in the middle of time*. It is physically begun in a strictly local, merely exemplary fashion; but spiritually, already some all-embracing work, too, is begun at that time: the work of salvation (and theodicy, I would add), resulting (among other things) in the *freeing* of humankind, and thereby of all creatures, to the real possibility of being *ultimately raised up*, of being *deified*. It is the work of Christ in Sophia, with Mary and the Holy Spirit as necessary helpers:

According to the sophiological interpretation of the definition of Chalcedon, the two natures in Christ correspond to the two forms of Sophia, the divine and the created. The created humanity of Christ[,] the God-human[,] came to him from the Mother of God. It belongs to her. In a true sense it is possible to say that she herself personally is this created humanity of Christ, that she is the created Sophia. [...] [I]t is in this sense, as sharing the human nature of the God-human, that his holy Mother is the created Sophia.⁸⁴

She *is* created Wisdom, for she is creation glorified. In her is realized the purpose of creation, the complete penetration of the creature by Wisdom, the full accord of the created type [*better*: token] with its prototype, its entire accomplishment. In her[,] creation is completely irradiated by its prototype. In her[,] God is already all in all.⁸⁵

Here, as so often in Bulgakov's texts, there is reason to deplore Bulgakov's indiscriminate use of the word »is,« with which he is prone to connect non-literal senses, to the considerable detriment of clarity of meaning. To put it straight: Mary is, *literally*, neither identical to created Wisdom, the created Sophia, nor

82 *Sophia*: 79.

83 By perfectly exemplifying a form in—literally in—the creaturely Sophia, *x* is perfectly exemplifying a form literally in the Divine Sophia (the creaturely Sophia being literally a part of the Divine Sophia), and hence *x is in God*, literally in God, as we have *stipulated* (in section 5).

84 *Sophia*: 126-127.

85 *Sophia*: 126.

to creation glorified, nor to Christ's created humanity.⁸⁶ All that can be said *literally* (and truly) is that she, first among all humans, *perfectly exemplifies* (namely, is a perfect hypostasis of) creaturely humanity, creaturely human nature (»Christ's created humanity«), and that she *thereby*, due to the onto-theological centrality of humanness (implicitly confirmed by the Chalcedonian dogma), is a *perfect representation* (a living symbol, an epitome) not only of creaturely humanity but also of the creaturely Sophia (because creaturely humanity—perfectly exemplified by Mary—is a representative part of the creaturely Sophia) and of creation glorified (because Mary—perfectly exemplifying creaturely humanity—is a representative part of creation glorified). Only in a *non-literal*, in a *representational* sense, can it be said that *in Mary* creation is »completely irradiated by its prototype«—that is, made perfect vis-à-vis its ideal, the creaturely Sophia—and that *in Mary* »God is already all in all.«

Still non-literally, still merely representationally, but certainly in a more telling, more »encompassing« way than *in Mary alone*, God—for Bulgakov: the Trinity—is already all in all *in the risen Christ*; who *risen* (and *raised up*) is no longer kenotic and, anyhow (kenosis or not), has all the time (according to orthodoxy) been *both* a perfect hypostasis of the unfolded Divine Ousia (of the Divine Sophia, of Divine-humanity), just like the Father and the Holy Spirit, *and* a perfect hypostasis of creaturely humanity, just like Mary (»[h]er humanity became his [the Son's] humanity«⁸⁷). The Holy Spirit in this local and exemplary beginning of pan(en)theosis, in this singularity in the middle of time, cannot be separated from Mary or from Christ; for *the Annunciation* and *the Incarnation*, in which the Holy Spirit essentially participates, are the beginning of that beginning:

In the Annunciation both the Word and the Spirit are sent from the Father to reveal Sophia to the world, and thus to reveal, in the earthly, the heavenly humanity. The next point to note in this mystery is that the Spirit must come on the Virgin, and be accepted by her, before she can conceive and give flesh to the Word. [...] In the Incarnation, the Son and the Spirit come down from heaven together, for the Spirit, who rests on the Son inseparably and unconfusedly, in his descent on the Virgin brings down the Word too in person, in virtue of which she, conceiving the Son, becomes the birthgiver of God.⁸⁸

86 To repeat (see footnote 79): the use of the word »creaturely« instead of the word »created« would have been more adequate to the truth.

87 *Sophia*: 116.

88 *Sophia*: 101.

In all of this, »[t]he originating Hypostasis throughout remains, as before in all missions *ad extra*, the Father.«⁸⁹ Presumably, therefore, the Father *knows* what is the ground of the necessity of *What is not assumed [by God] is not healed [redeemed by God]*—the principle of Gregory of Nazianzus, which has almost universally (among Christians) been supposed to govern *the mission of all missions*. To a Christian (but not to a Jew or Muslim), the necessity of Gregory's principle may at first seem obvious; on thinking about it, it may become more and more enigmatic. Why couldn't God save (heal, redeem) us without assuming—in the second Divine Person—our nature? In contrast, the necessity of the following principle can only be, and remain, immediately evident: *What is not thrown down [initially by God] is not raised up [ultimately by God]*. Far as this latter principle may be from the Orthodox mind of Bulgakov (though apparently not from the Anglican mind of John Donne), it nevertheless seems worthwhile to rethink *the mission of all missions* in its light.⁹⁰

9. Panpsychism?

Prima facie *panpsychism* is the thesis that *everything has mental states*. Since neither non-objects, nor abstract entities, nor merely possible entities, nor impossible entities seem at all capable of having mental states, and since it is not absolutely certain that there are no entities which are non-objects, no entities which are abstract, no entities which are merely possible, and no entities which are impossible, it is recommendable to formulate the thesis of panpsychism in a less general way than seems right prima facie, as follows: *Every actual concrete object has mental states*. Yet even this restricted version of panpsychism may still assert too much: Does an actually existing table or stone have mental states? That they have mental states seems somewhat doubtful. Perhaps the thesis of panpsychism should, therefore, be put in the following way: *Every actual concrete object which is a fundamental entity has mental states*.

No matter which of the three formulations of panpsychism is chosen, it is obvious that *panentheism*—the thesis that everything is in a god (this thesis being taken in its logically strong interpretation: see footnote 1)—does not logically entail panpsychism, nor is logically entailed by it. Nevertheless, it turns out that *Bulgakovian panentheism* is not without *Bulgakovian panpsychism*. What *Bulgakovian panentheism* amounts to has been amply described in the previous sections. But what, now, is *Bulgakovian panpsychism*? The key

89 *Sophia*: 102.

90 More on this matter can be found in Meixner 2017.

to answering this question is the fact that the Divine Sophia—the unfolded divine essence—is *alive and conscious* for Bulgakov⁹¹ (because, according to him, it is alive and loving God: see section 4). We may take it that the creaturely Sophia, too—which Bulgakov identifies with the Divine Sophia (see section 6) and which, in any case, is certainly not something that could exist apart from the Divine Sophia—is *alive and conscious* for Bulgakov. Therefore, in the pan(en)theosis, when the created world will be brought into perfect congruence with the creaturely Sophia (that is, will enter into its maximal ontological nearness to the creaturely Sophia, and thereby also to the Divine Sophia), the created world—»nature,« »the cosmos«—will certainly be *as alive and conscious as it can possibly be*, in all its parts. However, the created world *is alive*—certainly in a *consciousness*-implying sense—even *now*, although this fact is presently obscured by sin, obscured to the point that the created world appears to be *dead* (and, doubtless, *is dead* in some measure). Bulgakov had a vision—or rather, a strong intimation—of the resilient aliveness of the created world (and it proved to be the first step of his long way back to the Christian faith):

This was my first sight of the mountains. I looked with ecstatic delight at their rising slopes. I drank in the light and the air of the steppes. I listened to the revelation of nature. My soul was accustomed to the dull pain of seeing nature as a lifeless desert and of treating its surface beauty as a deceptive mask. [...] Suddenly, in that evening hour, my soul was joyfully stirred. I started to wonder what would happen if the cosmos were not a desert and its beauty not a mask of deception—if nature were not death, but life. If he existed, the merciful and loving Father, if nature was the vesture of his love and glory ...⁹²

This, if anything, is *Bulgakovian* panpsychism, and no doubt, it is *orthodox* panpsychism.

91 The Neo-platonic origin of this idea is obvious if one considers what Plotinus has to say about the νοῦς: »Admiring the world of sense as we look out upon its vastness and beauty and the order of its eternal march, thinking of the gods within it, seen and hidden, and the celestial spirits and all the life of animal and plant, let us mount to its archetype, to the yet more authentic sphere: there we are to contemplate all things as members of the Intellectual—eternal in their own right, vested with a self-springing consciousness and life—and, presiding over all these, the unsoiled Intelligence and the unapproachable wisdom.« (Plotinus 1991 [Ennead V.1, 4]: 351.) The Divine Sophia (with the creaturely Sophia as part of it) is—among other things it is—the Christian form of the pagan Neo-platonic νοῦς.

92 Bulgakov 1976: 10.

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