

ZOSIMA THROUGH BULGAKOV

FOR THE SAKE OF THE WHOLE: A THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF  
DOSTOEVSKY'S ELDER ZOSIMA VIA SERGIUS BULGAKOV

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in Religious Studies

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McMaster University MASTER OF ARTS (2015) Hamilton, Ontario (Religious Studies)

TITLE: For the Sake of the Whole: A Theological Examination of Dostoevsky's Elder Zosima Via Sergius Bulgakov

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NUMBER OF PAGES: iv, 98

## ABSTRACT

The goal of this project is to organize and clarify the various theological ideas broached by Zosima, the enigmatic Elder of Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. I argue that the dogmatic theology of Sergius Bulgakov proves to be especially helpful in this regard. By examining the teachings, sayings and actions of Zosima in the light of Bulgakov's major theological trilogy, *On the Divine-Humanity*, I aim to demonstrate conceptual resonance between the two. Through the lens of Bulgakov's dogmatic theology, we can, I argue, better assess the *cosmological*, *anthropological* and *ecclesiological* themes that arise sporadically in the Elder's dialogue throughout the text. By connecting Bulgakov with the character of Zosima, I hope not only to anchor Zosima theologically, but also to reveal the dramatic contours of Bulgakov's theological project. The paradigm that emerges from a cross-examination of Zosima and Bulgakov is, I claim, a holistic theology centered on the dynamic interpenetration of God, man and the cosmos. I conclude that the concept of a divine milieu binding all things together in mystical communion, Bulgakov's "Sophia," serves to effectively consolidate Zosima's diverse theological ideas.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Elder Zosima is the most frequent expositor of positive theological maxims in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Zosima, more than any other character in the novel, gives voice to determinate ideas about God, man and the cosmos. For the most part the Elder's ideas are distributed throughout the novel in the form of aphorisms, exhortations, and ad hoc pastoral advice, while the most concentrated collection of his sayings is found in a hagiography compiled by the novice Alyosha. While several of the various threads of Zosima's thought are habitually addressed in critical commentary on *Karamazov*, there has not, to my knowledge, been a project that effectively weaves these threads together to form a comprehensive theological pattern. Perhaps, it may be argued, the absence of a systematic appraisal of Zosima's theology is due to the simple fact that Dostoevsky did not intend for the Elder to function as a systematic theologian. Indeed, in several of his letters Dostoevsky refers to Zosima as an "artistic" manifestation of his religious convictions, and states that the hagiographical account of Zosima was intended not as a "sermon" but a "story."<sup>1</sup> That being said, even if not a system per se, I will argue that the theological perspective attributed to Zosima possesses an overarching coherence and integrity that emerges upon close examination of its constituent parts and their subtle interconnections. The task of this thesis, then, is to offer such an examination.

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<sup>1</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2011), 661, 662, 660.

I will attempt to consolidate Zosima's religious maxims by reading them in conjunction with (what I argue to be) parallel themes drawn from the Russian Orthodox theological tradition. In this endeavor, I will focus particularly on the major theological trilogy of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944), a prominent Orthodox philosopher and theologian. Bulgakov was himself a great admirer of Dostoevsky (1821-1881), often making reference to Dostoevsky's literature explicitly in his own work. By privileging Bulgakov as a dialogue partner I am also following the lead of Lev A. Zander, who, in his monograph *Dostoevsky*, suggests that Bulgakov's theology is capable of elucidating the mystical dimensions of Dostoevsky's poetics.<sup>2</sup> While Zander makes some interesting associations between the ideas of each thinker, he opts for a sweeping approach, concentrating on select passages from across the extensive range of Dostoevsky's oeuvre. Furthermore, Zander's use of Bulgakov draws mainly upon his early philosophy of religion, rather than his later theological writing. The path thus remains open for an in-depth comparison between Bulgakov's mature dogmatic theology, and the religious vision of the Elder Zosima, one of the last, and most refined, religious characters conceived by Dostoevsky. It is my hope that, by examining the stories and teachings of Zosima found in the *Brothers Karamazov* in the light of the theology of Sergius Bulgakov, a reciprocal illumination will emerge, helping us to interpret both more effectively. Hence, this thesis will aim not only to anchor Zosima theologically via Bulgakov, but also to draw out the dramatic contours of Bulgakov's theology via Zosima.

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<sup>2</sup> Lev Zander, *Dostoevsky*, (New York: Haskell House Publishing Ltd., 1975), 38.

I have chosen to structure the thesis around three central chapters. Each chapter explores a particular emphasis in Zosima's religious vision and traces its resonance with an analogous theological topic in Bulgakov. The first chapter focusses on the topic of cosmology, the second anthropology, and the third, ecclesiology. Even prior to reading Bulgakov, who explicitly employs these categories, such an heuristic approach struck me as a natural way of constellating Zosima's various religious maxims. The cosmos, the human race, and the Church are undeniably objects of critical examination in *Karamazov* in general, and, as we will see, each receives special treatment from the Elder in particular. His commentary on these topics, I argue, yields an integrated theology centering on the mystical interpenetration of God, man and the cosmos. The cosmological reflections of Zosima and Bulgakov together reveal a mystically unified world in the paradoxical process of becoming what it is. Their anthropological reflections point toward a mystically unified humanity responsible for un-concealing and actualizing its own, and the world's, unity. Their ecclesiological reflections broach the means by which humanity ought to approach this task of unification and how divine providence is involved in the endeavor.

In the first chapter, I examine those sayings of Zosima that relate to the natural world and its tacit connection with the divine. I observe how Zosima describes a cosmos that shares a common source, direction and substance, anchored in a transcendent ground of being. I then juxtapose Zosima's sayings with the "sophiology" of Bulgakov, a current of his theological project that, not unlike the "natural theology" of the West, attends to the presence of God in the world, and the world in God. Bulgakov argues that the existence of the creaturely world is forever contingent upon the divine nature of God, from which it

takes its source, content and entelechy, its whence, what and whereto. I conclude by juxtaposing and coordinating the respective ideas of Zosima and Bulgakov.

In the second chapter, I examine Zosima's ideas about the transcendent connectivity of the human race, rooted in interpersonal compassion and mutual responsibility. I compare and contrast Zosima's ideas with those of Ivan Karamazov, who believes that interpersonal love is the product of all-too-human reification. I compare Zosima's vision of pan-human unity with Bulgakov's ideas about man being made in the image and likeness of a Trinitarian God, who, as Trinity, exemplifies perfect unity in multiplicity. Bulgakov and Zosima, I argue, regard the inter-communion of man to be both an ontological truth and, at the same time, a feat to be achieved; an irrevocable potential that requires free actualization.

In the third chapter, I examine Zosima's ideas about the destiny of the Church and, once again, contrast his position with Ivan's. While Ivan and Zosima agree that it is the "destiny" of the Church to reign universally, they disagree, I argue, on the means of its accomplishment. Zosima, I demonstrate, connects the universal reign of the Church with the universal brotherhood of man. This, he argues, will be a divinely-accomplished, eschatological event that must nevertheless be actively striven toward. I connect Zosima's emphases with Bulgakov's ecclesiology. Bulgakov believes that the world was created for the sake of the Church, which for him is the perfect eschatological communion of all things in the life of God. Bulgakov distinguishes between the "historical" and "ontological" modes of the Church and argues that the Church must patiently struggle to align the two in anticipation of the eschaton.

While each of these chapters could be treated as an independent study, when taken together they mutually reinforce a theological paradigm centered on the mystical interpenetration of God, man and the cosmos. Furthermore, they demonstrate a conceptual affinity between the dogmatic theology of Bulgakov, and the theological poetics of Dostoevsky's fiction.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **AM I NOT IN HEAVEN NOW? : THE MYSTICAL UNITY OF THE COSMOS**

the learned ones of this world . . . have examined parts and missed the whole, and their blindness is even worthy of wonder. Meanwhile the whole stands before their eyes as immovably as ever, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

– Fyodor Dostoevsky

There is a fundamental error in separating the parts from the whole, the mistake of atomizing what should not be atomized. Unity and complementarity constitute reality.

– Werner Heisenberg

### **Introduction**

Though perhaps not a “theologian” in the traditional sense, Fyodor Dostoevsky was hailed by Nicolas Berdyaev as “Russia’s greatest metaphysician”<sup>3</sup> and his novels clearly bear the mark of a profound theological imagination. This imagination is on full display in the *Brothers Karamazov*, where the fraught nexus of God, man and the cosmos is explored at length and in depth. One of the central metaphysical questions posited in *Karamazov* is whether or not there exists an underlying principle of unity, or “wholeness” binding the world together in its multiplicity. Is there, Dostoevsky invites us to consider, a transcendent power imparting meaning, integrity and direction to the cosmos, or, conversely, is cosmic life devoid of ultimate purpose and coherence, fashioned by chance collisions of particulate

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<sup>3</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky: an Interpretation* (San Rafael: Semantron Press, 2009), 11.

matter? Is nature governed by an all-encompassing, an-entropic force, a living, active Logos, or is it in fact a blind, self-propelled mechanism, brute matter in perpetual motion?

This set of questions leads naturally to the question of epistemology: how does one come to “know” which of these world-pictures is “true”? What sort of data is germane to such an analysis? If there *is* a transcendent power informing the world, how can this power come to be known immanently? Furthermore, how does one’s understanding of the cosmos affect the way one abides within it, what is the existential import of cosmology? In *Karamazov*, the answers given to these questions are undeniably diverse. However, in this chapter I will focus on the perspective of one character in particular: the Elder Zosima. Zosima operates as the main expounder of the novel’s explicitly religious ideas, many of which have deep cosmological ramifications. Zosima’s paradigm, furthermore, appears to have direct endorsement from Dostoevsky. Indeed, in a note to his editor Lyubimov, Dostoevsky wrote of Zosima that, “I completely share the thoughts he expresses.”<sup>4</sup>

When examining the sayings of Zosima disseminated throughout *Karamazov*, a distinctive cosmological vision begins to emerge. Through Zosima, Dostoevsky appears to depict a world that is deeply and mysteriously alive, a world in which matter and spirit, time and eternity, coalesce. As I will demonstrate below, Zosima understands the earth to be *sustained*, *propelled* and *united* by a divine animating force. He imagines the natural world to be inherently sacred, harboring “paradise” within itself. The mystical view of the earth advanced by Zosima (and found elsewhere in Dostoevsky’s fiction) is vaguely

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<sup>4</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2011), 661.

defined in *Karamazov*, but, as Lev Zander has argued, its meaning can be illuminated by the “sophiological doctrine” of Sergius Bulgakov. As Zander notes in his monograph, *Dostoevsky*:

The ancient mystical teaching about the life-giving power of the earth and its mysterious bond with man, proclaimed with such force by Dostoevsky . . . has been developed in dialectical form in the sophiological doctrine of Father Sergius Bulgakov, whose system may be regarded as the most characteristic and profound expression of the Russian philosophical and theological spirit . . . It is only in the light of that doctrine [sophiology] that we can appraise Dostoevsky’s intuitions. Apart from the sophiological doctrine, they remain dreams and visions, the religious and metaphysical meaning of which is hidden from us.<sup>5</sup>

Having made this bold proposition, Zander goes on in the monograph to examine some general similarities between Dostoevsky and Bulgakov. However, in so doing, he does not provide an in-depth examination of the teachings of Zosima, who, in my opinion, is the most developed spokesman of Dostoevsky’s “ancient mystical teaching.” In this chapter, then, I will attempt to expand upon Zander’s proposition, using Bulgakov’s sophiological writings to illuminate and unpack Zosima’s mystical/cosmological musings. First, I will outline the general contours of Zosima’s cosmology as presented in *Karamazov*. Next, I will provide a summary of Bulgakov’s sophiology. Finally, I will re-examine Zosima’s cosmology through the lens of Bulgakov’s sophiology.

### **The Cosmology of Father Zosima:**

Regarding Zosima’s “cosmology,” I believe there are three aspects of his thought that particularly stand out. First, the contingency of being, the idea that the world is not self-sufficient but depends upon a transcendent source for its ongoing existence. Second, the

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<sup>5</sup> Lev Zander, *Dostoevsky*, (New York: Haskell House Publishing Ltd., 1975), 38.

directionality of being, the idea that there is a “telos” toward which all things pre-consciously incline. Third, the permeability of being, the idea that time and space are porous, that all things are in some sense con-temporal and con-substantial. Taken together, these aspects mutually reinforce the idea that the cosmos possesses a transcendent unity and coherence. The contingency of being suggests a common source and sustainer. The directionality of being suggests a common objective. The permeability of being suggests a common substrate, a divine milieu in which all things hang together.

### Contingency of Being

Integral to Zosima’s vision of the cosmos is the idea that being itself is a gift derived from an external, transcendent source. “Everything is from God” he says (BK 55, 285)<sup>6</sup>. For Zosima, “God” is the eternal wellspring of life, the universal provider through whom all of creation lives and moves and has its being. God is that by which there is, and continues to be, something rather than nothing. Such reasoning is evident in a passage from Zosima’s homilies where he describes the vital dependency of “this earth” upon “other mysterious worlds”: “God took seeds from other worlds and sowed them on this earth, and raised up his garden; and everything that could sprout sprouted, *but it lives and grows only through its sense of being in touch with other mysterious worlds*” (320, emphasis mine).<sup>7</sup> According

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<sup>6</sup> All Bracketed Citations come from the Pevear/Volokhonsky translation of Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*: (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> It might be argued that Zosima, in this invocation of “other worlds” is pointing toward an account of creation out of extra-divine matter. However, I believe that Zosima’s use of this imagery is less dogmatic and more rhetorical/poetic, intended to emphasize the mysterious divine origin of terrestrial life, and the ongoing dependence of terrestrial life upon this origin. That being said, as I hope to show below, Bulgakov’s account of creation out of a pre-eternal divine world, the Ousia or “Sophia” of God, (which is itself seeded with the word-seeds of the Word, the “logoi spermatikoi”) helps to make cosmogonic sense

to Zosima, this knowledge (that the world owes its existence to a power beyond itself) is not the product of abstract postulation. Rather, it is a truth that naturally presses itself upon the human mind. The grace-character of life, the inexplicable given-ness of things, is something, he suggests, we recognize intuitively. For, he says, we have “been granted” a mysterious intuition that our being relies upon, and participates in, a transcendent ground of being.<sup>8</sup> Zosima calls this intuition, “a secret, mysterious sense of our living bond with the other world, with the higher heavenly world” (320), and he believes that it may lead one to the conviction that “the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here but in other worlds” (320).<sup>9</sup> Zosima thus advises that one should set one’s mind on “things above” since “our true homeland is in heaven” (70).<sup>10</sup>

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of Zosima’s statement. The “other mysterious worlds,” on this account, would be interpreted to exist within, not without, the depths of God.

<sup>8</sup> As we will see (in the next chapter), the possibility of such an experience relates to Zosima’s vision of human flourishing, which involves the awareness of one’s participation in a transcendent, supra-human milieu—what the novel frequently refers to as “the whole” (3, 171, 304). For Zosima, the knowledge of our external dependency may help to break us out of the prison of egoism and draw us into a living world of interpersonal compassion. Conversely, failure to acknowledge this dependency drives humanity into “disunity” and “isolation,” potentially resulting in “indifference to life” (314, 320).

<sup>9</sup> In a letter to N.L. Ozmidov, Dostoevsky suggests that the human “I” intuitively recognizes itself as more than finite, leading to a rending inner tension: “you cannot handle your own I: it does not fit into the earthly order of things, but is always seeking something else that it belongs to, outside of this world” Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2011), 657.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that in statements such as these, Zosima is not encouraging a resentful flight from the material world. Nor is he endorsing a form of Manichean dualism. On the contrary, Zosima is often accused by his fellow monks of being too invested in the world, of drinking too deeply from the flagon of life (333, 336). He is regularly described as possessing a jovial character, and there is no hint of tedium or melancholia in his teaching: “the elder was not at all stern . . . on the contrary, he was most always cheerful in manner,” (29) “bless life and cause others to bless it—which is the most important thing.” (285)

By rooting the “essence of things” in the mysterious loam of a “higher heavenly world” Zosima is not, I think, aiming to degrade or diminish the significance of “this earth” but, quite the opposite, to enrich it. For, if finite, terrestrial matter is indeed fed and nourished by the sap of eternity, its ontological density is guaranteed, its hallowed status assured. If imbued from crust to core with unfathomable mystery, the earth is guarded against crude reductionism and commercial despoliation. For Zosima, the stuff of creation, the rudimentary matter of the earth, appears to retain what we might call a “sacramental” dimension. He notes that creation bears within itself a timeless *mysterium*—the “mystery of God in things” (319). Perhaps, then, it would not be inapt to interpret Zosima as a kind of materialist, not in the sense of one who acknowledges only material phenomena, but in the sense of one who robustly defends the worth of materiality and incarnate existence. For Zosima’s ecstatic love of the earth is undeniable. How else can one explain his exhortation to: “Love all of God’s creation, both the whole of it and every grain of sand” (319)? Or, again, to “fall down on the earth and kiss it” (291, 322)? These teachings are further reinforced by Zosima’s remarkable death: “[he] bowed down with his face to the ground, stretched out his arms, and, as if in joyful ecstasy, kissing the earth and praying, quietly and joyfully gave up his soul to God.” (324).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Zosima’s disciple Alyosha has an ecstatic experience following the death of the Elder, that leads him to approximate the Elder’s actions: “The silence of the earth seemed to merge with the silence of the heaven’s, the mystery of the earth touched the mystery of the stars . . . Alyosha stood gazing and suddenly, as if he had been cut down, threw himself to the earth. He did not know why he was embracing it, he did not try to understand why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss all of it, but he was kissing it, weeping, sobbing, and watering it with his tears, and he vowed ecstatically to love it, to love it unto ages of ages” (362).

Conversely, when the earth is evacuated of the beauty of the infinite, confined, as Ivan says, to a mere “three dimensions of space,” (235) it becomes susceptible to ontological desecration. Matter, when voided of any and all transcendence, is quickly reduced to grist for the mill of evolutionary progress, Ivan’s “manure” (244). Outside of human manipulation matter comes to be seen as little more than cosmic debris, subject to the “blind, mute, merciless laws of nature” (340). Zosima clearly sees the material world in a different (celestial) light. For him, nature is not a blank slate, a stockpile of cold and meaningless sense-data, acquiring worth strictly through external imposition. Rather, it is charged through with eternal value, seeded with the seeds of “paradise.” From Zosima’s perspective, meaning, worth and beauty are not alien to nature, but, on the contrary, abide forever within it.

That being said, Zosima would also agree that the world regularly presents itself to man through a glass, darkly. As he points out, the divine ground of being, “paradise,” often remains “concealed” from ordinary sight (303, 320). Though present in nascent form to human intuition, the idea that there exists a transcendent world-behind-the-world is not, Zosima recognizes, empirically self-evident. Hence, in order to see the universe aright, to truly behold “the beauty and glory of it all,” (28) one must cultivate a certain depth-perception. This begins, according to Zosima, with a genuine “love” for creation, a positive (rather than dismissive) response to its mysterious beauty. As he declares, “If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin tirelessly to perceive more and more of it every day” (319). Consequently, the truth of the presence of the “mystery of God in things” must be progressively, patiently and

lovingly un-concealed, both within oneself, as a microcosmic piece of creation, and within creation at large (319). This mysterious truth is not, for Zosima, limited to any single insight, it is not a “gnosis” that one can master and manipulate, for it pervades everything: “*all things* are good and splendid because *all* is truth” (295, emphasis mine).

### Directionality of Being

Implicit in Zosima’s aforementioned statement that “everything . . . lives and grows only through its sense of being in touch with other mysterious worlds,” is the question of what exactly “everything” is “living and growing” *toward*. For Zosima, this question can be answered in one word, *the Word*—Christ. The Word, he indicates, is the universal telos of creation, that toward which all being naturally tends and intends. Indeed, according to Zosima, “the Word is for all, all creation and all creatures, every little leaf is striving towards the Word, sings glory to God, weeps to Christ, unbeknownst to itself, doing so through the mystery of its sinless life” (295). From Zosima’s perspective, all matter—animal, mineral, vegetable—down to the last sub-atomic particle, “strives,” “sings” and “weeps” to a personal transcendent power. The rich diversity of nature is dynamically united in its common desire for the all-embracing singularity that is Christ the Word.

As Zosima notes, this propulsion toward the Word manifests itself unconsciously (“unbeknownst to itself”) and ubiquitously (“they ceaselessly enact it”) in plant and animal life (295). It is presumably for this reason that Zosima says of “natural” creatures that “there is no sin upon them” (295). As he says elsewhere, “look at the divine gifts around us: the clear sky, the fresh air, the tender grass, the birds, *nature is beautiful and sinless*” (299,

emphasis mine). However, the inherent sinless-ness of nature does not, for Zosima, apply in the same way to humanity: “everything except man is sinless” (295). Man, presumably because of his capacity to exercise freedom and bear responsibility, is considered by Zosima to be, in a certain sense, more than natural. For, in their freedom, humans can choose to deviate from their “natural” propensities, including their good and natural propensity toward the Word. This deviation can, in turn, become a deeply engrained pattern. Whence, it would seem, sin. This is not to say, however, that man is less than natural. For even if humans deny and suppress this propensity, it does not, Zosima suggests, cease to churn powerfully within them.<sup>12</sup> The human body is, after all, made of the same rudiments as the rest of the universe, the same earth. The flesh of man feels the tug of the Word at least as much as “every little leaf.” In fact, as Zosima cautions, “the people will perish without the word of God, for their souls thirst for this word and for every beautiful perception” (294). When this “thirst” is not attended to, when man forsakes the inner craving of his soul, he begins to wither and rot—to “fester.” Zosima therefore advises man not to look condescendingly upon the animal kingdom: “Man, do not exalt yourself above the animals: they are sinless, and you, you with your grandeur, fester the earth by your appearance on it, and leave your festering trace behind you—alas, almost every one of us does!” (319). The “festering trace” left by man seems to relate to his “sin”; his corrupted

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<sup>12</sup> We will later examine this idea in terms of Zosima’s notion of conscience (the law of Christ) and the image of Christ. Ivan’s formula “either God exists or everything is permissible” seems to run up against the fact that everything is not permissible, at least not without lacerating psychological and spiritual consequences.

freedom; his failure to pursue the Word as he ought.<sup>13</sup> However, Zosima's caveat, "*almost all of us does,*" would seem to indicate a belief that sin does not bind the will invincibly.

Zosima clearly sees something laudable in the primitive, un-deviating procession of the natural world that humankind could stand to learn from. The incredible simplicity and single-mindedness of animal and vegetable life summons humankind back to its elemental nature, the good earth from which it was formed. As we have noted, Zosima sees nature as saturated with, and inclined toward, divinity. This inclination is evident in a remarkable scene recounted from Zosima's past, in which he and a young barge-puller marvel at the "great mystery" of the natural world:

It was a bright still, warm July night, the river was wide, a refreshing mist rose from it, once in a while a fish would splash softly, the birds fell silent, all was quiet, gracious, all praying to God. And only the two of us, myself and this young man, were still awake, and we got to talking about the beauty of this world of God's, and about its great mystery. *For each blade of grass, each little bug, and, golden bee, knows its way amazingly; being without reason, they witness to the divine mystery, they ceaselessly enact it.* (295, emphasis mine)

We can see then that, for Zosima, not only does all being receive its sustenance from a transcendent source, but also its momentum and sense of direction. It would appear that both the ground and purpose of creation lie beyond the realm of the natural, which nevertheless serves to disclose this ground and purpose. Zosima's is a non-dualistic cosmology. The world, he seems to reason, is more, but not less than natural; the natural is

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<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere in the novel, such "festering" can be seen in the deepening rot of Dmitri's gazebo, located in the midst of a beautiful garden: "He (Alyosha) looked around the gazebo, and for some reason it seemed for him much more decrepit than before; this time it seemed quite wretched to him" (See 104, 223).

pregnant with the supernatural; the barrier between transcendence and immanence is not impregnable but essentially porous.

### Permeability of Being

Recalling a vespers service from his youth, Zosima recites a passage from the book of Job (1:21): “Naked I came out of my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return into the earth” (291). What the attentive reader will notice about this quotation is that three words have been appended to the passage, three words not present in the original text: “into the earth.” As a result of this interpolation, it would appear that a conceptual analogy is tacitly drawn between the “mother’s womb,” out of which Job comes, and “the earth,” to which he returns. If this rough equivalence holds up, we might see Zosima as subtly pointing toward the unity and fecundity of matter that we have already anticipated. For “the earth” might in this sense be identified with the universal womb; mother-earth, the proto-matter (*mater*) from which all of creation takes its flesh—the humus that clothes human, plant, and animal alike. This would ostensibly indicate a certain “con-substantiality” of all things, a shared universal substrate. Furthermore, this analogy suggests a re-imagining of the soil as a generative power, a womb and not a tomb (or at least a tomb become womb). This would align with the novel’s epigraph from John 12:24 describing a corn of wheat achieving fructification by way of earthy decomposition.

Zosima elsewhere suggests that physical distance, spatio-temporal separation, is transcended by an intimate bond linking everything and everyone together, connecting all to all. As he says: “all is like an ocean, all flows and connects; touch it in one place and it

echoes at the other end of the world” (319). Not unlike some contemporary theoretical physicists, Zosima seems to imagine a universe invisibly governed by entanglement and non-locality. He apparently affirms the participation of all matter in a sub-atomic milieu where spatio-temporal boundaries come undone. In any case, he clearly sees the basis of reality as a fluid medium transcending ordinary strictures of time and space. I think that one of the important things to notice here is that Zosima regards this transcendent unity as something intrinsic to the universe itself. The unity he envisions is not constructed or contrived *a posteriori*; it is not a mechanical or contractual unity, but an ontological unity, rooted in the spiritual nature of being itself. I would appear that, for Zosima, things do not *have* relationship so much as they *are* relationship. Though man may indeed have a role to play in the process of unification, once again it would appear to involve the task of unconcealing something extant, rendering visible an invisible truth.

Zosima juxtaposes his transcendent-organic (“oceanic”) vision with the “shortening of distances” lauded by his contemporaries: “We are assured that the world is becoming more and more united, is being formed into brotherly communion, by the shortening of distances, by the transmitting of thoughts through the air. Alas, do not believe in such a union of people” (313). For Zosima, such mechanical unity is a pseudo-unity, because it fails to address the transcendent-organic basis of reality. Philosophers of the mechanistic bent begin with the idea of man qua atomic individual and end, predictably, with the vision of an atomized cosmos, a cosmos marked by “disunity and isolation” (314). Perceived mechanical disunity is met with mechanical unity and a mechanization of life ensues.

Zosima's fellow monk Father Paissy has similar qualms about reductionistic approaches to understanding the world. As he says: "the science of this world, having united itself into a great force, has, especially in the past century, examined everything heavenly that has been bequeathed to us in sacred books, and, after hard analysis, the learned ones of this world have absolutely nothing left of what was once holy . . . they have examined parts and missed the whole, and their blindness is even worthy of wonder. Meanwhile the whole stands before their eyes as immovably as ever" (171). Paissy believes that the holistic nature of the cosmos is, to a certain degree, self-evident to our intuition. Hence the "wonder" he experiences at the failure of "the learned ones" to perceive it. By over-estimating the power and reach of their scientific concepts and methods, these learned ones, it would seem, break apart the organic unity of being unawares, obfuscating rather than clarifying the truth of things. By restricting themselves to "partial" examination, they alienate themselves from other sources of knowing (such as desire, intuition and the broader scope of reason). This type of parochialism is echoed elsewhere in Ivan's dogmatic fidelity to "Euclidean geometry" (235).<sup>14</sup>

Zosima's ideas about time are as dynamic and mysterious as his ideas about space. The eternal, from his perspective, is intimately connected to the temporal. He recalls and affirms his deceased brother's statement that "one day is enough for man to know all happiness," that "paradise" may manifest on earth itself in the blink of an eye (288). In his recollection of the story of Job, he describes such an event as the "touching" of time and

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<sup>14</sup> "Let the parallel lines meet before my own eyes: I shall look and say, yes, they meet, and still I will not accept it." (236)

eternity: “But what is great here is this very mystery—that the *passing earthly image* and *eternal truth* here *touched each other*. In the face of earthly truth, the enacting of eternal truth is accomplished” (292, emphasis mine). In contradistinction to Ivan, who asserts that the “parallel lines” of time and eternity “cannot possibly meet on earth,” (235) Zosima seems to consider their permeability to be a manifest truth. Past, present and future, from his perspective, can and do interpenetrate one another, problematizing the supposed hegemony of linear, calculable cause-and-effect determinism. The presence of the eternal in the temporal gathers all of time and space together in a mysterious, integrated whole. Roger B. Anderson arrives at a similar conclusion in his analysis of Zosima’s notions about the inner workings of temporality:

for Zosima, each moment can reveal the sacred, and, therefore, ordinary concepts of ‘past’ and ‘future’ lose their meaning . . . He speaks of a sacred mystery, that, once revealed in time, becomes unchangeable, applicable to all future moments in its original potency . . . In Zosima’s mind, time demarcations fade as he dwells on the constant infusion of a single cosmic truth within all time. He feels no haste in reaching an improved future; nothing is in danger of being lost.<sup>15</sup>

For Zosima, time, the power of change and development, is informed by a mysterious inner logic; time moves, he thinks, to the rhythm of a divine, predestinating power that he calls “the wisdom of God.” As he says, “There is no need to trouble oneself with times and seasons, for the mystery of the times and seasons is in *the wisdom of God*, in his foresight, in his love. And that which by human logic may still be rather remote, by divine predestination may already be standing at the eve of its appearance, at the door” (66, emphasis mine). This invocation of “the wisdom of God” may serve as a logical gateway

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<sup>15</sup> Roger B. Anderson, *Mythical Implications of Zosima’s Religious Teachings*, found in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2011), 738-739.

into the cosmology of Sergius Bulgakov, for whom the concept of “Divine Wisdom,” or “Sophia,” plays a central role. His detailed exposition of this concept will, I hope to show, prove beneficial in our attempt to further elucidate the teachings of Zosima.

Before moving on to Bulgakov, however, let us briefly reiterate what has been said thus far of Zosima’s cosmology. First, it was shown that Zosima identifies a *common source* of being, a transcendent power that generates, sustains and enriches all of creation. Second, it was shown that creation is united by a *common desire*, a universal goal of Christ-likeness toward which all things intrinsically strive, whether consciously or not. Third, and lastly, we examined Zosima’s ideas about a *common substrate*, a universal binding agent that preserves the unity of the cosmos and transcends ordinary strictures of time and space. Each one of these aspects contributes to Zosima’s overarching vision of cosmic integrity, an underlying coherence that may reveal itself to those with eyes to see.

### **Bulgakov’s Sophiology**

“Sophiology,” according to Bulgakov, “represents a theological, or, if you prefer, a dogmatic interpretation of the world within Christianity,”<sup>16</sup> and “the central point from which sophiology proceeds is that of the relation between God and the world, or, what is practically the same thing, God and humanity.”<sup>17</sup> Within the broader scope of Bulgakov’s theology, sophiology occupies a vein of cosmological and anthropological speculation focusing primarily on relational categories (God-world, God-man, man-world). It is a

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<sup>16</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia: the Wisdom of God*, trans. Patrick Thompson (Hudson: Lindisfarne Press, 1993), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 14

poetic/contemplative mode of interpreting the nature of being that combines embodied experience and philosophical acumen with the manifold resources of the Christian tradition (including Church architecture, the creeds, iconography, hymnography, liturgy, and, above all, Scripture).

The experiential component of sophiology, immanent encounter with the divine, was not unknown to Bulgakov. A committed Marxist-materialist for many years of his life, he was compelled to reevaluate this paradigm after continually running up against the presence of the sublime in natural world. According to Bulgakov's own account, the mysterious and astonishing depths of reality were unexpectedly disclosed to him for the first time while travelling through the Caucasus Mountains in his early twenties:

I was twenty-four years old. For a decade I had lived without faith and, after early stormy doubts, a religious emptiness reigned in my soul. One evening we were driving across the southern steppes of Russia, and the strong-scented spring grass was gilded by rays of glorious sunset. Far in the distance I saw the blue outlines of the Caucasus. This was my first sight of the mountains. I looked with ecstatic delight at their rising slopes. I drank in the light and 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. Yet, contrary to my intellectual convictions, I could not be reconciled to nature without God. 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 or deception—if nature were not death, but life.<sup>18</sup>

Much of Bulgakov's mature theological writing bears the trace of ecstatic insights such as this. Running through his work is an abiding sense of awe and wonder at the beauty and splendor of being, the sheer gratuity of life. In his sophiological reflections, Bulgakov writes lyrically of the cosmos as a living organism, bristling with élan, dynamic to the

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<sup>18</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *A Bulgakov Anthology* (Southampton: The Camelot Press, 1976), 10.

highest degree. His felt awareness that nature is “not death, but life” clearly informs his later verdict that “There is no place for dead matter in the world.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, he describes the earth as inexhaustibly fecund. According to Bulgakov, ““God did not create death,’ (Wisdom 1:13) and therefore he did not create anything dead. What we consider dead, or rather non-organic, contains the principle of life, even if only at its lowest levels, in its dark state . . . all creaturely matter is capable of being quickened and participating in life through living beings . . . the boundary between the living and the dead in nature is mobile.”<sup>20</sup>

Bulgakov’s sense of the eternal fecundity of nature is rooted in his conviction that all nature partakes in the eternal life of God, drinks from the ever-brimming chalice of divine ebullience. In this respect, the Biblical figure of “Sophia,” (the feminine personification of wisdom in the Old Testament) plays a major role in Bulgakov’s theological project. For Bulgakov, Sophia represents a living, ontological bridge between Creator and creation; she is (at one and the same time) “the world in God,” and “God in the world.” Sophia is the shared “ousia” of God and the cosmos.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is one of Bulgakov’s central metaphysical claims that (not unlike the bread of the Eucharist) the living Godhead of the Trinity—Sophia—is sacrificially distributed throughout the cosmos at the dawn of creation.<sup>22</sup> According to Bulgakov the life of the creaturely world, the

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<sup>19</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, Trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2002), 79.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 81.

<sup>21</sup> Bulgakov, *Sophia: the Wisdom of God*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, Trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2008), 129.

foundation and content of the cosmos, is derived from the immortal substance of Divinity.<sup>23</sup> This is not to say, however, that the ontological integrity of Sophia, the consubstantial unity of the Trinity, is ruptured or torn asunder. For Sophia, he argues, co-exists in two separate, correlative “modes”: Divine and creaturely, eternal and temporal. The former is eternally simple and consistent, the other ceaselessly striving to become what it is.

In what follows I will briefly examine Bulgakov’s reflections about each of these modes, beginning (as he does) with the Divine and moving subsequently toward the creaturely. Having done so, I will attempt to underline the conceptual resonances between Bulgakov’s sophiology and the previously examined cosmology of Zosima.

#### Divine Sophia: The World in God

For Bulgakov, Sophia is the “Divine world,” the superabundant life and power of the Holy Trinity, the timeless and perfect instrument of God’s internal self-revelation and self-inspiration. He refers to “her” as the “self-Icon of Divinity,” the masterpiece of “divine self-art.” As Bulgakov explains:

Sophia is the Pleroma, the Divine world, existent in God and for God, eternal and uncreated, in which God lives in the Holy Trinity. And in itself this Divine world contains all that the Holy Trinity reveals about itself in itself; it is the Image of God in God Himself, the self-Icon of Divinity . . . it is the real and fully realized divine Idea, the idea of ideas, actualized as beauty in ideal images of beauty. The icon of Divinity is divine self-art, life in ideal images and in the reality of these images . . . Ousia-Sophia is the Life of life and the proto-ground of all creaturely life.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> As we will see, the being of the world is, for Bulgakov, alloyed with nothing (me-on) thus giving creaturely life its distinctive status of “becoming.”

<sup>24</sup> Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 103-104.

According to Bulgakov, there was no time when Sophia was not, and no time when God was not her “Creator.” Sophia, the Divine world, is the consummation of God’s “supra-eternal” creativity, the ceaseless actualization of all possibilities within God. As he says, “Sophia must also be understood in the sense of *creative* self-determination, the supra-eternal *creative act* of the Holy Trinity, the self-creativity of the Holy-Trinity, the *actus purus* in God.”<sup>25</sup>

Bulgakov further analyzes Sophia in terms of “content” and “manifestation.” Recognizing that temporal processes do not factor into the inner life of God, Bulgakov nevertheless speaks heuristically of creation in God as a process, or “procession,” involving the three Persons of the Trinity. The Father is the “revealed hypostasis” while the Word and Spirit “uni-dyadically” act as the “hands” of the Father, the “revealing hypostases.” Together, the Word and Spirit render the Father visible as Sophia according to the following *taxis*. Initially, the Father gives all of Himself, His Godhead, to be revealed through the Word and Spirit. The Word, the direct recipient of the Father’s gift, accepts the “words” of His Father as His own, giving himself wholly to the task of gathering and organizing them as a “unity-in-multiplicity,” an “All-unity.” These integrated words, the manifold ideas about all that is, constitute the essential “content” of Sophia.<sup>26</sup> The Spirit, in turn, “reposes” upon this content, “clothing” it and enabling it to shine forth with complete and utter lucidity. This is the triumphant “manifestation” of Sophia, the manifest “Beauty” and “Glory” of God. This tri-personal self-revelation of God is a pre-eternal

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<sup>25</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 41.

<sup>26</sup> “By her content, Sophia, or the Divine World, is the pan-organism of ideas, the organism of the ideas of all, about all and in all; she is Integral Wisdom.” Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 112.

creative act, the perfect accomplishment of Divine poeisis.<sup>27</sup> Sophia, then, is the shining world of God, the consummate Godhead, the integrated words of the Word, illumined by the Spirit. An unbroken ring of collaborative creativity amongst the Persons of the Trinity forever yields a perfect revelation of the divine nature.<sup>28</sup>

### Creaturely Sophia: God in the World

Bulgakov describes the genesis of the creaturely world as “the Divine ‘ecstasy’ of love.”<sup>29</sup> For, as he says, “God is love and it is natural for love to love and expand in love . . . it is proper for the ocean of Divine love to overflow its limits and it is proper for the fullness of the life of Divinity to spread beyond its bounds.”<sup>30</sup> While Bulgakov asserts that there is nothing that could “force” God to create the temporal world, nothing in the act of creation that provides for God’s “self-completion,” he also argues that, in a certain sense, God (for whom nothing is arbitrary) could not but create it.<sup>31</sup> For if God and creation indeed co-exist, then, given what God has revealed about his character, namely, that he acts with perfect consistency, things could not have been otherwise. Creation is an act, Bulgakov says, of free necessity, necessity as freedom—“the necessity of love.”<sup>32</sup>

Bulgakov combines this idea of God’s ecstatic overflow with the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. For, Bulgakov reasons, if the doctrine of *ex nihilo* indicates

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<sup>27</sup> See especially Ch.1-2 of *Sophia: the Wisdom of God* and also 107-110 of *The Lamb of God*

<sup>28</sup> In the next chapter, we explore how this eternal manifestation of the divine nature (Sophia) is connected with the perfect trihypostatic love of the trinity.

<sup>29</sup> Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 127.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 120

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

(negatively) that God did not create the world from anything outside of himself, then it is only logical to conclude that God must have created it from himself. *Creatio ex nihilo*, he thinks, is really just a “negative” way of expressing *creatio ex Deo*. For, “if the negative definition ‘God created the world out of nothing’ eliminates the idea of any nondivine or extradivine principle of creation, its *positive* content can only be such that God created the world *out of Himself*, out of His essence . . . the *positive* content of the world’s being is just as divine as its foundation in God, for there is no other principle for it.”<sup>33</sup> As we have seen, Bulgakov equates this positive content with the figure of Sophia—the world in God. We can then understand the genesis of the creaturely world as a sort of “repetition” of Sophia, what Bulgakov calls a Divine “self-repetition.”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, according to Bulgakov, “the All in the Divine world, in the Divine Sophia, and the All in the creaturely world, in the creaturely Sophia, are one and identical in content. *One and the same Sophia is revealed in God and in creation.*”<sup>35</sup> This idea is expressed theologically by the term “panentheism” (God in all and all in God) a term Bulgakov accepts as a description of his sophiology.<sup>36</sup>

Bulgakov also describes the genesis of the creaturely world as a kind of “releasing,” a relinquishment of the Divine world into a spatio-temporal milieu outside the unchanging inner chamber of the Trinity.<sup>37</sup> Thus, for Bulgakov, not only is the act of creation ecstatic, it is also kenotic, characterized by Divine self-emptying. Indeed, what Bulgakov calls the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid 126 (emphasis mine)

<sup>34</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 222.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid Emphasis Bulgakov

<sup>36</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, Trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2004), 200.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid 49

“metaphysical kenosis” of creation involves a drastic change in the operative “mode” of the Divine Sophia.<sup>38</sup> For there is, of course, a major difference between the life of the creaturely world and the life of God. Whereas the Divine world is eternal, marked by unchanging perfection, the creaturely world is temporal, marked by change and development—birth, growth and decay. Bulgakov thus invokes *creatio ex nihilo* in another sense, the sense of God alloying the plenitude of Divine “Being,” the Divine Pleroma, with a created “nothing.” He describes this as a traumatic fusion that generates a world in the process of “becoming.” According to Bulgakov, “nothing” functions as a kind of ontological spacer, a void in being that creates room for the integrated words of the Word to distance themselves from one another, to grow and expand in various directions through time and space. The “All-unity” of Sophia, in its creaturely manifestation, thus becomes an “All-multiplicity.” God, in this sense, “potentializes” the words of the Word, planting them like so many seeds in the flux of space-time, opening up the real possibility of variations on the given theme, or shape, of the creaturely Sophia. Nevertheless, the “foundation, content, entelechy and meaning” of creation remains invincibly anchored in the Divine Sophia.<sup>39</sup> Important to note is that, for Bulgakov, this potentialization is not itself a “Fall.” He does not think that multiplicity and mediation are inherently “bad” in any sense. However, the potentialization of Sophia does open up the real possibility of friction and uncomplimentary alignment between the variegated words of the Word.

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<sup>38</sup> Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 128.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 126, 127.

Bulgakov describes the relationship between the creaturely and Divine Sophia as that between type and prototype, the former striving to conform itself to the latter, which constitutes its ontological center of gravity; the latter turning its face toward the former, inviting it to recall and recollect what it always-already is. For Bulgakov, the motion of the creaturely toward the Divine is not to be seen as an effortless, automatic unraveling. Rather, it is a free and creative self-determination in concert with objective content. The creaturely world must struggle to fulfill its given potential, it must creatively re-integrate itself in accordance with its natural ontological shape. Consequently there is, he says, a “long path” to be trodden before the creaturely Sophia may achieve a true semblance of its heavenly prototype. As Bulgakov says, “the becoming world must, in its becoming, follow the long path of cosmic being to the end before it can reflect in itself the countenance of the Divine Sophia, which, being the foundation and entelechy of the world’s being, is only in a state of potentiality, which the world must actualize in itself.”<sup>40</sup> Because it is in the process of becoming itself, and only ever glimpsed at a given stage of this becoming, the Sophianic heart of the world is not immediately apparent to us. Hence, for Bulgakov, if it is to be recognized, it must be progressively and creatively un-veiled.

As in the Divine Sophia, Bulgakov sees the action of the Spirit as playing a prominent role in the life of the creaturely Sophia. For Bulgakov, the Spirit summons out what the world should be, activating its inner potential insofar as it is willing and able to assimilate it. The Spirit unceasingly sustains the life of the world, luring and inviting all

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid 127

that dwells within it to become itself for itself. As in the inner life of the Trinity, the Spirit clothes the words of the Word in creation, the ideal content of all that is, providing all things with tangible expression and vital impetus. Bulgakov writes poetically of the Spirit as the “life force” of the creaturely world:

The force of the Spirit is the earth from which all things have their being, the leaf of grass as well as man. It is a certain silent being in which, nevertheless, the words of the Word are spoken and resound. . . In the creaturely Sophia, the Spirit is a hearing and perceiving silence, in which the Word born from all eternity is born again for creation, as it were. In the creaturely Sophia, this Spirit is resonance, breathing, accomplishment, life . . . The Spirit is the natural energy of the world which can never be extinguished or interrupted in the world . . . is our mother, the moist earth out of which all things grow and into which all things return for new life.<sup>41</sup>

Bulgakov sets the central drama of the creaturely world in its yearning for self-completion, its desire to become what it inherently is—Divine. This asymptotic stretching toward Divinity constitutes the heart and soul of creaturely existence. For Bulgakov, the creaturely world does not possess itself for itself, but is constantly gifted its being from the superabundant depths of God, the manifold “words of the Word” and the quickening breath of the Spirit.

Without getting too deep into his anthropology at this point, which will figure prominently in the next chapter, it should be noted that man, for Bulgakov, holds a unique position within the cosmos, that of microcosm and mediator. Man functions, says Bulgakov, as the “logos” and artist of the creaturely world. Like the Logos in the Trinity, mankind is tasked with creatively integrating the cosmic logoi. Man is to give conscious

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<sup>41</sup> Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 199.

direction to the creaturely Sophia, aligning her (or rather helping her to align herself) with the Divine Sophia, doing so through inspired acts of artistic, economic and sacramental poesis. Man, whose body may be thought of as Sophia in miniature, is uniquely gifted with a “hypostasis,” a personal creative spirit. His task may be thought of as rendering both his own body, as well as the natural world (his “peripheral body”) transparent to the Spirit, thereby shedding light on the half-being of man becoming and allowing what truly is to shine forth in all its primordial splendor.

### Summary

To recapitulate, Sophia represents the objective nature, or “world,” of God, the pre-eternal creation within the life of the Trinity. She is pregnant with the ideas about all that is, ideas that are perfectly actualized and integrated via the uni-triadic action of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the ecstatic/kenotic act of creation, this world is submerged in non-being, released into the volatility of time and space. Through this procreative event, the Divine ideas are potentialized and condensed into restive seed-form. Spatio-temporal gaps thus arise and unsettle Sophia’s accomplished integrity. However, this new creation, the “creaturely Sophia” is not left to her own devices. She is umbilically connected to her proto-Mother, the Divine Sophia, and is thus never without a source of nourishment and direction. The ontological integrity of the creaturely Sophia is guaranteed by her inherent correlation with the Divine Sophia. She is, in fact, the Divine Sophia in the process of becoming. Unity and harmony in the world are thus ontologically prior to, and more substantial than, disunity and discord, which become possible due to the emergent freedom of the creaturely world. Even then, the unity undergirding all that is, is immutable, because

derived from the eternal life of God. Man, functioning as the “logos” of the creaturely Sophia, is tasked with unveiling the transcendent ground of her being, of creatively harmonizing the fluctuating Sophia with her unchanging Divine prototype, both in his personal life and in the life of the world, which, after all, partake of the same nature.

### **Comparison: Zosima and Bulgakov**

Several similarities between Zosima’s cosmological intuitions and Bulgakov’s Sophiology will perhaps already be evident. To conclude this chapter, I will re-examine the three aspects of Zosima’s cosmology explored above—contingency, directionality, permeability—through the lens of Bulgakov’s Sophiology, underlining the conceptual resonance between the two.

#### **Contingency of Being**

As we have seen, Zosima roots the fundamental being of the world in an external, transcendent source. The earth, he notes, has been sown with the sustaining seeds of “other worlds,” seeds through which all that is “lives and grows.” This idea of other-worldly sustenance is mirrored in Bulgakov’s concept of the two Sophia’s: Divine and creaturely. Like Zosima, Bulgakov imagines a world-behind-the-world (the Divine Sophia) that provides for this world’s (the creaturely Sophia’s) continuing existence.

Bulgakov similarly uses seed-language to talk about the “implanting” of Divine ideas, or “words,” into the “neonal” soil of the earth, ideas that constitute the center and circumference of creaturely being. As he says, the Divine ideas, “are the very *seeds of*

*being*, implanted in the meonal ‘half-being’ of becoming.”<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he notes, “(t)he creaturely Sophia, as the heavenly face of the world’s being, already contains the entire fullness of creation, just as the spring earth already contains all the seeds that will issue forth sprouts in their time.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, Bulgakov shares Zosima’s belief that the world is inherently meaningful, pregnant with eternal purpose. Both Zosima and Bulgakov agree that truth is un-concealed rather than contrived, a process that involves free human creativity. Life, both assert, is a gift.

### Directionality of Being

Zosima’s conviction that all of creation, “every little leaf,” strives toward “the Word” is essentially reiterated by Bulgakov, who believes that the world is composed of the manifold words of the Word, proceeding from and actively returning to their divine source and sustainer. The Word, for Bulgakov, is the ultimate destination of all that is, the supreme organizing principle in which all things hold together and find their completion. According to Bulgakov:

nature is not empty, but full. It is full of logoses, ontic seeds, which pre-contain the all of cosmic being. These seeds sprout at different rates and with different energies, but it is precisely *they* that sprout. Therefore, development is not a sentence without a subject and without a predicate, a sentence that contains only a copula of general fluidity, which thought cannot even perceive because of its objectlessness. Development has its *theme*; it has a subject and a predicate, the ‘what’ that develops and the ‘whereto’ or ‘to what’ it develops. In general, evolution only acquires meaning only if it has an inner teleology. But the teleology of the world is of course given by its ontology. It is established by the action of the Second hypostasis: ‘all

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<sup>42</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 55 emphasis mine.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid 64

things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made’  
(John 1:3)<sup>44</sup>

The Logos, for Bulgakov and Zosima is the natural ground and telos of creation, the consummate end-point of creaturely existence. Bulgakov’s exposition of the world as a dynamic “pan-organism” struggling to become itself resonates with Zosima’s vision of creation striving, singing and weeping to the Word. This propulsion toward self-completion is often described by Bulgakov as “natural grace” or “natural eros,” an inner mounting flame of desire that lures all things to become what they are. For Bulgakov, this is the fiery, “quickening” action of the Spirit upon the manifold logoses of the world. As he says, “All existing things develop and change; all living things grow. And the mystery of this life and of this growth is the force of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>45</sup> Zosima and Bulgakov both envision a cosmos boiling with life, life that is in the process of becoming. Neither is content to see this becoming as random or mechanical. Rather, both affirm a tacit direction and intelligence impelling the nature of the world, a divine an-entropic force, inviting all that is toward its natural end, which is, they agree, unity in the Divine.

### Permeability of Being

Zosima’s notion of a common, universal substrate uniting all things together is clearly consistent with Bulgakov’s idea of Sophia as a “multi-unity.” Unity for Bulgakov, ontologically precedes difference. This is not to say, however, that difference is an illusion. Bulgakov talks about this idea in terms of “simplicity.” As he says, “the simplicity of God’s

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<sup>44</sup> Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 208.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 209.

spiritual essence is not mere uniformity any more than the divine unity excludes multiplicity. On the contrary, simplicity precisely implies fullness, a fullness in which all qualities meet in one.”<sup>46</sup> Bulgakov and Zosima both recognize that the transcendent unity of the cosmos is often concealed to our everyday perception, but also assert that the empirical division of things is superficial. Bulgakov captures this idea nicely, suggesting that its perception requires a certain surrender before the whole:

Apart from becoming, creaturely multiplicity is characterized by partiality, fragmentedness, outwardly manifested diversity. It has its inner foundation in multi-unity, although it exists, first of all, as a multiplicity of individually qualified being. This individuality of personal being is not its supreme and definitive determination. On the contrary, this being is subordinate to the power of integrity, of unity in the whole, where one’s soul must be ‘lost’ before it can be saved, where the corn of wheat must die before it can bring forth fruit. This being becomes fully itself when it loses its individuality. This individual, qualified ray, which hitherto has shined only in its own color, now begins to shine with the light of the pleroma and participates in the wholeness in which God is all in all.<sup>47</sup>

Zosima speaks of such surrender as the acknowledgement as one’s guilt before all, and frequently calls upon his listeners to consider themselves the lowest of all. This, he says, is the path towards true unity. It would appear that Bulgakov is in agreement.

### Conclusion

In the next chapter I will further explore Zosima’s proposed path toward unity via self-surrender and active love, coupling this with Bulgakov’s Incarnational, Trinitarian anthropology. In this chapter I hope to have laid down a strong argument for conceptual resonance between Bulgakov and Dostoesky’s Zosima via their respective cosmologies.

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<sup>46</sup> Bulgakov, *Sophia: the Wisdom of God*, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Bulgakov, *the Bride of the Lamb*, 92.

Both, I have argued, perceive the world as a dynamic, spiritual organism, characterized by inherent unity and purposiveness.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL: COMPASSION AND HUMAN UNITY**

Dostoevsky was at once a mystic, a humanist and a naturalist. He commanded a vital feeling of inner connection with the suprahuman, and was in this sense a mystic; it was in this very feeling that he located human freedom and power – Vladimir Solovyov

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I will highlight the similarities between the anthropological visions advanced by Zosima in the *Brothers Karamazov*, and by Sergius Bulgakov in his major theological trilogy. Both, I will demonstrate, regard the human race as inherently communal, interconnected by an ontological pre-disposition toward compassionate love. Zosima and Bulgakov agree that loving, interpersonal communion is something that must be freely and actively pursued in order to become fully manifest, even while it also exists outside of, and prior to, human pursuit. I will begin by examining Ivan's individualist anthropology as a foil for Zosima. Man, for Ivan, is intrinsically egoistic; the idea of selfless love, as he sees it, is naught but a reified social construct. Next, I will examine the teachings of Zosima, and several likeminded characters in *Karamazov*, centering on the ideas of

“active love” and universal guilt/responsibility. From here, I will turn toward the theology of Bulgakov, paying special attention to his ideas about humankind as the image-bearer of God, who, as Trinity, is inherently relational in essence. Finally, I will cross-examine the paradigms of Zosima and Bulgakov noting conceptual resonances between them.

### **Is Love Natural? Ivan’s Metaphysical Aboulia**

In the sixth chapter of the first book of *Brothers Karamazov*, Pyotr Alexandrovich Miusov (during a lively conversation in the elder’s cell) reiterates an opinion about human nature which he attributes to Ivan Karamazov, an opinion that Ivan subsequently acknowledges as his own. According to Miusov’s “anecdote,” Ivan had, in the recent past, “solemnly announced” this opinion at a “local gathering.” He frames Ivan’s line of argumentation as follows:

That there is decidedly nothing in the whole world that would make men love their fellow men; that there exists no law of nature that man should love mankind, and that if there is and has been any love on earth up to now, it has come not from natural law but solely from people’s belief in their immortality. Ivan Fyodorovich added parenthetically that that is what all natural law consists of, so that were mankind’s belief in its immortality to be destroyed, not only love but also any living power to continue the life of the world would at once dry up in it. (69)

Several connected strands of Ivan’s argument stand out. First, there is the idea that “love,” which for Ivan indicates altruistic cooperation between persons, is not an objective, obligatory power; there is “nothing,” he says, “in the whole world” that would “make” men love one another. From this follows the idea that love is something other than “natural,” that it stems from a source other than “natural law.” Altruism, according to Ivan’s argument, is not included in the intrinsic order of things. Rather, the origin of interpersonal love is all too human; its manifestation, says Ivan, is derived “solely” from “people’s belief

in their immortality.” Love (and indeed “all natural law”) is the product of reification, drawn into existence by faith, sustained by collaborative worship and will-power.

From these postulates one can begin to discern a picture of the human being as the master and commander of the cosmos. Man is, for Ivan, the prime architect of meaning in the world.<sup>48</sup> It is indicated in the above passage that meaning/order is humanly wrought, forged by belief and the progressive entrenchment of belief. Ivan, for instance, attributes the power of the “conscience” to the promulgation of “universal human habit over seven thousand years” (653). Given his rejection of a “natural” propensity toward brotherly love, it would appear as though he envisions the “state of nature” to be a condition in which self-love, “egoism,” is normative. Humanity, as a species, seems to be understood as an unnatural conglomeration of solitary individuals. Whatever love and social cohesion exists between these individuals is due not to an organic, interpersonal attraction, but to the genius of human invention. Love, as Ivan sees it, has no reality independent of the mind; its existence is wholly contingent upon human belief. He places the full weight of human unity, the possibility of loving cooperation, upon man’s ability to create and believe in his creation. Hence, love is for Ivan a contractual-symbolical force not an ontological one. There is, in the end, no love but “love enforced by duty” (237).

While (If Miusov’s account can be trusted) these ideas represent the main thrust of Ivan’s “intellectual” position, it would appear that this position is problematized by his lived experience. For, as Zosima rightly detects, Ivan is not without his “torment” (70).

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<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere he speaks of man as god-maker: “and man has, indeed, invented God.” (234)

Although he denies the ontological density of compassion, proclaiming to Alyosha that Christ-like love is “a miracle impossible on earth” and that “another man will never be able to know the degree of my suffering because he is another and not me” (237), the experience of vicarious suffering is not unfamiliar to Ivan. On the contrary, it is a constant thorn in his flesh. This fact is evident in several episodes throughout the novel. For instance, in Ivan’s inability to leave a drunken peasant freezing in the snow despite the “intense hatred” and aggression he initially feels/directs toward the man (621, 633-634),<sup>49</sup> in his confession of visceral anguish at the suffering of children, an anguish which he concedes is irrational (244), and in the catastrophic pangs of remorse that rack his conscience and drive him progressively mad upon recognizing his tangential implication in the murder of his father. While he rejects the real existence of interpersonal love, such incidents reveal that when such love is transgressed, Ivan, in spite of himself, cannot but feel a shuddering in the marrow of his being: “Conscience! What is conscience? I make it up myself. Why do I suffer then?” (653). It is as if, through these experiences, a dormant nerve is struck and awakened in him.

Throughout the novel Ivan’s nominalist philosophy appears to cringe and break under the repeated blows of a concrete, external reality: the reality of loving interpersonal connectivity, revealed in its transgression. Hence, while Ivan, in accord with his intellectual convictions, arrogates to himself an unlimited license of desire regarding his father’s fate: “as for my wishes in the matter, there I reserve complete freedom for myself” (143), and

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<sup>49</sup> This scene interestingly echoes the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) with Ivan (playing the role of Samaritan) bringing the peasant to an inn and paying for his stay.

though, Cain-like, he mocks the idea that he should be held responsible for Dmitri: “What have I got to do with it? Am I my brother Dmitri’s keeper or something?” (231), he cannot reconcile this position with the torment he experiences when his father really is murdered. Smerdyakov, who, in executing the deed, assumed he was acting with Ivan’s tacit approval, is surprised by Ivan’s psychological unravelling: “You used to be brave once, sir, you used to say ‘Everything is permitted,’ sir, and now you’ve got so frightened!” Smerdyakov murmured, marveling” (625). Ivan’s anxiety appears to betray his inner awareness of an obligation that transcends social construction, a personal obligation to the other. If indeed “everything is permitted,” it is not, he discovers, without consequence. Though he dismisses the idea of natural responsibility, of intrinsic brotherly love, he secretly knows and accepts that he is indeed his brother’s keeper.

As mentioned above, Zosima senses Ivan’s torment after briefly conversing with him. According to Zosima, Ivan is in dire need of a “resolution” between his professed intellectual convictions, on the one hand, and his visceral intuitions, on the other. While he warns Ivan against trying to achieve resolution in “the negative way,” (70) it often appears as though Ivan attempts to do just that, willfully suppressing the pangs of conscience that summon him to external responsibility. Ivan’s professed love of mankind rarely moves beyond profession and the “thirst for life” he preaches to Alyosha is not particularly evident in his practice throughout the novel. When Alyosha responds enthusiastically to this avowed “thirst,” encouraging Ivan to esteem it “above logic,” Ivan’s subsequent question—“love life more than its meaning?”—comes across as decidedly unconvinced (231). He rationally neutralizes his love-of-life by attributing it to a curiosity of physics,

the mechanical lug of “centripetal force” (230). The compulsive censorship and subdual of his intuitions, however, appears to strand Ivan in the circular maneuverings of his mind, impeding his ability to decide and to act. This buffered self-enclosure inevitably isolates him from others. As he confesses to Alyosha: “I have no friends.” (234) Due to the intensity of Ivan’s self-imposed stoicism, Fyodor can hardly recognize him as his own flesh and blood. He says to Alyosha that “Ivan loves nobody, Ivan is not one of us; people like Ivan are not our people” (244). Dmitri calls Ivan a “grave” (110) and Alyosha, sensing Ivan’s perilous psychological condition, encourages him to “resurrect his dead” (231). Ivan cannot find it within himself to heed the wisdom he quotes from Schiller’s *Sensucht*: “Believe what the heart tells you / For heaven offers no pledge” (247). The heart’s glow may be heaven’s pledge, but Ivan ultimately esteems his head above his heart, suppressing his intuitions to the point of crippling aboulia. His commitment to a vision of the human (and thus of himself) as a self-made, autonomous creature, leads him to mute those influxes from beyond that threaten to disturb his hard-wrought (though vulnerable) stability, feelings of compassion and higher responsibility that the novel associates with the wisdom of the heart.

Ivan’s condition bears a close resemblance to Zosima’s definition of hell as a dearth of love that results in “spiritual torment.” As Zosima says, “Fathers and teachers, I ask myself: ‘what is hell,’ And I answer thus: ‘The suffering of being no longer able to love’” (322). Ivan, who, as we have seen, is persuaded that love is no more than a reified social construct, is driven by this belief to rise above it via detachment and suppression. However, the manifest difficulty, indeed impossibility, of this project wreaks havoc on his psyche,

locking him within the confines of his ego. As the narrative unfurls, Ivan becomes more and more “grave-like.” As Alyosha notes, he appears to be in dire need of exhumation. That being said, according to Zosima the experience of “hell” has the potential to function as a kind of purgatory, a cathartic process through which one’s heart and mind may be cleansed and renewed (323). For Zosima, the felt pain of being unable to reciprocate love is already evidence of the presence of love in a person. For it may elicit a direct insight into the tragic rift between what currently is and what ought to be, between who one currently is and who one ought to be. Such an experience, he thinks, opens up the real possibility of repentance and release from one’s isolating self-enclosure. It reveals the prospect of an authentic re-centering of the self—*metanoia*. This, in turn, may lead one to the recognition that he is not in fact an isolated individual, but a direct participant in a transcendent, supra-human “whole,” a whole composed of multiple persons, each as real as oneself.

In the ensuing section I will turn from Ivan’s individualist anthropology toward Zosima’s ideas about brotherly love and the concealed unity of mankind. As we will see, there are points of agreement and disagreement between Ivan and Zosima.

### **Zosima and Active Love**

In his preface to the *Brothers*, Dostoevsky describes the “hero,” Alyosha Karamazov, as “he who bears within himself the heart of the whole” (3). Alyosha is introduced in the novel proper as a “soul struggling from the darkness of worldly wickedness towards the light of love” (18, 26). By taking these two statements in tandem, it would appear that Alyosha’s “whole-hearted” quest for enlightenment (via love) could be seen as representative of the

central human drama of the novel. Alyosha may be regarded, in this sense, as an emblematic microcosm of humanity. His struggle “towards the light of love” is the common struggle. We have seen that Ivan copes with this existential situation by attempting to reduce love to a manageable figment of the human imagination. Ivan seeks light through self-generated illumination. Alyosha and Zosima, on the other hand, take love seriously as a concrete external reality. As we will see, this leads them away from individualism and toward a more “holistic” anthropology.

The idea of “the whole” per se is reiterated in different ways throughout the novel, signifying an organic cohesion between all things and all people, a universal “brotherhood” that transcends the sum of its parts. Dostoevsky suggests in the preface, however, that the universe of the novel is plagued by an epochal attenuation of this wholeness: “the other people of his [Alyosha’s] epoch have all for some reason been torn away from it [the whole] for a time by some kind of flooding wind” (3). If we relate this “tearing away” to man’s authentic trajectory (however fraught) toward light/love/fraternity, we might then see it as a kind of collective alienation from the real, an unnatural descent into darkness, un-love and isolation.

This is in keeping with the cultural diagnosis given by Zosima, and before him, his friend Mikhail—the “mysterious visitor.” Indeed, according to Mikhail, a certain ethos of self-love has been growing rampantly amongst the people of his “age.” This, in turn, has resulted in a “period of human isolation.” For, “isolation,” he says:

is reigning everywhere, especially in our age . . . For everyone now strives most of all to separate his person, wishing to experience the fullness of life within himself,

and yet what comes of all his efforts is not the fullness of life but full suicide, for instead of the fullness of self-definition, they fall into complete isolation. . . all men in our age are separated into units, each seeks seclusion in his own hole, each withdraws from the others, hides himself, and hides what he has, and ends by pushing himself away from people and pushing people away from himself . . . For he is accustomed to relying only on himself, he has *separated his unit from the whole*, he has accustomed his soul to not believing in the people's help, in people or in mankind. (303, emphasis mine)

Continuing his diagnosis, Mikhail goes on to describe this situation as “unnatural.”

Humanity, he thinks, has lost sight of its inherent unity and is thus in need of a renewed vision:

Everywhere now the human mind has begun laughably not to understand that a man's true security lies *not in his own solitary effort, but in the general wholeness of humanity*. But there must needs come a term to this horrible isolation, and everyone will at once realize how *unnaturally* they have separated themselves from one another. Such will be the spirit of the time, and they will be astonished that they sat in darkness for so long and, did not see the light. (304, emphasis mine)

According to Mikhail, human isolation is both *ephemeral* and *unnatural*. The positive upshot of this reasoning would seem to be that the antithesis of isolation: human communion—“the general wholeness of humanity”—is somehow more *enduring* and *natural*. Zosima echoes this sentiment in his profession that, though everywhere in chains, “man was created for happiness,” (55) destined for “magnificent communion” (317). Father Paissy elsewhere declares of “the whole” that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (71). Mikhail, Zosima and Paissy each seem to perceive isolation as a kind of fall or deviation from a more primordial unity, a unity that nevertheless continues to endure. The paradise of universal brotherhood has perhaps, they concede, been temporarily forgotten and lost, but it has not therefore been expunged. Paradise may yet be remembered and regained. Though not immediately evident, the integral unity of mankind, grounded in

interpersonal love, remains an irrepressible reality. The human race exists first and foremost as a whole.

Zosima talks about the loss of unity as an alienation from the earth, further suggesting a connection between brotherly love and nature. He refers to those who deny transcendence and consider the task of unification to be a strictly immanent enterprise as “socialists” and “atheists.” Such people, he says, “have severed themselves from their own land” (294) and taken “a veritable lie to be the truth” (301).<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, Dmitri, quoting Schiller’s *Eleusian Festival*, beseeches a healing re-connection with “Earth the Mother”:  
That men to man again may soar / Let man and Earth with one another / Make a compact evermore— Man the son and Earth the mother (107). The poem suggests that isolated individuals (“men”) may achieve supra-individual unity (“man”) via an invigorating return (“again may soar”) to nature (“Earth the mother”). This collection of images hearkens back to what was said in the first chapter about the consubstantiality of cosmic life, its inherent unity, fecundity and purposiveness. It also re-affirms the idea that there is something natural and primordial about universal brotherhood.

It is interesting to juxtapose this idea of the basic natural-ness of unity in love with Ivan’s statement explored above: “there is decidedly nothing in the whole world that would

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<sup>50</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, in his study on Dostoevsky: *Freedom and the Tragic Life*, describes a recurrent character-type he finds throughout Dostoevsky’s fiction: the “proud son of the earth.” According to Ivanov, this “proud son” is a character who, “aspiring to superhuman power, supposes that the more he alienates himself from the organic, the universal and the primitively real—whose vigor he has hitherto drawn from the all-nourishing mother-soil—the more he will exalt himself.” However, the tragic result of such an endeavor, he says, is not freedom from one’s nature but, on the contrary, isolation and desiccation. Such a characterization would seem to fit tendencies we have noted in Ivan. *Freedom and the Tragic Life: a Study in Dostoevsky*, Trans. Norman Cameron (New York: The Noonday Press 1960), 77.

make men love their fellow men . . . there exists no law of nature that man should love mankind . . . if there is and has been any love on earth up to now, it has come not from natural law but solely from peoples belief in their immortality.” While Mikhail and Zosima agree with Ivan that love, considered as altruistic interpersonal communion, is not an irresistible “force of nature,” they disagree with his opinion that love has no mooring outside of the human mind. Though both consider love to be, in a sense, more than natural, they never concede that it is less.<sup>51</sup> Both resist Ivan’s tenuous notion that love comes “solely” from “people’s belief.” As we will see, Zosima’s central notion of “active love” does not demand an either/or in this regard. In the case of love, belief can, and does, he thinks, correspond with a concrete external reality, one that becomes increasingly apparent as one continues to “actively” seek it out.

In much the same way as Ivan encounters the reality of interpersonal love and responsibility by way of its transgression, so too do Mikhail, Zosima and Alyosha. The main difference is that the latter three place more trust in the transcendent reality glimpsed in the rupture. Because of this trust, or “faith,” the world-pictures of these characters differ significantly from Ivan’s. An alternative paradigm emerges amongst them in which mankind is seen not as a collection of autonomous individuals, but as an interpersonal whole, bound by links of living love and mutual responsibility. Like Ivan, these three are in tune with the affective movements of their hearts, and, consequently each passes through

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<sup>51</sup> As we saw in the first chapter, nature is not, for Zosima, a dead mechanism, a blind, compulsory power. Rather, it is a dynamic, living organism tending toward unity in the divine. This was related to Bulgakov’s notion of the divine entelechy of nature, its proclivity toward becoming what it always-already is—not just passively, but freely/actively/creatively.

his own personal torment. Mikhail, having murdered a young woman in a fit of jealous rage, and having tried for years to excuse his action theoretically “fell to brooding at last and the torment was more than he was able to bear . . . the blood of the murdered victim began to appear to him menacingly and bitterly” (307). Zosima, prior to his life as a monk, cruelly battered his servant Afanasy out of wounded pride. He describes the compunction that followed this act in poignant terms: “it was if a sharp needle went through my soul” (298). Alyosha, empathetic to the highest degree, is powerfully affected by even the thought of another’s suffering. In one instance, recalling the declining health of his elder, he is involuntarily brought to a physical halt: “his heart suddenly contracted painfully, and he stopped in his tracks” (77). What binds each of these characters together as a discrete group, however, is not just their shared experience of torment, but also their surprising response to it: genuine repentance and a corresponding will-to-atone. Each character, in his own way, is able to see in his personal suffering a reflection of the universality of suffering, and an opportunity for authentic spiritual growth via the bearing of this suffering.

According to Zosima, a humble spirit of “repentance” is evidence of the real presence of love in a person, a presence that he connects with divinity. As he says, “take care that you repent without ceasing . . . If you are repentant, it means that you love. And if you love, you already belong to God” (52). For Zosima, the insights of the contrite heart may lead to the recognition of one’s failure to love as one ought, the recognition that, indeed, one *ought* to love. But this “ought” is not born solely of guilt, or pity, or duty.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This is evident, for instance, in Katerina Ivanova, who speaks of her torment as, “something else . . . higher than duty itself. My heart tells me of this irresistible feeling and it draws me irresistibly.” (189)

Rather, it is ostensibly motivated by a vision of the superlative truth and beauty of love. It is only through such a vision that the transgression of love becomes truly appalling to the transgressor, moves beyond a mere “chafing of the heart” (64). The transgression will then be seen not only as transgression but as desecration—sacrilege. It is no accident that the “conversion experiences” of Mikhail, Zosima and Alyosha (also Markel and Dmitri) are accompanied by visions of sublime beauty, of earthbound “paradise.”<sup>53</sup> The feeling of contrition engendered by the perceived desecration of beauty and love, of a real other, is itself, for Zosima, a step toward the truth that sets one free. It has the real potential to emancipate one from prison of the ego. As he counsels Madame Khoklakov, who has serious doubts about her capacity to love another as herself: “It is enough that you are distressed by it. Do what you can, and it will be reckoned onto you.” (57) Zosima further relates this distress to purification, assuring her that she has been “purified by the very fact that you have noticed it in yourself” (58). Elsewhere he connects repentance to the dawning awareness of one’s “conscience,” which he refers to as “Christ’s law.” As he says, “the regeneration of man anew,” and the “transformation” of sinners, is due to “Christ’s law alone, which manifests itself in the acknowledgement of one’s own conscience” (64).

Zosima is adamant, however, that the existential gravitas of compassion only becomes truly palpable in the concrete act of loving one’s neighbor. Knowledge of love requires participation in love; one learns of love by heeding love’s call, by putting it into practice. The “light of love,” intimated by the compassionate heart, shines more brilliantly

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<sup>53</sup> There is an interesting resonance here with the conversion of the apostle Paul recounted in Acts 9. Paul experiences a vision of transcendent truth accompanied by the sober and rending acknowledgement of his transgression against this truth.

the more it is sought out and striven towards. It remains but a faint glow if it is neglected. For Zosima, the decision to strive is a free one, an act of faith prompted by a disquieting glimpse of the truth of love's existence. This is not, he thinks, groundless fideism, but fidelity to a tangible summons felt in the marrow of one's being.<sup>54</sup> Many, such as Ivan, hold back at this point, unable to trust the worth of the pursuit, perhaps due to a paucity of empirical evidence. Zosima is well aware of the fact that love often remains "cool" and "inactive" in the human heart, a bloodless sentiment. He calls this state of inaction "love in dreams," and counterposes to it a mobile, patient, longsuffering love which he calls "active love." The difference between the two is, he thinks, highly significant. Indeed, as he says, "active love is a harsh and fearful thing compared to love in dreams . . . active love is labor and perseverance and for some people, perhaps, a whole science" (58). For indeed knowledge of love is "difficult to acquire . . . dearly bought by a long work over a long time" (319). For Zosima, love without action is deficient, a pale shadow of the thing itself. To sentimentalize love is to bankrupt it.

Growth in knowledge of love appears to resemble, in Zosima's thinking, a slow and gradual ascent ("long work over a long time"); it is an understanding that emerges progressively, little-by-little, not all-at-once. This idea is evident in one of his later exhortations: "If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin tirelessly to perceive *more and more of it every day*. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an entire, universal love" (319,

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<sup>54</sup> The pursuit of illumination via love is not, for Zosima, irrational. He might think that reason, however, lags behind experience. Reality outruns our rational apprehension.

emphasis mine). It is also evident in Zosima's response to Madame Khoklakov's doubts about the existence of God and immortality. For Khoklakov, as for Ivan, God's existence is bound up with the very possibility of authentic love and compassion.<sup>55</sup> She, a "lady of little faith," poses the question: "How can it [the real existence of God/immortality] be proved?" Zosima replies that "One cannot prove anything here, but it is possible to be convinced" (56). According to Zosima, her conviction will come:

By the experience of active love. Try to love your neighbors actively and tirelessly. *The more you succeed in loving, the more you'll be convinced of the existence of God and the immortality of your soul.* And if you reach *complete selflessness* in the love of your neighbor, then undoubtedly you will believe, and no doubt will even be able to enter your soul. This has been tested. It is certain. (56, emphasis mine)

According to Zosima, one gains a truer picture of the world, of God and life itself, the more one empties oneself in the service of others, the more one "loves." There are echoes here of 1 John 4:8: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." Earlier in the novel, the narrator speaks of "self-renunciation" aligning it with "perfect freedom." Perfect freedom, according to the narrator, is for man nothing other than "freedom from himself" (27-28). This is a freedom very different from the absolute autonomy trumpeted by Ivan. For Ivan, a person is most free when he is most self-sufficient, most able to bend life's circumstances to his personal will. For Zosima, on the other hand, a person is most free when he is able to relinquish his lust for control. True freedom, for Zosima, is connected with one's ability to break free of egotism, to abide and flourish in pan-human communion, to lose oneself in the mysterious rhythm and cadence of the ever-revolving whole. Once

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<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere, Alyosha makes the connection explicit. Addressing God in prayer, Alyosha equates God with love: "You are love, you will send joy to all!" (160).

again the novel's epigraph is apt: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." One can only become oneself, Zosima thinks, in relation to others, in relation to a holistic community that is fundamentally integrated and interdependent. An "I" does not and cannot know itself independent of a "Thou." Zosima's anthropology esteems community above individuality without neglecting the individual. It is a free communalism grounded in what he understands to be the mystical, supra-personal nature of being itself.

For Zosima, the culmination of the wisdom of love, of the heart, is a penetrating insight into the transcendent-organic basis of reality. It is a recognition that all things cohere in a universal, interdependent web of compassion, that a sin against one is a sin against all, oneself included. All things rise and fall, wax and wane, together as one. This is evident in Zosima's bold assertion that each person is "guilty on behalf of all and for all." As he says "Love one another . . . For you must know, my dear ones, that each of us is undoubtedly guilty on behalf of all and for all on earth, not only because of the common guilt of the world, but personally, each one of us, for all people and for each person" (163-164). And again, "the moment you make yourself sincerely responsible for everything and everyone, you will see that *it is really so*, that it is you who are guilty on behalf of all and for all" (320, emphasis mine). If all are guilty before all, it is insinuated that this is due to the fact that there is a real power binding "everything and everyone" together in mutual solidarity.<sup>56</sup> Though questionable in its sincerity, there is truth to Smerdyakov's original

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<sup>56</sup> Alyosha confesses to Lise that his "soul" is "welded" to Zosima (221).

lyric: “An invincible power / Binds me to my flower” (223). Zosima describes this “knowledge” (which is also embraced by Mikhail, Alyosha and Markel) as the coronation of human striving: it is, he says, “the crown of the monk’s path, and of every man’s path on earth” (164). Furthermore, it is through the acquisition of this knowledge, he suggests, that the “goal of our unity” may be “achieved.” For “only then,” he says “will our hearts be moved to a love that is infinite, universal, and that knows no satiety. Then each of us will be able to gain the whole world by love and wash away the world’s sins with his tears” (164). And, again, “love is such a priceless treasure that you can buy the whole world with it, and redeem not only your own but other people’s sins.” (52)

The “goal of unity” is both something to be “achieved” as well as something always-already given. “Knowing,” for Zosima, involves a subjective perception of the objective (though oftentimes hidden) truth that “all is like an ocean, all flows and connects; touch it in one place and it echoes at the other end of the world” (319). According to Zosima this fact does not “force” unity upon humans, who possess an indissoluble nucleus of freedom. Communion in love is not an imposition so much as a proposition. However, as a living connective power, love does exert a tangible pressure toward unification, evident in the existence of the personal “conscience.” This pressure, for Zosima, is not less than natural. Unification, then, is both active and passive, a matter of active submission to the transcendent-organic reality of love which endures all things. As Zosima says, “where there are brothers there will be brotherhood” (316). Brotherhood, though grounded in ontology, still requires continual effort, “active love,” if it is to move beyond potentiality (“love in dreams”). Man, in his freedom, always has the option to reject it. But, as Ivan finds out,

this rejection is not without its consequences. He himself acknowledges this. Accused of “rebellion” against nature by Alyosha he responds: “Rebellion? I don’t like hearing such a word from you . . . *One cannot live by rebellion*. And I want to live” (245, emphasis mine). The answer one gives to the question of whether or not love and truth really exist is, for Dostoevsky, seemingly like unto the question: to be or not to be?

### Summary

I began this section by exploring Ivan’s interpretation of love as the “un-natural” invention of human belief and willpower, and of man as a self-grounding individual. Next, I explored how this interpretation is problematized by Ivan’s experience of torment, stemming from his personal transgressions against love. From here, I moved on to explore alternative visions of love and man in the *Brothers*. It was shown how Zosima, as well as other likeminded characters, reverse Ivan’s evaluation, esteeming individualism to be an unnatural deviation from a more original communion. Next, we observed how Zosima links the torment of the conscience, which he and Ivan share in common, to the existence of a living web of love connecting all humans together in compassionate brotherhood. Mankind is not seen by Zosima as a series of isolated individuals, but rather as an integrated pan-human “whole.” His vision of the pan-unity of mankind was shown to involve an inherent pre-disposition toward loving brotherhood, which nevertheless requires free human action, “active love,” in order to manifest itself in full.

In the next section, I will explore Bulgakov’s anthropology which relies upon the idea that man is created in the image and likeness of God, who, as Trinity, is inherently

relational, exemplifying loving unity in multiplicity. I believe that Bulgakov's picture of human nature will shed some light on Zosima's ideas regarding humanity as a naturally integrated whole.

### **Bulgakov's Incarnational, Trinitarian Anthropology**

Bulgakov's anthropology draws upon the story of the creation of man in the book of Genesis. He makes much of the fact that Adam is there described (in Gen 2:7) as having been shaped from two basic components: the "dust of the ground," and the "breath of life." These, we read, together make of man a "living soul."<sup>57</sup> This bipartite structure is, according to the Genesis account, unique to the human creature. The "dust of the ground" Bulgakov takes to represent the "natural" component of humanity, man's embodied "nature" which is consubstantial with the cosmos at large ( the cosmos being man's "peripheral body"). The "breath of life" he takes to represent the "supra-natural" component of humanity, the "personality," or "hypostasis" that endows each human being with the unique capacity for creative self-determination.<sup>58</sup> This personality, he thinks, participates in the eternal and thus, while subject to the waves of time, also extends above and beyond them. According to Bulgakov these two elements—nature and person—are inextricably woven together in the human being. As he says, the life of man consists in "the living and inseparable unity of person and nature, so that *in concreto* there is no impersonal nature or natureless personality; they can be separated and even opposed only in the

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<sup>57</sup> "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7 KJV).

<sup>58</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, Trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2008), 91.

abstract.”<sup>59</sup> In the abstract then, the person is that which stands forth and says “I,” the dynamic, living center around which and by which existence is defined, while nature is the well from which this I continually draws its defining content. Each and every human person is shaped in advance by the shared nature of the human race, as well as the unrepeatable configuration that he/she has been “given.”

Bulgakov notes that humans, sensing their relative power over nature, may sometimes seek to rise above it. But, he adds, this nature does not simply cease to shape and sustain their being. The rejection of one’s nature in the name of absolute freedom is, according to Bulgakov, an “ontological revolt” that is destined to fail. For indeed, he says, “Even in revolt creation cannot arbitrarily become *anything it wants to be*. It remains *only itself*, but turned inside out.”<sup>60</sup> Human nature, for Bulgakov, possesses a determinate content and direction that impels each human person in a determinate direction. This is not to say, however, that human nature unfolds itself blindly and mechanically, rendering the person redundant. For the growth and development of humankind is different from the growth and development of an acorn or sea cucumber. Humans, unique in this regard amongst creation, are radically free, and this their freedom, for Bulgakov, represents the ongoing possibility of possibility. As he says, “Creaturely freedom is as real as the world . . . the lawlike regularity of the world’s being, despite the unity and predeterminedness of its foundation as entelechy, implies an infinite series of possibilities of realization.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>60</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, Trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2002), 151.

<sup>61</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, Trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2008), 161.

Indeed, the unfolding of human nature takes place in constant communion with the human person—the relationship between the two is inherently dialectical.<sup>62</sup> Here, fact coincides with act, object with subject. Bulgakov notes that “between *natura naturans* (nature naturing) and *natura naturata* (nature natured) there exists a living identity.”<sup>63</sup> It is the existential mission of this “living identity” to bridge the gap between its given nature and that toward which it is “naturing.” For Bulgakov, this mission is equated with the ongoing process of becoming who/what one is.

That toward which created nature inclines without exception is, according to Bulgakov, divinity—the divine nature from which it perpetually derives its being. As we saw in the first chapter, Bulgakov sees the natural world (the creaturely Sophia) as a “repetition” of the divine world (the Divine Sophia) in time and space. Creation, seeded with the divine words of the Word, naturally strives to identify herself with her timeless “prototype,” to achieve coherent unity in her multiplicity. This is also true, he thinks, of human nature. To become fully human, according to Bulgakov, is to become fully divine. In this sense, Bulgakov speaks of humanity as “theandric” in its ontological structure; man, he says, inherently “participates” in divinity. The human person, rendered in the image of Christ, stands poised between two natures: creaturely and divine, temporal and eternal. Therefore, thinks Bulgakov, man is essentially Christo-morphic:

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<sup>62</sup> Bulgakov calls this the “dialectic of creaturely freedom,” which, he says, involves moving from individual definition toward communal participation: “at first, this theme must be received and assimilated as one’s own, in all its individual limitedness; then, at the end of the path of freedom, it must merge with the ocean of sophianic being, its singularity participating in fullness, and on the pathways of freedom, overcome individuality for the sake of higher and ultimate freedom, with the acceptance of sophianic determination as its goal.” *The Bride of the Lamb*, 143.

<sup>63</sup> Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 90.

The first Adam is created in the image of the second Adam . . . He is formed in such a way that Christ can become incarnate in him . . . by its divine origin, the human spirit is capable of participating in God's life, even if this is only a possibility; but this possibility is already an ontological reality. At the same time, the human spirit is immersed in the creaturely nature of man, who is therefore a god-man by design, since he has one hypostasis and participates in two natures, divine and creaturely. In other words, the first Adam, as god-man, is already an image of Christ that awaits its perfect revelation and accomplishment.<sup>64</sup>

Bulgakov talks about this theandric ontology as the condition of possibility for the “deification” of nature: “the duality of the natures in man, his eternal divine-humanity, makes possible the deification of life, the inseparable and inconfusable communion of the two natures in man.”<sup>65</sup> Man, he says, is a “microcosm” of the creaturely world at large, bearing within himself the central drama of the cosmos. The universal yearning of creation for self-completion, for “inseparable and inconfusable communion” with divinity, is recapitulated in each human person. For Bulgakov, It is due to the common, interconnected nature of man and the cosmos (man's “peripheral body”) that all of creation is capable of falling together with one man—Adam—and of being inaugurated into redemption along with one man—Christ. Each person is integrally connected with each other person, forming a pan-human “sphere”: “every person is a point on the surface of this sphere, connected by a radius to the center.”<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Bulgakov says, “every person not only has certain universally human traits, or participates in humanity. Every person is also an all-man.” This is, he says, “the basic anthropological axiom which lies at the basis of the idea of original sin and God's incarnation, and, finally, redemption.”<sup>67</sup> The idea of human unity in

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid 138

<sup>65</sup> Ibid 94

<sup>66</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 110.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid 110

sin also leads Bulgakov to a conclusion we encountered in the thought of Zosima, the guilt of all for all. It would appear that he clearly has Dostoevsky in mind when he says that “Humanity is united not only by the solidarity of good but also by the solidarity of sin: all human beings are guilty not only for themselves but also for all, with all, and in all things.”<sup>68</sup>

Another way in which Bulgakov discusses the drama of creation is by stressing the idea that man, according to Genesis 1:27, is made in the “image and likeness of God.” For Bulgakov, “image” and “likeness” each have a specific meaning in regards to the life of man and the world, roughly corresponding with potential divinity and actualization of this potential. As he says:

The image of God, given to man at his creation, is indissolubly linked with his *likeness* . . . The image is the given implanted by God, the sophianic image of man, whereas the likeness is the task proposed for man, his proper work, by which he is to realize his proper image in creative freedom, in the sophianization of himself and all creation. The image of God is the unalienable ontological foundation; it is the initial *power* that is implanted in man for his life and creative activity. This power can increase in man or decrease, shine forth or become darkened as a function of his freedom. The likeness, in contrast, is the image of Divine creative activity and of the eternal actuality of the spirit. The likeness of God in man is man’s free realization of his image.<sup>69</sup>

Due to this inherent gap between potentiality (image) and actuality (likeness), a result of the world’s creation “out of nothing,” Bulgakov describes man as being “ontologically unstable.”<sup>70</sup> Humans, because they are free persons, not yet fully themselves, possess the freedom to deviate (to a certain extent) from their developing nature. They may discern,

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<sup>68</sup> Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 347.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid 146-147

<sup>70</sup> Ibid 147

and cleave to, their true selves, or tragically lose sight of themselves and stumble into isolation and non-being. The progressive cultivation of selfhood, the never-ending discovery of who one is, is, for Bulgakov, the summit of human creativity, an echo of the primordial act of divine creation. This movement is, he says, “asymptotic,” an “infinite ascent.”<sup>71</sup> Christ, he thinks, was the only man to ever fully identify image and likeness, an event which opened up the ontological possibility for mankind to approximate this feat.

But what is it in the nature of the divine likeness that humanity aspires to emulate, what is the “natural” essence of divinity? Bulgakov notes that, within the trinitarian life of God, the distinction between freedom and necessity is pre-eternally overcome in self-renouncing, personal love. God, as *Actus Purus*, never fails to act in perfect accordance with his uni-triadic will and nature. God is perfectly consistent, perfectly and simply Godself from all eternity. God is free from freedom (considered as arbitrary, egoistic volition), and thus truly free, truly unconstrained. The identification in God between freedom and necessity is described by Bulgakov as the concretization of selfless love, which, for him, is the quintessential expression of Godhead. The statement in 1 John that “God is love” is, for Bulgakov, not an analogical but an “ontological” statement; love, he thinks, is the center and circumference of divine being. God always-already “chooses” to be what God is: love. As he says: “In the absolute spirit there is no place for the distinction or opposition between freedom as self-positing and the given as necessity (or nature). Freedom and necessity are adequately covered in the principle of the divine being, which

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid 94

is love. Love is free necessity, necessity as freedom.”<sup>72</sup> According to Bulgakov, the love that constitutes the life of God is manifested in the interpersonal relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, an unending rotation of mutual self-offering. In this respect, he draws upon Augustine’s formulation of the Trinity as a loving transaction between the three Persons: “the loving one/the loved one/love itself.”<sup>73</sup> The Trinity, existing as both one and three Persons, is, in Bulgakov’s view, inherently relational. The interrelationship of the Persons, marked by ecstatic procession and return, grounds the being of God as a steadfast unity-in-diversity. The trine unison of God, the perfect three in one, is sealed by reciprocal love. Indeed, according to Bulgakov, divine perfection, the perfect beauty and transparency of God, is realized “dynamically” via “the ardor of self-renouncing personal love.” As he says:

the flames of the divine trihypostasis flare up in each of the hypostatic centers and are then united and identified with one another each going out of itself into the others, in the ardor of self-renouncing personal love . . . In it [the Holy Trinity], the static being of each personal center is the initial principal of the dynamic going out, where personal self-affirmation is removed and overcome, and the Person is realized as the ring of this trinitarian self-moving love. Therefore, the first thing one must say about the Divine Person is that, as trihypostatic, this Person is equally real in one hypostasis 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. The trihypostatic Divinity is one Person, despite this trihypostatizedness, or rather in virtue of it.<sup>74</sup>

The Triune life of God, in which isolation is permanently “vanquished” through reciprocal, self-renouncing love, is analogous, for Bulgakov, to the impending life of humanity—the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid 142

<sup>73</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, Trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2004), 66.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid 94-95.

“likeness” toward which mankind collectively presses. This sort of existence, he notes, is invoked by Christ in the last discourse: “That they may be one, even as we are one: I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:22-23, KJV). The human race, made in the image of this Unity-in-Trinity, is, he thinks, naturally connected by the circulation of interpersonal love. Indeed, “the capacity for love,” says Bulgakov, “is the seal of God’s image in man. . . love as ‘altruism,’ as the capacity to transfer to some extent one’s personal center into another being, is one of man’s indisputable *natural* virtues.”<sup>75</sup> The human race is comprised of multiple persons who must proceed out of themselves in order to become themselves, must love actively and self-lessly in order to find their authentic place within the all-human whole. This truth is, thinks Bulgakov, woven into the ontological fabric of human nature. For, “a human being lives only to the degree and by how much it loves, and it dies to the extent and by how much it does not love.”<sup>76</sup> Love is both a natural, extant connection between persons as well as a task to be accomplished, a fact and an act. It is incumbent upon the human race to become what it always-already is: a loving unity-in-multiplicity.

God, in whom all possibilities are actualized without interval, and in whom multiple hypostases perfectly co-inhere, is able to love immediately and self-sufficiently. Man, however, divided across time into a plethora of imperfect, unfolding hypostases, must progressively actualize his unity-in-love over the course of generations. The perfection of man is eschatological—yet to come. The human race, thinks Bulgakov, exists not only in

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid 314

<sup>76</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, Trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2010), 1.

a given empirical/historical collection of hypostases, but also as a supra-empirical “whole” transcending time and space. This whole contains the living, the deceased (who cannot be excised from the whole), and those yet to be born. Love is thus a supra-personal, supra-temporal work in progress. In one sense it is eternally given and natural, in another it is a potential that must be “attained,” indeed, is always-already in the process of being attained.

As Bulgakov says:

The objective possibility of love is connected with the *multi-unity* of the human race, according to the image of the triunity of the Holy Trinity. The multiple centers of individual being are connected by the unity of life or unisubstantiality, which is given by the *genus*, but which is only *proposed as a task* in individual being, and which thus is an object to be attained (or not attained) in the free multi-unity of love, in the sobornost of life.<sup>77</sup>

According to Bulgakov, the process by which loving supra-personal unity is realized involves both human effort and divine grace. It is, he says, a process of divine-human “synergy.”<sup>78</sup> This is a process that each person must actualize personally as well as supra-personally, as a common, universal objective. Subject and object are knit together in this task; subjective transformation paves the way to objective transformation. The communion in question is not externally enforced, but produced through a free consent to unity in cooperation with the invitation of the Holy Spirit. For Bulgakov, free human effort is absolutely essential to this project, a condition of its possibility, but is not itself enough. While “natural” love may draw men tightly together as a concrete community, true overcoming of individualism is, he thinks, dependent upon the action of a transcendent power lifting love beyond its temporal fragmentation. This transcendence is, in his opinion,

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<sup>77</sup> Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 314.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid 316

made manifest in the ongoing life of the Church. The Church, for Bulgakov, is the body of Christ, gifted with the abiding presence of the Spirit.<sup>79</sup> As he says, “the gift of community, *koinonia*, is the first gift of the Pentecost as the manifestation of the Church . . . It is manifested in a particular sense of churchliness, a sense of dissolving in *the whole*, of living multi-unity, in which the personal is not abolished but integrated into a unity of Sobornost.”<sup>80</sup> Bulgakov further describes this as “Churchly love,” which,

in the image of the Holy Trinity, overcomes the isolation of egocentrism by the power of the *whole*, which enters into the soul as a higher reality . . . Here one first has to deny oneself, to abandon one’s self-assertion, and then, in response, the soul is filled by the life of the whole through love. The individual gains for himself a center higher than his own; and instead of being eccentric and egocentric, he becomes concentric with respect to the whole.<sup>81</sup>

In this sense, Bulgakov talks about the Church as the telos of humanity, the eschatological manifestation of perfect human community in the image of the Holy Trinity, the fulfillment of human nature as a unity-in-multiplicity powered by voluntary, self-sacrificial love. As we will see in the next chapter, this vision approximates that of Father Zosima, who imagines the Church to constitute the inner destiny of the world, that which the world is destined to become.

### Summary

In this section I began by examining Bulgakov’s conception of man as an incarnate spirit, composed of a dynamic, indissoluble union of nature and person. Next, it was seen that,

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<sup>79</sup> This is not to say, however, that the Church has a monopoly of the Spirit which, after all, “bloweth where it listeth.”

<sup>80</sup> Ibid 319, emphasis mine

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

for Bulgakov, it is the incumbent mission of each person to actualize and render transparent his/her given nature, a nature that invariably inclines toward divinity. This, I noted, is not only an individual mission, but one that unites and propels the entire human race. Bulgakov speaks of this process as humanity incessantly striving to conform its “image” to its “likeness.” Examining Bulgakov’s ideas about the nature of divinity, I next turned toward his vision of the Trinity as a unity-in-multiplicity characterized by perfect self-renouncing love. God, for Bulgakov, transcends the distinction between freedom and necessity, always acting in perfect accordance with the free-necessity of love. Man, he thinks can collaboratively approximate this perfection. Finally, I looked at how Bulgakov sees the human race as a reflection of this Trinity, a multi-hypostatic organism internally connected by the self-moving energy of love. This love, he thinks, is both an ontological fact, and a feat to be attained. The manifestation of this discovery/attainment is, for Bulgakov, the Church.

### **Comparison/Conclusion**

In conclusion, we can observe several similarities between the anthropological vision advanced by Zosima in the *Brothers Karamazov*, and the “theandric” anthropology articulated by Bulgakov. Bulgakov, I hope to have shown, helps to provide a theoretical framework through which to analyze the themes of human love, human nature, and human unity in the *Brothers*.

Ivan, as we have seen, places a heavy emphasis on human freedom and creativity. His vision of the human race esteems the individual above the collective, and regards the power

of love as a human creation, an ingenious tool for maintaining social order. Peaceable community, and the love that binds it together, are, he thinks, ultimately the product of individuals working together for their own comfort and profit. Ivan admittedly feels the potent draw of compassion, but dismisses it as a figment of the cultural imagination. Bulgakov, as we have seen, likewise places a high premium on human freedom and creativity. These capacities, he believes, point toward God's inclusion of a divine, "personal" dimension in the structure of human being. He also argues, however, that the human person cannot be separated from his/her given nature. To attempt to do so, he says, is an "ontological revolt" that results in alienation from oneself. To deny one's given nature, which for Bulgakov is always relational and grounded in love, is to dis-incarnate and de-humanize oneself. Bulgakov's diagnosis would seem to fit Ivan, who, in his formidable efforts to repress and rise above his nature, to break loose from the fetters of compassion, is driven into isolation and madness. Another aspect of Ivan's philosophy, the idea that love is non-compulsive, is shared by Bulgakov, who asserts that love (properly seen as self-renunciation for the sake of another) does not impose itself upon man. Rather, love qua love, while forever remaining the ground of being, must be freely assented to. In this regard, he points toward the life of the Trinity, which he sees as a loving convergence of personal freedom and nature/necessity. Humanity, made in the image and likeness of this Trinitarian God, is most fully itself when its members embody the erotic, self-emptying love of the Trinity, thus forming a dynamic unity-in-multiplicity. This image of man as an interlocking, interdependent multitude is given voice by Zosima, who frequently speaks of humankind as an organic "whole" bound by mutual love, guilt and suffering. Zosima

arrives at the positive idea that love connects all things together by way of the idea that the negation of love is ontologically impossible. The trespass against love, as we see in Ivan, Zosima and other characters, reveals the presence of a sensitive, living bond between persons. Zosima teaches that, once revealed, this intrinsic connectivity may be strengthened and nourished by “active” pursuit. Thus, for Zosima, as well as for Bulgakov, love constitutes a concrete external reality, which nevertheless requires un-concealing and free activity in order to be made fully manifest. For Bulgakov the community dedicated to this mission is known as the Church. As we will see in the next chapter Zosima also sees the Church as a vital embodiment of brotherhood on earth, a community of faith living in anticipation of the eschaton.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN: ESCHATOLOGY AND ECCLESIOLOGY**

The Church is indeed a kingdom and appointed to reign, and in the end must undoubtedly be revealed as a kingdom over all the earth — Fyodor Dostoevsky

The whole world is coming to be the Church — Sergius Bulgakov

## Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the various ecclesiological stances presented in the *Brothers Karamazov*, juxtaposing them with Bulgakov's dogmatic theology of the Church. For Dostoevsky and Bulgakov alike there is a deep-seated tension between the historical and eschatological dimensions of ecclesiology. That is because the Church, "destined" to reign universally, finds its influence unevenly distributed across the length and breadth of history. The degree to which the church ought to participate in its own universalization is up for debate, as is the meaning of this universalization. Is the "ecclesialization" of the world an immanent process? Transcendent? Both? I shall argue that for Bulgakov, as well as Zosima and the monastic characters in Dostoevsky's novel, the third approach is the only appropriate one. Bulgakov and Zosima both endorse a church politic that emphasizes the interpenetration of immanence and transcendence, and each is wary of over-exaggerating one or the other of these linked dimensions. Such an ontological commitment provides for a patient approach toward ecclesial expansion in which the human role in the construction of the universal Church is acknowledged but not absolutized. For it is argued by both Bulgakov and the monks that there is a divine, providential dimension to be factored into the growth of the Church.

I will begin by examining a discussion in Zosima's cell in which the stakes of ecclesiology are illuminated through several contrasting perspectives. From there I will expand upon the monastic approach as advanced by Zosima and likeminded characters

throughout the novel. Having done so, I will turn toward Bulgakov's ideas about the dyadic nature of the Church as "ontological" and "historical." Next I will examine Bulgakov's ideas about the role of the Church in history, his ideas about "historiosophy." Finally, I will draw connections between Bulgakov's and Dostoevsky's perspectives on the Church, demonstrating how Bulgakov can help to constellate the clustered ecclesiological sections of *Karamazov*.

### **Ecclesiological Dialectics; the Debate in Zosima's Cell**

The most explicit discussion of ecclesiology in the *Brothers Karamazov* occurs in Book One, Chapter Five: "So Be It! So Be it!" This titular exclamation is repeated several times throughout the chapter by Zosima and his fellow monks (Paissy and Iosif). In the context of the chapter, a debate about the proper vocation and destiny of the Church, the "So be it!" appears to signal affirmative hope and faith in the eschatological triumph of "Christ's Church," the "Kingdom of Heaven." It is, for the monks, an invocation and affirmation of a reality that remains as-of-yet unseen; namely, the universal reign of the Church throughout the world, the kingdom come on earth. In this sense, the exclamation resembles the "Lord's Prayer" ("Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven") as well as the anticipatory "Come" found in the last chapter of the Bible: "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come . . . he which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:17. 20 KJV). The monks' refrain appears to demonstrate their trust in a providential power at work in the course of world history, a divine agency directing the world toward its eschatological culmination. During the debate over ecclesiology, which takes place in Zosima's cell, one

of the main points of contention is the extent to which the historical Church ought to participate in the manifestation, or immanentization, of this awaited kingdom, the extent to which the Church ought to deploy its energies and resources toward this end. It is questioned whether or not the goals of the Church are compatible with those of the “state,” and indeed whether or not they are compatible with historical reality per se. On one side, it is argued that the Church, as a “divine” institution, should occupy a “corner” of the state, not concerning itself with worldly, political ambitions. Such is the opinion advanced by an anonymous “churchman” whose book on the subject of “ecclesial courts,” serves as fodder for the debate. Miusov, for his part, also appears to support this position. On the other side, it is argued that the mission of the Church is deeply political and irreducibly universal, requiring progressive transposition into social reality. The Church, in this view, ought to reject compromise with the state (or, at the very least, ought to see any compromise as temporary and non-ideal). This is the basic thrust of an article written by Ivan in direct response to the churchman. The sum of the article is recapitulated in the chapter and its conclusions are ostensibly supported by the monks. However, as we shall see, they also deviate from Ivan on certain points.

The churchman, we are told, is an advocate for the separation of Church and state. He envisions the Church to be a “divine institution” primarily concerned with non-political, “religious purposes.” The Church is, according to him, a “kingdom not of this world” (61). It is implied that, for the churchman, there is no substantial friction between the “earthly” kingdom of the state, and the “heavenly” kingdom proclaimed by the Church. He argues that they occupy non-overlapping magisteria. The relationship between the two will remain

amicable, as long as each remains within the proper bounds of its own territory. According to this perspective, it should be acknowledged that “the Church occupies a precise and definite place within the state” (61). For Ivan, however, the churchman errs in mistaking a “temporary compromise” between both entities as the ideal, confusing a problematic status quo (“our sinful and unfulfilled times”) with that which is “immovable, elemental and eternal” (62). Indeed, while Ivan grants that a degree of compromise is unavoidable between Church and state, he is adamant that such a compromise represents an adulteration of the “pure essence” of each entity. It is, he thinks, a lamentable “mixing of elements” founded upon a “lie” (61). Ivan sees the ideal of the state to be in competition with that of the Church, and, for this reason, argues that the Church ought not to capitulate before the state agenda. On the contrary, the Church, if it is to be authentic to itself, must, he thinks, boldly assert itself over against the state. He appears to defend a kind of theocratic pragmatism, arguing that the Church should press strategically toward the realization of its all-encompassing political vision. As he says, “the Church should contain within itself the whole state and not merely occupy a corner of it . . . if for some reason that is impossible now, then in the essence of things it undoubtedly should be posited as the direct and chief aim of the whole further development of Christian society” (61). Indeed, if the Church is to be true to its “basic principles,” to its “holy, eternal, and immovable destiny,” it must, for Ivan, recognize the irreducibly “universal” nature of this mission. As he indicates, this is a mission that involves the progressive transformation of “the whole world” into the Church (62). Furthermore, this transformation apparently has an inherently eschatological component. According to Ivan it is fundamentally oriented toward the future: “Thus (that

is, for future purposes), it is not the Church that should seek a definite place for itself within the state . . . but, on the contrary, every earthly state must eventually become wholly transformed into the Church and become nothing else but the Church, rejecting whichever of its aims are incompatible with those of the Church” (62).

During the debate, two concerns with Ivan’s position are voiced by Miusov. The first is that Ivan is essentially calling for a totalitarian theocracy, the transformation of the Church into a surrogate state, a trans-national religiously-buttressed empire. He accuses Ivan’s position of “ultramontanism” and later “arch-ultramontanism” (61, 66). Miusov does not detect a substantial difference in Ivan’s distinction between the state becoming the Church, on the one hand, and the Church becoming the state, on the other. The second of Miusov’s concerns is that the universal and eschatological dimensions of Ivan’s proposed Church politic render it impractical and nebulous. He passes off Ivan’s ecclesiology as “some ideal, an infinitely remote one, at the Second Coming . . . a beautiful utopian dream,” (63) and again, “something shapeless and impossible to understand” (64). While Ivan attempts to quell Miusov’s second concern (regarding plausible implementation) by exploring concrete juridical applications, he never directly responds to the first. This is a task taken up by the monks. The lack of personal response on Ivan’s part may be especially telling given the quasi-Catholic totalitarianism he later invokes in his poem: “The Grand Inquisitor.” Indeed, insofar as the Inquisitor can be said to represent Ivan’s inner convictions, it would appear that he dismisses the idea of providential action in history. He does not, in the end, trust in providence as the monks do. As we will recall, he asserts that the “parallel lines” of time and eternity remain interminably isolated from

one another, thus suggesting a deistic paradigm in which divine action is excluded from history. Accordingly, the Church's "destiny" will either be wrought on the immanent plane, or not at all; if there is to be an earthly "paradise," it will be built up brick-by-brick by shrewd human craftsmanship. In the words of the Inquisitor, this process is equated with a re-construction and final completion of the "tower of Babel." Man, he thinks, must immanentize the eschatological kingdom. Furthermore, rejecting the idea of immortality, and thus transcendent continuity of human consciousness, Ivan's unslakable thirst for justice drives him to clutch after it with a burning sense of urgency. For if there is no immortality, then the reward of witnessing and rejoicing in the fruit of one's labor is stolen by death. Hence, Ivan demands to see this fruit during his own lifetime lest his efforts be reduced to "manure for someone's future harmony" (244). As he confesses to Alyosha, "I need retribution, otherwise I will destroy myself. And retribution not somewhere and sometime in infinity, but here and now, on earth, so that I see it myself" (244). This position leads him to the resolution that he must forge justice quickly, and on terms he will define: "While I am on earth, I hasten to take my own measures" (244). Ivan's intense desire to realize just ends, however, leads him to accept the provisional implementation of unjust means, intellectually assenting to the "compromise" he himself decries as a betrayal of pure essence. This is seen in his Inquisitor's willingness to lie, and indeed burn citizens at the stake, in order to produce and maintain civil harmony. However, Ivan appears to be of two minds here. In his article, as we noted, he rejects a society based on un-truth, and advocates for incremental enactment of ecclesial justice: "little by little, of course, not all at once, not immediately, but still quite soon" (63)

### Monastic Counter-Point

But what do the monks have to say about the Church? How do they, if at all, diverge from the ecclesial vision advanced in Ivan's article? There is certainly much in Ivan's perspective that they agree with, prompting much enthusiasm during the cell-debate. For instance, both Paissy and Zosima affirm that it is the eschatological destiny of the Church to reign universally, and both affirm that the fulfillment of this destiny is connected with some form of immanentization. According to Paissy, the "establishment" of a terrestrial Church was at the heart of Christ's incarnate mission: "Our Lord Jesus Christ came precisely to establish the Church *on earth*" (61, emphasis mine). It would appear that, for Paissy, the Church acts as a functional extension of the Incarnation. He would surely affirm the Apostle Paul's repeated description of the Church as the "body" of Christ. The Church, Paissy notes, is intimately connected to and concerned with the world. However, he also states that it retains its connection with heaven. Stationed at the liminal space between heaven and earth, the Church is meant to function as a privileged mediator between the transcendent and the immanent. As he says, "The Kingdom of Heaven, of course, is not of this world but in heaven, but it is entered in *no other way than through the Church* that is founded and established on earth" (61, emphasis mine). Paissy also affirms that it is the eschatological destiny of this Church to reign universally: "The Church is indeed a kingdom and appointed to reign, and *in the end* must undoubtedly be revealed as a kingdom *over all the earth*" (61-62, emphasis mine). Similar universal and eschatological themes are echoed by Zosima: "'It is true,' the elder smiled, 'that now Christian society itself is not yet ready, and stands only on seven righteous men; but as they are never wanting, it

abides firmly all the same, awaiting its *complete transfiguration* from society as still an almost pagan organization, into one *universal and sovereign Church*. And so be it, so be it, *if only at the end of time*, for this alone is *destined to be fulfilled!*” (66, emphasis mine). While the monks share Ivan’s enthusiasm for a universal ecclesial kingdom, they appear less willing to detach its manifestation from divine guidance and activity. They are less willing to limit destiny to an immanent event or human process. Trusting in the mysterious operation of divine providence, they reject a compromise of means as an attempt to hasten the arrival of justice. According to Zosima, the Church, as the ground and pillar of truth, must flatly and unambiguously reject any manipulation of this truth. As he says, “the judgement of the Church is the only judgment that contains this truth, and for that reason it cannot, essentially and morally, be combined with any other judgment, even in temporary compromise” (65). It is true, he says, that there is a “mystery” preserved in the “wisdom of God” that continually influences historical development, a mystery that cannot be circumscribed by “human reckoning.”<sup>82</sup> Acknowledging the reality of this mystery will require (and enable) one to work toward justice with patience and humility. As Zosima says, and Paissy confirms:

‘there is no need to trouble oneself with times and seasons, for the mystery of times and seasons is in the wisdom of God, in his foresight, and in his love. And that by which human reckoning may still be rather remote, by divine predestination may already be standing on the eve of its appearance, at the door, And so be that too! So be it!’ ‘So be it! So be it!’ Father Paissy confirmed with reverence and severity (66).

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<sup>82</sup> For Zosima this mystery is not cold and impenetrable, an eternal question mark used to leverage and deceive the uninitiated (such as expressed by Ivan’s Inquisitor). Rather, it is deeply connected with the living movement of love in the world, an invisible movement that (as we saw in chapter two) can be intuited through the noetic eye of the heart/conscience.

Zosima's position here is consistent with the priestly advice he gives to Madame Khoklakov just prior to the ecclesial debate, when discussing the attainment of freedom through "active love." As he says:

I predict that even in that very moment when you see with horror that despite all your efforts, you not only have not come nearer your goal but seem to have gotten farther from it, at that very moment—I predict this to you—you will suddenly reach your goal and will clearly behold over you the wonder-working power of the Lord, who *all the while has been loving you, and all the while has been mysteriously guiding you.* (58, emphasis mine)

It is clear that the monks have faith in a transcendent power moving alongside and influencing the immanent realm. The monks unmistakably assert, with Ivan, that the universal mission of the Church must not be relegated to a distant dream or ideal, that its action in the world must be tangible and relevant. However, they also assert that the Church's peaceable reign must not, indeed cannot, be forced prematurely into existence. It cannot be, for human action is only one factor in the manifestation-process. There is also the divine to consider. So the growth of the Church, like the deepening humanity of the human race (as discussed in chapter two) is shown to involve the recognition of a prevailing, divine trajectory that yet requires voluntary self-alignment. Indeed, beyond the debate in Zosima's cell, we find direct association of ecclesial expansion with the expanding brotherhood of man explored in the last chapter.

### **The Church as Brotherhood**

The uniting of all people together in loving unity (in accordance with their true nature) is described by Zosima with the same universal/eschatological language he uses to talk about the final manifestation of the Church. He speaks of his faith in the "magnificent

communion of mankind in the future,” which may be anticipated “even now” in small, tender acts of reconciliation. This “great and openhearted communion” is an event that he says will ultimately be accomplished only “with Christ” (317). The mysterious stranger of his youth, Mikhail, similarly describes the overcoming of egoism and isolation as the emergence of “paradise,” the earthly manifestation of “the Kingdom of Heaven” (303). He asserts that when all have come to recognize their inherent brotherhood, their solidarity in guilt and suffering, “the Kingdom of Heaven will come to them, no longer in a dream but in reality” (303). The concretion of the Kingdom, for Mikhail, has to do with a collective renewal of the human psyche, a full scale paradigm shift, repentance en masse. As he says, “in order to make the world over anew, people must turn themselves unto another path psychically. Until one has indeed become the brother of all, there will be no brotherhood” (303). Mikhail clearly indicates that there is a component of voluntary human action (“must turn themselves”) involved in bringing about universal brotherhood; however, he also associates this event with the impending eschaton, the second coming of Christ: “then the Son of Man will appear in the Heavens” (304). In the penultimate age, the interim period between the first and second coming, Mikhail advocates for an attitude of perseverance and preservation, the maintenance of fidelity to the “great thought” of Christ-like love. This, punctuated by moments of exemplary performance: “Until then [the second coming] we must keep hold of the banner, and every once in a while, if only individually, a man must suddenly set an example, and draw the soul from its isolation for an act of brotherly communion, though it be with the rank of holy fool. So that the great thought does not die” (304). Mikhail appears to consider preservation (keeping hold of “the banner”/

remembering the “great thought”) to be the principal and sacred task of the Church. This is a task, however, that is vulnerable to inertia and distortion. So, lest the great thought congeal and “die,” it must, he thinks, be periodically enacted in a radical and palpable fashion.

A tactic of preservation and perseverance is also recommended by Zosima in his talks and homilies: “where there are brothers, there will be brotherhood; but before brotherhood they will never share among themselves. *Let us preserve the image of Christ*, that it may shine forth like a precious diamond to the whole world . . . So be it! So be it!” (316, emphasis mine). Zosima talks about this process of brothering, which appears to correspond with churching, in soteriological terms. He suggests that the “salvation” of Russia, and indeed the whole world, may spread out from monastic communities, where Christ-like love is remembered and enacted across the ages. For Zosima, monasteries appear to function as a bulwark against cultural amnesia, beacons of memorial light in a world ravaged by the “flooding wind” of extravagant individualism. He sees them as signposts, pointing toward the tacit, mystical reality of pan-human communion. Putting their faith in divine providence, these monks patiently bide their time, strengthening their resolve and waiting for historical circumstances to ripen. When the moment is ripe, he thinks, they may rise up and lead:

From these meek ones, thirsting for solitary prayer, will perhaps come the salvation of the Russian land! For truly they are made ready in peace ‘for the day and the hour and the month and the year’. . . in their solitude they keep the image of Christ fair and undistorted, in the purity of God’s truth . . . and when the need arises the will reveal it to the wavering truth of the world . . . Of old from our midst came leaders of the people, and can they not come now a well? (313, 314)

Along with the preservation of a vision, Zosima associates the monastic vocation with the training of “the people” in the ways of faith, love and peaceful perseverance. The shared Christian legacy of the Russians, whom Zosima calls a “God-bearing people,” will, he declares, ensure their retention of the monks’ instruction: “The Orthodox heart will understand everything!” (293). As he exhorts, “the salvation of Russia is from the people. And the Russian monastery has been with the people from time immemorial . . . watch over the people, therefore, and keep watch on their hearts. Guide them in peace. Such is your monastic endeavor, for this is a God-bearing people” (315). Zosima’s emphasis on preservation, grounded in communal remembrance, thus appears to link up with a sort of grass-roots, religious populism. Orthodox monks, standing arm-in-arm with the lay people, are to enkindle a slow-motion coup d’état. For Zosima, the ecclesial mission of the monks, universal in scope, cannot be contained within the walls of monasteries. Rather, monasticism (and Christianity at large) must maintain a dedication to social engagement and reform. Such an emphasis is demonstrated when Zosima sends his beloved novice Alyosha to live as a “monk in the world” (77). Indeed, throughout the novel, we see that Alyosha’s compassionate disposition, retentive memory, and enduring will-to-truth, characteristics tempered and refined by the monastic life, allow him to naturally draw a lay brotherhood into existence.

It should be noted that one of the consistent themes of the ecclesial brotherhood advocated by Zosima is the non-coercive nature of its growth and expansion. Above, we connected this with Zosima’s trust in divine providence, and, in the last chapter, we explored his idea that true human community involves un-coerced consent to unity. Zosima

corroborates Mikhail's statement that "The Lord is not in power but in truth" (308). Truth, he thinks, speaks for itself, possessing its own inner power of conviction. If there is indeed a coup-d'état encouraged in Zosima's teachings it does not appear to be a violent or vengeant one. In contradistinction to Ivan's Inquisitor, for whom violent coercion is an ugly but necessary component in the construction of the universal Church, Zosima consistently argues on behalf of "love" as a means of longsuffering suasion. He poses and answers the rhetorical question of how one ought to confront the stubborn resistance of worldly "sin" by negating "force" as an option:

One may stand perplexed before some thought, especially seeing men's sin, asking oneself: 'Shall I take it by force, or by humble love?' Always resolve to take it by humble love. If you so resolve once and for all, you will be able to overcome the whole world (319).

For, as he says, "a loving humility is a terrible power, the most powerful of all, nothing compares with it" (319). And again: "Love is such a priceless treasure that you can buy the whole world with it" (52). One should strive, he says, to "gain the whole world by love" (164) and to "tirelessly, insatiably love all men" (322). As always, while anchoring this task in the living memory of Church tradition, Zosima keeps an eye to its impending, eschatological dimension. Hence his address to the monks: "have faith to the end . . . your work is for the whole, your deed if for the future" (321, 322). While Ivan appears to advise a strategic advance toward this future, the arrogation of providence, Zosima and the monks stress the impossibility of such a task. The growth of the Church, they think, is often imperceptible to the empirical eye. It comes slowly and subversively through small, humble works of love in cooperation with the mysterious action of providence. Zosima talks about the expansion of human brotherhood in terms of planted "seeds," invisibly

germinating, and “drops” producing subtle, far-reaching ripples in the ocean (291, 294, 315, 319), and when Alyosha beholds paradise in a dream sequence, Zosima, who is present there, declares that his presence there is predicated upon the simple gift of an “onion” (361).<sup>83</sup> One could perhaps say that Zosima’s ecclesiology places more emphasis on the “how” than the “what.”<sup>84</sup> Certainly, for Zosima, the “what” is inseparable from the “how.” Though there is a mysterious and indefinite quality to his vision, the basic tenet is clear: the Church, as an instrument of love, must continue to be the Church, it must hold true to its non-coercive calling. Vyacheslav Ivanov nicely captures the inherent mysteriousness of Dostoevsky’s take on ecclesiological advancement, emphasizing its subtle and subversive expansion:

The construction, therefore, will resemble—as is allegorically suggested in a Russian fairy-tale—a process of building the invisible church with invisible bricks; and the artisans and architects themselves will be unable to perceive with their senses what they have erected until the invisible is revealed in glory. To those who are sent out to build in this World another World, and in this Kingdom another Kingdom, the behest is given: ‘That which is made, and will be made, upon earth and by men’s laws, do not seek to destroy it; but your work is not governed by these laws.’<sup>85</sup>

Ivanov, I think, puts his finger on the pulse of the tension inherent in the ecclesiology expressed by Zosima. The Church, torn between two worlds, must strive to reconcile the two. The Church must not fade into social irrelevance, cloistering itself in a “corner” of the state, but it also must not dilute its embodied truth for the sake of an alleged increase in

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<sup>83</sup> Alyosha and Grushenka elsewhere discuss this microscopic action in terms of the giving of “onions” (352-353). Dmitri is shaken to the core when he is thoughtfully gifted a pillow to sleep on (508), and when he remembers that a doctor once generously gave him a “pound of nuts” (675).

<sup>84</sup> COR. 13

<sup>85</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life: a Study in Dostoevsky*, Trans. Norman Cameron (New York: The Noonday Press 1960), 154.

efficacy. Thus, the Church must continually struggle to imaginatively transpose the Kingdom of Heaven into quotidian life: social, political, economic. It must build slowly, patiently and prayerfully, continually placing its hope in “things unseen.” This is what Zosima seems to mean by speaking of the state becoming the Church rather than vice versa. The Church should not aspire to seize hold of the reins of power, to issue and enforce commands from on high, but rather should function as a voluntary community, slowly infusing society like a leaven from below/within. This does not appear to be, for Zosima, a retreat from the social sphere, but a way of creatively, critically and constructively engaging it.

Having laid out the basic contours of Zosima’s monastic ecclesiology, I will next turn toward Bulgakov’s vision of the Church. As we will see, Bulgakov, like the monks, imagines the universal manifestation of the Church to coincide with the eschatological culmination of history. The Church, for Bulgakov, simultaneously participates in the temporal and the eternal, functioning as a dynamic facilitator between heaven and earth. His account will help us to see more clearly the paradoxical position of the Church in the world expressed by Dostoevsky.

### **Bulgakov’s Ecclesiology; The Church as Body, Temple, and Bride**

Bulgakov has an impressively “high” doctrine of the Church. According to his understanding, “the Church,” in her interior “essence,” represents the foundation and goal

of all creaturely existence.<sup>86</sup> On numerous occasions Bulgakov cites a passage from the apocryphal “Shepherd of Hermas” indicating that the world was created “for the sake of” the Church: “she was created before all things, and the world was created for her.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the Church, for Bulgakov, “is the fulfillment of God’s eternal plan concerning creation and the salvation, sanctification, glorification, deification and sophianization of creation. In this sense, the Church is the very foundation of creation, its inner entelechy.”<sup>88</sup> As we observed in the previous chapter, Bulgakov considers the life of the Church to be a reflection of the trinitarian life of God; that is to say, it is an image of unbroken communion between multiple persons inhabiting a single nature. As we also observed, however, the inherent instability of the human race, its status as a free, multi-hypostatic organism in the process of becoming, results in an inevitable gap between image and likeness, between potential and actual being. As a reflected image of the Trinity, the Church only ever approximates the true likeness of this image. For this reason, when speaking of the Church, Bulgakov distinguishes between two “inseparable and inconfusable” modes of her existence. The first mode is the “ontological” mode. This signifies the “invisible” life of the Church as a

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<sup>86</sup> He anchors this argument scripturally by pointing toward several passages in the epistle to the Ephesians. Therein we read that Christ: “hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world . . . that in *the dispensation of the fullness of times* he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth . . . being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:4-11). Bulgakov links this Christic unity with “the fellowship of the mystery” introduced in chapter three, “which, from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:9-11). This fellowship, he says, is the Church: the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, Trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2002), 254, 255.

<sup>87</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 253.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

transcendent unity-in-multiplicity, the inter-communion of all humankind in a single body, will and spirit. For Bulgakov, it is a form of ecclesial reality that “transcends history,” that always-already precedes and conditions the historical manifestation of the Church. The Church’s ontological presence is, he says, typically “unseen” and thus must be taken as “a matter of faith.”<sup>89</sup> The second mode is the “phenomenological” mode. This is the “visible” manifestation of the Church on the immanent plane of history. Here, the Church is apparently subject to division and multiplication, approximating the unity of her divine prototype only through the dialectical “churning of life.”<sup>90</sup> As Bulgakov notes, this distinction roughly corresponds to the difference between Church in the singular and the plural: “In Scripture, the term *church* is used in two senses: (1) in the sense of a local community of believers, that is, in the sense of *churches* in the plural, united by unity of life; and (2) in the sense of the *Church* as this very life, as *one mystical essence*.”<sup>91</sup>

This “one mystical essence” (the ontological Church) is, for Bulgakov, exemplified in the Pauline passages that speak of the Church as both the “body of Christ” and the “temple of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>92</sup> As he says, these two definitions encompass “the very foundation of Church ontology.”<sup>93</sup> They are not, he says, figurative or metaphorical, but literal. He directly relates them to corresponding historical events: the Incarnation and

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<sup>89</sup> Sergius Bulgakov, *Sophia: the Wisdom of God*, trans. Patrick Thompson (Hudson: Lindisfarne Press, 1993), 134.

<sup>90</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 259.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid 255 (emphasis mine)

<sup>92</sup> He mentions several such passages from the Pauline corpus: 1 Cor. 10:17: “we being many are . . . one body.” Rom. 12:5: “we, being many, are one body in Christ.” Col. 3:15: “ye are called one body.” Eph. 2:16: “that he might reconcile both unto God in one body.” Eph. 3:6: “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body.” Eph. 4:4: “There is one body, and one Spirit.”

<sup>93</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 258.

Pentecost. For Bulgakov, these two linked events hold universal “anthropological significance.”<sup>94</sup> Together they mark a sea-change in human nature, inaugurating the potential incorporation of all mankind, without exception, into the life of Christ by the Holy Spirit. As he says:

the doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, has, first of all, an anthropological significance. This doctrine affirms a certain panchristism and panpneumatism, to which no limits are set. In this aspect this doctrine contains the idea that, after the Incarnation and Pentecost, Christ is the head of humankind and therefore lives in all humankind. The same thing is affirmed concerning the Holy Spirit.<sup>95</sup>

This tacit incorporation of all humanity into the “body of Christ” is, for Bulgakov, an ontological fact, constituting the universal nature of the Church: “All human beings belong to Christ’s humanity. And if this human condition is the Church as the body of Christ, then, in this sense, *all* humanity belongs to the Church.”<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, given that man, qua “microcosm,” is intrinsically connected with the cosmos (his “peripheral body”), Bulgakov asserts that “the whole universe belongs to the Church.”<sup>97</sup> Indeed, the entire cosmos, he thinks, is the Church waiting to be born. Bulgakov recognizes that there is, of course, a tension between the omnipresence of the Church, considered ontologically, and the uneven distribution of her historical presence. The universal communion of humanity, an ever-present reality in the “ontological Church,” is not realized in the life of the world without

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<sup>94</sup> In this regard, Bulgakov points toward Christ’s words in Matthew 25 stating that an action done to any human, “the least of these,” is *equivalent* to an action rendered unto him, and Peter’s invocation of the prophet Joel in Acts 2:17: “I will pour out my Spirit *upon all flesh*.” For Bulgakov, the Incarnation signals the incorporation of *all* human nature into the divine nature of Christ, albeit potentially. The Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost, continues to abide in the world, acting to progressively activate this divine potential insofar as it is actively striven toward.

<sup>95</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 261.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 266.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 267.

active mediation. For the Church does not manifest herself instantaneously or automatically. Nor does her existence coerce the human race into mechanical brotherhood. Hence, while ontologically unlimited, the historical influence of the Church is often restricted to localized pockets of enactment. Though the impulse toward ecclesial unity is embedded within the inmost essence of things, the actualization of this impulse requires free human effort. The Church, emerging as multiple church(es) across time and space, must consistently be drawn into conformity with her ontological prototype (which exerts a silent pressure toward universal communion). Bulgakov describes this as a “synergetic” process involving man and God. As he says, “The Church is a synergism uniting heaven with earth.”<sup>98</sup>

Bulgakov thus talks about Paul’s attention not only to ontology, but to “practical applicability.”<sup>99</sup> As he says, “depending on where the accent falls, the main thrust of Paul’s ecclesiology is either dogmatic or practical. His ecclesiology attests to that mysterious unity of humanity that is the mystery of the Church and also summons us to accept this mystery as a guide, so that all abide in the union of love.”<sup>100</sup> Bulgakov links Paul’s emphasis on ecclesial praxis (local initiatives guided by trust in the “mysterious unity of humanity”) with a third definition of the Church: “the Bride of the Lamb.” This epithet, found in the book of Revelation,<sup>101</sup> is for Bulgakov an expression of the impending marriage between the historical Church and her ontological prototype at the end of time.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 270.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid 261-262.

<sup>101</sup> Rev. 21:9-11; also intimated in Ephesians 5:31-32. Furthermore, Bulgakov connects this with the Bride and Bridegroom in the Song of Songs.

The symbolism of the book of Revelation invokes a union between heaven and earth, a union which, according to Bulgakov, can only ever be approximated prior to the eschaton. As he says “heavenly and earthly, the Church is one in ground and limit, in entelechy, but she remains dual in the world process until the end of the world.”<sup>102</sup> This end, for Bulgakov, is unpredictable and un-programmable, but nevertheless connected with human striving.

Bulgakov’s “Church history” thus appears to run as follows: the world is created for the sake of the Church, pre-destined to become the universal body of Christ; at the “fullness of time” Christ, via the Incarnation, draws all things embryonically into his body, opening the potential incorporation of all things into the Church; subsequently, the Spirit, poured out at Pentecost, reposes upon and activates this universal Christic/ecclesial potential insofar as it is freely pursued by humanity; finally, at an undisclosed future moment, the universal communion in Christ is sealed and perfected by an unpredictable eschatological event.<sup>103</sup> This is the Church as body, spirit and bride. Thus, the Church presently finds herself navigating a “penultimate” age; the time of the “already but not yet” in which her body is growing through the spirit toward impending nuptial consummation. This is a period where the Church is struggling to become what she is: the creative facilitator of universal communion in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Church’s ontological perfection, while constituting the inner core of her being, appears, in this age,

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<sup>102</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 264.

<sup>103</sup> One could seemingly organize Bulgakov’s ecclesiology into three overlapping ages, corresponding to the three Persons of the Trinity: (1) The age of the Father, stretching from creation until the Incarnation: the “Old Testament Church” (2) The age of the Son, consisting of Christ’s accomplished incarnation, death and resurrection (3) The age of the Spirit, stretching from Pentecost until the eschaton, inspiring the deification of the world in cooperation with mankind, which has become inwardly identified with Christ.

to remain terminally out of reach. How then is the historical Church to conduct herself? How ought the historical Church to proceed toward her eschatological destiny? To what extent ought the Church to actively participate in the extension of her influence?

### **Bulgakov on the Church in History**

According to Bulgakov there are two main forces operative in the growth and development of the historical Church. First, there is the internal ontological thrust of creation: the divine power that shapes and guides the trajectory of the universe, inclining the world (and thus the Church) toward its eschatological consummation. This ontological inclination is, for Bulgakov, intimately connected with God's providential action in the world. Secondly, there is the relative power of human freedom, which may choose to align or dis-align itself with this inclination. Free human creativity is, for Bulgakov, an indispensable component in the manifestation of the Church. For man, says Bulgakov, is a "microcosm that extends into the macrocosm."<sup>104</sup> Human creative activity, therefore, has profound and irreducible cosmic significance. According to Bulgakov, each human deed rings throughout the universe, and, indeed, throughout all time. He goes as far as to say that the "completion" and "transfiguration" of the cosmos depends (in part) upon human action:

Having created man in the fullness of his potential tasks, God entrusts to him their fulfillment. In this sense, the world created by God is completed by man, not as creator "out of nothing" of course, but as the accomplisher of God's designs . . . without this accomplishment the fullness of the universe cannot be manifested, and the universe cannot attain its end and its ultimate transfiguration . . . therefore, there is, so to speak, a natural preparation for eschatology in history, besides the spiritual

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<sup>104</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 321.

preparation. The universe realized in man is the substrate of the transfiguration of the world.<sup>105</sup>

Bulgakov, as we can see, assigns great responsibility to human action. Man is, for him, “inseparable from the cosmos,”<sup>106</sup> inextricably bound up with its destiny, a destiny which involves the whole world becoming the Church. Bulgakov is also adamant, however, that man does not possess a secret gnosis that would enable him to seize the reins of history and steer the world unswervingly toward its end; the human race does not possess a definite blueprint for the construction of the eschatological Kingdom. Rather, for Bulgakov, human action is always-already entangled with the mysterious action of God in the world. As we noted above, he understands man and God to operate “synergetically,” in co-operation with one another. Hence, regarding the universal manifestation of the Church, Bulgakov notes that, “It is indisputable that man himself is not given to know and to define the measure of this accomplishment. Therefore, the end inevitably contains *for man* something unexpected and catastrophic, as Scripture witnesses.”<sup>107</sup> According to Bulgakov, divine action, often subtle and implicit in the passage of history, appears explicitly at the end of time, purging and refining the deeds of man. That being said, Bulgakov refuses to see the creative labor of man throughout history as being somehow annulled by this fact. Nor is God’s creativity diminished. For, as he says,

This building of the city of God in history does not diminish the significance of God’s new creative act in the transfiguration of the world but prepares for the world the material that is the content of history, its creative activity. The new city is not

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid 321-322.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid 321.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid 322.

created out of nothing but is the transfiguration of history. A catastrophic rupture takes place here, but what has been accomplished is not abolished.<sup>108</sup>

Bulgakov describes this Divine-human process as “the world’s ecclesialization in time,” a task that (since all have become inwardly identified with Christ via the Incarnation) includes and concerns all of humanity. However, he notes, the active and dedicated pursuit of this ecclesialization is found primarily in the life of the confessional Church, where it is consciously acknowledged. This Church, for Bulgakov, must dwell within the midst of society, effecting gradual change and illumination from within. For the Church, he thinks, “acts as a leaven, until all the dough rises.”<sup>109</sup> This internal leavening process is not imposing and coercive, but creatively convincing. For, as Bulgakov says, “The Lord reigns in the world not by virtue of his omnipotence but by the action of the Spirit: ‘not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit’ (Zech. 4:6).”<sup>110</sup> The Church must not wash her hands of sociopolitical action, which would be to disincarnate herself, but she must also recognize that the extension of the Lord’s reign is not wrought by violent appropriation. The Church must therefore continually “combat the false yearning for the earthly kingdom, and to summon to patience and martyrdom.”<sup>111</sup>

According to Bulgakov, the Church’s mission is played out on both the immanent and transcendent planes, for time and eternity are “inseparable and inconfusable.” He thinks that this immanent-transcendent connection is especially significant because it means that advancement toward the eschaton can be wrought invisibly and inwardly over many ages—

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid 327.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid

<sup>110</sup> Ibid

<sup>111</sup> Ibid 336.

it does not dissolve with the passing of a given generation. This truth allows for a more patient and humble approach toward ecclesial progress. And indeed, like the construction of a great Cathedral, many generations will be required to see the project through to its completion. The Church, in Bulgakov's mind, takes the long view of history. As he says:

Our present history, on this side, also has an eternal significance—not in its empirical shell but in its inner content. This eternal element in the temporal belongs to the Church, which is why the Church acts in history as a creative force. The Church is not only Noah's ark, saving those inside it from the flood of corruption. It is also the leaven that leavens all the dough. Human history is, first of all, the history of the Church, not only outer and institutional, in the sense of her destiny in the world, but also inner, as the spiritual force that accomplishes Divine-humanity.<sup>112</sup>

Bulgakov contrasts this transcendent ecclesial perspective with the vision of “the state,” which he associates with a “godless” politic of pure immanence. Disregarding the transcendent dimension of reality, the state apparatus is bound to turn toward coercive, utilitarian measures to maintain social stability. According to Bulgakov, the state can only imagine progress on the immanent plane and thus arrogates the task of providence to itself. Because of this fact, Bulgakov advises the historical Church against collaboration with the state. As he says, “between it [the state] and the Church there can be no peace.”<sup>113</sup> Rather, Bulgakov thinks that the mission of the Church is illuminated through its opposition to the state. For the Church, grounded in mysterious longsuffering love, renounces top-down coercive power. In its struggle against the state, “the Church appears in its true colors as a community united on the basis of love, not by any kind of constraint, which for the state, on the other hand, is only natural. Accordingly, any concordat between Church and state

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid 334.

<sup>113</sup> Bulgakov, *Sophia: the Wisdom of God*, 145.

can only be a compromise, necessarily embarrassing to the Church, which must always remain in relation to the state an anarchic force.”<sup>114</sup>

Bulgakov juxtaposes “the soul of Christian progress,” which involves a patient, creative advance toward the “moving goal” of the eschaton<sup>115</sup>, over against the “evolutionary” progress heralded by the state. According to Bulgakov, evolutionary progress, which he associates with “petty-bourgeois” humanism, aims to immanentize an eschaton of its own devising, to absolutize a particular vision of the good. However, an eschaton that could be finalized by man is, for Bulgakov, most assuredly a deceit, a piece of historical fiction. He believes that this tactic inevitably leads to a “bad infinity,” where the true eschaton is actually obscured and warded off. He also argues that the rejection of transcendence, and therefore life beyond death, reduces the idea of immanent progress to a logical absurdity. As he says:

Eschatological progress is a *condition of the end*, while evolutionary progress is a complete *rejection* of the end, and its replacement by a bad infinity, which continues on the same historical plane. But there is no common evolutionary progress, no progress as one humanity in this sense. There is only a succession of generations, which can be united only in the abstract. And this subject of immanent progress is abolished by the existence of death.<sup>116</sup>

For Bulgakov it is only the idea of a resurrected humanity, an eternal, universal Church persisting through time, which can overcome nihilism and make sense of historical continuity. He continues:

On the contrary, it is universal resurrection that synthesizes and really restores one humanity as the subject of the achievements of history, although in a different

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid

<sup>115</sup> Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 344.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid 345.

dimension of being. But the idea of this resurrection is completely absent in the evolutionary conception of history. The fact that the ideology of immanent progress forgets death is a striking example of the superficiality and thoughtlessness with which it treats the most essential, decisive problem. There is no progress, for there is no one to progress in the absence of a unique, continuous humanity not subject to a temporal end. *Carpe diem* is the sole conclusion of godless historiosophy.<sup>117</sup>

According to Bulgakov it is the Church that has historically proclaimed and embodied this resurrection, the Church that has continually cultivated a sense of transcendent continuity in the world. His Church politic, then, would appear to encourage the extension of such cultivation. The historical Church, must, he thinks, immerse itself deeply and creatively within the life of the world, preparing it for transfiguration, while, at the same time, maintaining a critical distance from it. The Church must recognize that any temporal manifestation of things cannot be absolutized. History, he thinks, must be viewed in the relativizing light of the eschaton, where God and the Church will be “all in all.” This is an end that cannot be summoned into existence, it may not be “seized,” and yet it requires active human labor on the immanent plane, a plane that is always-already connected with eternity. This transcendent-immanent connection is, for Bulgakov, the condition of possibility for true progress toward the universalization of the Church.

### **Comparison/Conclusion**

I think that several of the points made by Bulgakov may help to clarify the ecclesiologies expressed in Dostoevsky’s novel. Bulgakov’s distinction between the historical Church (in the process of becoming) and the ontological Church (always-already grounding the historical) provides a way to analyze Zosima’s (and the other Monks’) emphasis on the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid

nature of the Church as both a present reality and a future destiny, a reality that is paradoxically “already, but not yet.” Zosima, while attesting to the fundamentally eschatological character of the Church, also points out that the brotherhood it represents is accessible “even now,” that paradise may be experienced in history. Bulgakov’s discussion of the ontological omnipresence of the Church seems to parallel Zosima’s emphasis on the tacit omnipresence of paradise, disclosing itself to those with eyes to see. Furthermore, Zosima’s emphasis on the universality of the Church finds a kindred expression in Bulgakov’s idea that all things participate mystically in the body of Christ and find their inner fulfillment therein. Bulgakov expresses this idea through the Biblical epithets that name the Church as body, spirit and bride. These epithets illuminate the universal unity that tacitly enfolds humanity, the progressive manifestation of this unity in time, and the eschatological consummation of this unity.

Regarding the expanding influence of the historical Church, Bulgakov’s notion of a synergetic process between man and God appears to resonate with Zosima’s emphasis on trust, patience and active love. For Both Bulgakov and Zosima, the Church must recognize and wait upon divine action in the world, while also taking creative initiative in the social sphere. In both cases it is the recognition and affirmation of an eschatological/providential dimension that informs their patient approach toward the implementation of justice and the expansion of ecclesial brotherhood. The interpenetration of time and eternity ensures that even the smallest action, however seemingly insignificant, echoes everlastingly. The existence of transcendent, supra-temporal continuity of life articulated by Bulgakov seems to correspond with Zosima’s emphasis on the immortality of the soul and the

interconnectivity of man. Bulgakov's emphasis on "eschatological progress" seems to fit with Zosima's discussion of patient advance toward ecclesialization suddenly, and unexpectedly, reaching its fulfilment.

On the negative side, it is apparently Ivan's exclusion of this transcendent dimension, his denial of the eschaton, which leads him to endorse an ersatz theocracy where genuine mystery is replaced by mystification. Seeking a just political model within the bounds of immanence alone, Ivan, via his Inquisitor, formulates an equation that he believes will maximize social justice. But attempting to do so while denying man's participation in the eternal ultimately leads to the de-humanization of man, the reduction of man to a homogeneous integer in a mathematical procedure. Coercive manipulation becomes a necessary tool in this project, which betrays justice in a bid to maximally extend it. There seems to be a resonance here with Bulgakov's critique of "evolutionary progress" which reduces life to a "bad infinity" and substitutes a super-determined status quo for the eschaton. This is a process that, while claiming to represent the fulfillment of history, actually strives to fend off the eschaton and its unpredictability. Indeed, the Inquisitor's anti-eschatological words to Christ, an inversion of the monks' "So be it!" appear to fit Bulgakov's diagnosis: "Go, and do not come again . . . do not come at all . . . never, never!" (262). Bulgakov would surely approve of Ivan's emphasis on the immanent dimension of ecclesiology, which, for Bulgakov, is too often negated in "Manichean" fashion. However, he would be critical of Ivan's neglect of the transcendent, which, for Bulgakov, must hold guard against man's hubristic desire for immediate mastery over time and space.

We can see, then, that there is significant overlap between Bulgakov's ecclesiology and that of Dostoevsky. The same tensions crop up in each thinker. Both struggle to reconcile the Church's universal and eschatological destiny with the constrictions of time and space. Furthermore, both seem to recognize three general approaches toward the manifestation of this destiny: one which embraces the immanent and rejects the transcendent (or collapses the distinction between them), and thus rushes to build the Church on its own terms (such as voiced by Ivan); one which embraces the transcendent and rejects the immanent, and thus dooms the church to political irrelevance (such as voiced by "the Churchman"); and one which embraces both immanence and transcendence, struggling to construct the Church patiently, hopefully, and non-coercively. It is this third option that would seem to be endorsed by Bulgakov, Zosima and the monks.

## FINAL CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me recapitulate the general arc of this thesis. I began by focusing on those passages in *Karamazov* that express the Elder Zosima's perspective on the natural world and materiality in general. I showed that he appears to see in nature a divine source, direction and substance that hold all things together as an integrated, purposive whole. It was also argued that, for Zosima, this holistic nature is not contrived but everywhere present, albeit often imperceptibly. I then compared this understanding with Sergius Bulgakov's sophiological perspective, showing how Bulgakov's vision of the creaturely world as a living repetition of the divine world in time and space helps to organize Zosima's emphases. Bulgakov and Zosima, it was demonstrated, both envision a world that proceeds

from, is sustained by, and returns to the divine. Having examined their perspectives on the natural world, I moved toward an exploration of man as a natural creature with the unique capacity for personal self-determination. I examined how, through a discussion of the reality of the conscience, Zosima appears to regard humanity as a communal organism connected by a dynamic, living web of empathy. It was shown that he sees the human race as eternally grounded in a communal love that only becomes apparent when actively striven toward. I next showed how this vision of pan-human love relates to Bulgakov's ideas about man. For Bulgakov, humanity, made in the divine image and likeness of a God who is perfect unity-in-trinity, must struggle to conform itself to this image. The divinity which in the first chapter I interpret as the source, content and entelechy of being was identified with triune, self-renouncing love, a love that, while constituting all that is, must yet be freely embraced. In the final chapter, I show how Zosima's ecclesiological perspective emphasizes the universal and eschatological nature of the Church, which is itself the manifestation of loving brotherhood. Zosima, over against Ivan and his Grand Inquisitor, affirms a providential agency operative in history which, in turn, leads him to endorse a patient and incremental approach toward ecclesial expansion. Such expansion was shown to correspond to the inter-communion addressed in chapter two, a communion which includes not only all of humanity but all of nature. Bulgakov has a similar perspective. He likewise connects the universal manifestation of the Church with the ultimate destiny of man and the cosmos, (as explored in chapters one and two). Bulgakov forwards the idea of a creative, synergetic approach toward the eschaton in which man and God cooperate to bring about the ecclesialization of the world.

As I have argued, Bulgakov's theological paradigm appears to have significant overlap with various trends in the thought of Zosima. The former's understanding of the world as a dynamic organism in the process of actualizing its divine potential via the synergetic collaboration of man and God in the ongoing formation of a universal, eschatological Church provides a narrative framework capable of constellating the religious maxims of the Elder. Furthermore, the idea that there is a holistic unity tacitly undergirding and preceding all things is heavily emphasized by Bulgakov and Zosima alike. Over the course of this thesis I have attempted to make a strong case for such conceptual resonance between the two. Besides similarities between the dramatic arcs of Bulgakov's and Zosima's respective theologies, I believe that other thematic parallels have become clear upon comparison between them. For instance, both appear to place a strong emphasis on human creativity and non-violence. This comes through in their mutual emphasis that truth abides in the world and must be patiently and imaginatively unconcealed. Bulgakov and Zosima both envision an invisible and dynamic world-behind-the-world that interpenetrates all things and only occasionally breaks the surface to meet the human eye. What is revealed in the surfacing—in the seeing—is the living presence of a universal love uniting all things as a dynamic, living whole. This is, for Bulgakov, the divine-human milieu: "Sophia." Furthermore, because both see the world as naturally arcing toward a determinate telos under divine guidance, they advise against violent, revolutionary attempts to forge a brighter future. In its stead they advocate hard work over a long time, the practice of active, longsuffering love nourished by eschatological faith and hope.

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I have left several avenues unexplored that would contribute to a stronger understanding of the theological resonance between Bulgakov and Dostoevsky's Elder Zosima. For instance, I have limited myself to examining conceptual resonance between the two, and have thus largely bracketed the historical resonance between Bulgakov and Dostoevsky. A thorough study of the religious milieu of late nineteenth/early twentieth-century Russia would undoubtedly prove beneficial. In this regard, a comparative examination of the thought of Vladimir Solovyov would, I think, be especially interesting. A highly influential Russian philosopher of religion during this period, Solovyov was an acquaintance of both Dostoevsky and Bulgakov, and Bulgakov has stated that Solovyov was a heavy influence on both his and Dostoevsky's projects. Another angle to be explored would be a closer examination of the modern critics of Bulgakov, who would also likely challenge and critique a Bulgakovian Dostoevsky. While I mainly focused on attempting to locate resonance between Bulgakov and Zosima, I did not really delve into secondary literature that might go against the grain of my reading. Finally, in this thesis I have limited myself to focusing on one character from one of Dostoevsky's novels, and a particular season of Bulgakov's thought, namely, his later dogmatic theology. The path thus remains open for deeper exploration and cross-examination of each thinker's respective oeuvre.

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