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MAKING THE NEW EVANGELIZATION CREDIBLE: MARY IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

*Walter Sisto, Ph.D.**

Introduction

In October 2012, Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of All England and the Anglican Communion, addressed the Synod of Roman Catholic Bishops convened in Rome to discuss "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith." In his address Williams stated that the goal of Christianity is to reveal "the face of a humanity in endless growth towards love, a humanity so delighted and engaged by the glory of what we look towards that we are prepared to embark on a journey without end to find our way more deeply into it, into the heart of the trinitarian life" (para. 6) . . . [However] "the more we keep apart from each other as Christians of different confessions, the less convincing that face will seem" (para. 13).¹

Williams reiterates Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI's observations that the new evangelization "moves along the path of ecumenism, the path of unity of faith,"² and that only as we move towards full unity can the Catholic Church offer a more

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¹ Rowan Williams, Archbishop Rowan Williams' Address to the Synod of Bishops: "To be Fully Human is to be Recreated in the Image of Christ's Humanity" (Zenit, October 11, 2012), accessed February 8, 2013—<http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/archbishop-rowan-williams-address-to-the-synod-of-bishops>.

² Pope Benedict XVI, On Christian Unity: "We All Have the Duty to Pray and Work for the Overcoming of Every Division" (Zenit, January 20, 2008), accessed September 6, 2013—<http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/on-christian-unity—2>.

“credible testimony of the Gospel.”³ The message of the Gospel is obscured by denominationalism.⁴ Competition, in-fighting, and proselytism among different denominations weaken our ability to evangelize, because for many this is evidence that Christians are hypocrites. It is no wonder why St. Paul insists: “Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together” (Eph 4:3-6). Perhaps it is more than a coincidence that the decline of interest in the ecumenical movement⁵ in the U.S. Christian Churches parallels the growth in religious “nones,” people who do not associate with any organized religion. According to a recent Pew study that surveyed forty-six million people, “nones” are one of the fastest growing groups in America. In fact, one third of adults under the age of thirty have no religious affiliation.⁶ In our secular society, Christianity is ceasing to be relevant. It is for this reason that I think the Pope is correct in renewing his plea that the

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Missionary Intentions 2009* (Pontifical Society of the Missionary Childhood, January 2009), accessed September 6, 2013—http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cevangel/p_missionary_works/infantia/documents/rc_ic_infantia_doc_20090324_boletin15p18_en.html.

⁴ The editors at the *National Catholic Reporter* highlight that for the first time since Pew researchers started surveying the religious affiliation of Americans, the United States is no longer majority Protestant. (Cf. NCR Editors, “Editorial: New Evangelization Requires Bishops’ Self-Examination,” *National Catholic Reporter* [October 27, 2012], accessed February 12, 2013—<http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/editorial-evangelization-requires-bishops%E2%80%99self-examination>.)

⁵ The fact that Walter Altman, the moderator of the 29 August 2012 Central Committee meeting of the World Council of Churches, began his speech with questions about the relevance of ecumenism today is evidence of this. He said: “Let us not fool ourselves: the question at stake was whether our ecumenical journey as the World Council of Churches was in irremediable decline. Thank God, we managed to go through the turmoil, with relatively little damage. Waters are calmer now, but is there still wind swelling to push our boat forward? Our ship will not capsize, but will it be able to advance significantly? Are we condemned to watch silently the sea around us—what we have been calling the ‘changing landscape’—without being capable of moving forward?” (Walter Altman, “Moderator’s Address: Signs of a Way Forward” [World Council of Churches, August 29, 2012], accessed September 12, 2013—<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2012/moderators-address>.)

⁶ Heidi Glenn, “Losing Our Religion: The Growth of ‘Nones,’” (National Public Radio, January 13, 2013), accessed March 28, 2013—<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/01/14/169164840/losing-our-religion-the-growth-of-the-nones>.

new evangelization must include the ecumenical movement. The new evangelization will be most effective when it includes all followers of Christ.

With the immanence of the ecumenical movement for the new evangelization in mind, this paper sets out to expound, critique, and apply the insights of an early Orthodox ecumenist, Sergius Bulgakov. Like Williams and Emeritus Pope Benedict, Bulgakov perceived the importance of the ecumenical movement.⁷ However, he argued that the ecumenical movement will not succeed until Christians from the Reformation tradition respect and venerate the Mother of Jesus. A shared understanding and experience of the Marian tradition is a preliminary condition for reunion.⁸ His perspective will no doubt cause as much offense today as it did in the 1920s; however, Bulgakov's contentious claim reveals unique insights about the role and function of Mariology in the life of Orthodoxy that I believe will help better facilitate reunion between the Christian churches and thereby allow Catholics to more effectively transmit their Catholic faith.

Mariology is an indispensable element of Orthodox and Catholic theology that allows us to enter into the ethos of both Church traditions: you cannot understand Catholic or Orthodox Christianity without understanding who the *Theotokos* is. According to Bulgakov, inextricably linked to the veneration of the Mother of God is the theology of the hypostatic union. Mary in Bulgakov's account has a pedagogical function in Orthodox theology; only by understanding her humanity can we understand Christ's humanity. Without a relationship to and theology of the Mother of God, reunion is impossible since our

⁷ For Bulgakov the ecumenical movement was nothing less than inspired by the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Note that Bulgakov does not address Catholic Mariology within the context of the ecumenical movement, because, during his time as an ecumenist (1920s to late 1930s), the Roman Catholic Church was not involved in the ecumenical movement. Although Bulgakov is critical of the Catholic Church, he understood the importance for Catholics to be involved in the ecumenical movement. His ecumenical proposal was in part motivated by this recognition and his awareness that Mariology was a central tenet of Catholic identity, and thus Catholics would be more likely to join the ecumenical movement if Mary was a topic for discussion.

experience of Christianity and theological traditions will be too different.⁹ Therefore, a shared understanding and veneration is an immediate need for the ecumenical movement and the new evangelization.

For the purpose of clarity this paper will be divided into three main parts. Part one will provide a brief introduction to Bulgakov, his ecumenical proposal, and his insight on the nature and function of Mariology and the veneration of Mary.¹⁰ Part two will critique his thought but also examine his thought within the context of recent Evangelical reappraisals of the Marian tradition. Part three will examine practical implications of Bulgakov's proposal for the Catholic Church.

Part I: Bulgakov's Background

A. Bulgakov and Mary

Sergius Bulgakov was a Russian Orthodox theologian and priest who was born in 1871 in Russia and died in 1944 in Paris. Although he is widely known for his Sophiology and the controversy surrounding that doctrine, few scholars have taken notice of the important role of the Mother of God within his theological publications and ecumenical activity.¹¹ Besides publishing a book on the Mother of God entitled *The Burning Bush* [1926], as Lev Zander notes, Mary is "the alpha and

⁹ By the same token, Orthodox or Catholic Christians that do not venerate Mary are not fully incorporated into the Church. They will lack the benefits or graces associated with their membership in the "True Church."

¹⁰ For these reasons, Bulgakov criticized his Protestant brothers and sisters for their lack of Marian piety that resulted in a heretical overestimation of Christ's divinity, individualism, and a truncated experience of Church. Bulgakov's criticisms extended to his own tradition. He experienced *de facto* Nestorianism in his Church tradition. This heresy, that attributed only an instrumental importance to Mary, was in part a motivation for writing his book on Mary, *The Burning Bush*.

¹¹ These are notable exceptions: Antonio Legisa's *Divina Maternitas Mariae in Sergio Bulgakov*; Lev Zander's *Bog i Mtr*; and three separate articles published by Andrew Louth, Robert Slesinski, and Bernard Schultze. Nevertheless, as Rowan Williams observed, Bulgakov's Mariology has been largely neglected by secondary scholars. (Rowan Williams, "General Introduction," in Sergei Bulgakov, *Towards a Russian Political Theology*, ed. Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 19.

omega" of Bulgakov's entire theological system,¹² that includes no less than two trilogies and a myriad of articles written in Russian, French, Italian, German, and English.

For the purpose of this paper, from 1925 until 1938, Bulgakov was the leading Orthodox ecumenist in the world. He is credited with introducing Mariology to the ecumenical movement. Bulgakov, a committed ecumenist, believed that the Holy Spirit inspired the ecumenical movement, and therefore he felt it was his divine calling to help the ecumenical movement succeed. This translated into frank discussions that should examine the teachings that are most central to Orthodox identity and are, therefore, integral to the success or failure of the ecumenical movement. Thus the contentious issue of the Mother of God needs to be at the forefront of the movement. To do otherwise would result in an inauthentic presentation of the Orthodox faith tradition and waste time!¹³

His sense of immediacy was evident in his speech at the First World Conference of the Faith and Order Commission in Lausanne [1927]. In his paper on Church ministry, to the astonishment of the Protestant ecumenists in attendance, he argued that reunion will only be achieved under Mary's cloak,¹⁴ for she is the mystical "Unifier."

¹² Lev Zander, *Bog i Mir*, 2:184, cited by Thomas Allan Smith, "Introduction," in Sergei Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2009), xiv. Mary is the subject of Bulgakov's first theological work on Sophia in *The Burning Bush* [1926], but also occupies his final reflection in his last major work, *The Bride of the Lamb* [1939].

¹³ For Bulgakov the liturgy is a source of revelation: it is the living tradition codified or the medium through which the Orthodox believer engages and lives out revelation. Andrew Louth, therefore, describes Bulgakov as a theologian, who "writes out of the liturgy" (Andrew Louth, "Sergii Bulgakov and the Task of Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74 [2009]: 243–257, esp. 250.) The fact that Mary is honored and invoked in every Orthodox liturgical service and that she is the subject of hyperdulia nurtures his thought. Drawing his inspiration from the liturgy—by liturgy he means everything associated with the liturgical expression (i.e., the prayers of the liturgical service books, the icons, and church structure)—Bulgakov argues that Marian veneration and teachings are necessary because they help guarantee Orthodox life and worship, since they help prevent Christological distortions and guarantee our full participation in the life of the Church.

¹⁴ Bryn Geffert, "Anglicans & Orthodox between the Wars" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2003), 143.

Bishop Evlogy, in his autobiography, tells us that before Bulgakov could finish his paper the convener of the session abruptly ended it, arguing that Bulgakov had no time left, which prevented further scandal for the Protestant theologians in attendance.¹⁵ For the next few years, Bulgakov continually petitioned the annual continuation committees of the Faith and Order Commission to address his concerns about the Mother of God.¹⁶ His efforts were not in vain, and at the Second World Conference of the Faith and Order Commission in Edinburgh (1937), a session on the "Communion of the Saints" was added to the program that included a subsection on Mariology.¹⁷ Unfortunately, this success was only short-lived, as language ascribing an exalted place for the Mother of God was removed from the final draft of the document that was produced.¹⁸ Due to illness and old age, Bulgakov was unable to pursue this theme at subsequent meetings.

B. Bulgakov's Mariology as a Method

Undoubtedly, Bulgakov's insistence on the need for Mary to be a central topic for the ecumenical movement reflects his Orthodox piety and devotion to the Mother of God.¹⁹ He insists that the "[l]ove and veneration for the Virgin is the soul of Orthodox piety."²⁰ For Bulgakov, as Sergei Nikolaiev

¹⁵ Cf. Sergius Bulgakov, "The Papal Encyclical and the Lausanne Conference," *The Christian East* 9, no. 3 (1928): 116-127, esp. 127; Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theologians: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov* [MTR] (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 283; Brandon Gallaher, "Bulgakov's Ecumenical Thought," *Sobornost* 24, no. 1 (2002): 24-55, esp. 45.

¹⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, "The Question of the Veneration of the Virgin Mary, at the Edinburgh Conference," *Sobornost* 12 (1937): 24-8, esp. 28.

¹⁷ Geffert, "Anglicans & Orthodox," 233. The establishment of this subsection of the "Communion of Saints" occurred three years prior to Edinburgh. (Cf. Bulgakov, "The Question of the Veneration of the Virgin Mary," 28.) "The Question of the Veneration of the Virgin Mary" is a reprinting of Bulgakov's paper, "A Brief Statement of the Place of the Virgin Mary in the Thought and Worship of the Orthodox Church," that he presented at Edinburgh.

¹⁸ Geffert, "Anglicans & Orthodox," 235.

¹⁹ Cf. Sergius Bulgakov, "The Question of the Place of the Virgin Mary," 29-31, esp. 29.

²⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 116.

succinctly summarizes, "the Orthodox Church does not make a distinction between the love of Jesus and his Mother, insisting that one who does not venerate Virgin Mary does not know Christ, and that faith in Christ that excludes the veneration of the Mother of God is a different faith and different Christianity from ecclesial faith and Christianity."²¹ Thus Bulgakov argues that the proper icon of the Incarnation is not Christ alone, but rather Christ and Mary.

Theologizing from this tradition, Bulgakov argues that Mariology "is the central, though hidden, nerve of the whole movement towards reconciliation among the divided confessions. The way in which the whole Protestant world suddenly ceased to venerate the Virgin Mary was the most mysterious and real spiritual event of the age of the Reformation. This lack of feeling continues up to the present time, and one of the most important preliminary conditions of the success of reconciliation is to overcome it."²² According to Bulgakov the greatest tragedy of the Reformation was the loss of Marian veneration that meant a loss of an orthodox understanding of the Incarnation. Protestants need Mary because she demonstrates that Christ is fully human amidst his divinity. She, in this sense, provides a fail-safe against inordinate conceptions of Christ that overemphasize Christ's divinity at the expense of his humanity. The underlying theme in Bulgakov's negative assessments of the Protestant tradition is the inability of Protestants to fully receive and articulate the hypostatic union due to its lack of Marian devotion. In the Protestant tradition he found an overemphasis of the Divinity of Christ at the cost of Christ's humanity.²³ Bulgakov insists that there is no Christ without Mary, because Christ incarnates into Mary's humanity.

²¹ Sergei V. Nikolaev, "Church and Reunion in the Theology of Sergii Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky, 1918-1940" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 2007), 137. Similarly, Florovsky stressed that the traditional icon of the Blessed Virgin is precisely an icon of the Incarnation: the Virgin is always with the Babe, and no image of the Incarnation is possible without the Virgin Mother. Cf. Georges Florovsky, "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," in *Creation and Redemption*, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, Vol. 3 (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publ. Co., 1976), 171-188.

²² Bulgakov, "The Question of the Veneration of the Virgin Mary," 28.

²³ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 116.

It is clear that Bulgakov's assessment of Protestantism is based primarily on his experience of Protestantism as opposed to a thorough scholarly study of this tradition. Nevertheless, beyond lived experience, the Council of Ephesus provides Bulgakov with a theological warrant for his claim. What was interesting to Bulgakov was that the first major Marian statement by an ecumenical council was made in the context of a Christological debate to clarify the Incarnation. Rereading the Council of Ephesus in the context of Chalcedonian theology, Bulgakov argues that Mary is the *Theotokos* because she is the mother of the hypostatic union and not simply the mother of Christ's humanity. Mary reveals the Incarnation of the Logos from the human side.²⁴ If Mary were simply the Mother of Christ, Christ would consist of two hypostases, resulting in a Nestorian Christology that undermines the humanity of Christ. Thus he concludes that "Mariology must necessarily be included in Christology as an inseparable part of it, for Christ, as the Son of Man, is the Son of Mary. Mary is His hypostatic humanity, the 'second' nature that He assumed in the Incarnation."²⁵ His term "hypostatic humanity" may suggest a confusion of hypostasis and nature, which is a popular criticism of his thought.²⁶ However, for Bulgakov the point is that Christ is not God acting "through" humanity, but God acting "in" humanity, whereby, without losing God's Divinity, God the Son is inseparably connected to every human person through Mary. In other words, the Son of God experiences the world as a human being in solidarity with other human beings; Mary allows Christ to immerse Himself into the human experience and life. She is not simply an instrument that God the Father uses to give flesh to His Son, but rather she is a human person that God involves in the dialogue of salvation history, who freely accepts her role in the Incarnation. In so doing she does not simply give human

²⁴ Cf. Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, 56.

²⁵ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008): Kindle e-book, Ch. 3, Sec. IV, Location 2969–2970 of 7314.

²⁶ Cf. Vladimir Lossky, "The Sophia Controversy: Protopriest S. Bulgakov's 'Report' and the Meaning of the Decree of the Moscow Patriarchate," trans. William Kevin Fisher (Paris, 2004), 26; cf. Georges Florovsky, "Creation and Creaturehood," in *Creation and Redemption*, The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, 3:43–78, esp. 49.

biology and flesh to God the Son, but rather her human nature that was uniquely formed by her choices and life experience. The Son of God enters the human race through Mary's unique and personally sinless experience of being human. Mary is this abiding link between God the Son and humanity, who guarantees the true, yet sinless humanity of Christ. Mariology, in effect, provides Christology with the anthropology necessary for understanding how, why, and with whom God incarnates. But also, Mariology is a guarantee of orthodox Christology since Mariology, for Bulgakov, helps to guarantee the antinomy of the hypostatic union. Although we must not undervalue Christ's divinity and Divine hypostasis, we must always balance this with a healthy stress on Christ's humanity.²⁷ Mary therefore teaches us that Jesus was fully human and avoids collapsing the antinomy of Chalcedonian teaching that Jesus is fully God and fully human by excessively focusing on one side of the antinomy. It is important to note that Bulgakov has little interest in liberal Protestants who either deny the divinity of Christ or focus exclusively on Christ as moral teacher. For Bulgakov, an overemphasis on the divinity of Christ to the detriment of Christ's humanity is incorrect, but remains within the Christian tradition; however, the *de facto* denial of his divinity is not Christianity and therefore not worth considering.

What follows is that the title *Theotokos* functions as a hermeneutical key to more clearly express the Mystery of the Incarnation. Mary serves a pedagogical and corrective function, preventing unorthodox conceptions of the Incarnation. In this way Bulgakov attempts to expand the teachings of St. John of Damascus who argued that the title *Theotokos* "contains the whole mystery of the Incarnation."²⁸

The upshot of this approach to Mary is his criticism of the Protestant tradition. Because it has lost its Marian heritage, although it formally accepts the teaching of Chalcedon,

²⁷ Bulgakov writes that those who deny the Virgin birth or fail to understand the importance of Mary, limiting her solely as an instrument in Jesus' birth, have a "maimed Christology" and an "absence of a clearly conceived anthropology [that] is striking." (Sergius Bulgakov, "Correspondences: The Incarnation and The Virgin Birth," *Sobornost* 14 [June 1938]: 32-34, esp. 33.)

²⁸ Cited in Florovsky, "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," 173.

the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon has little meaning in the life of their tradition. The human nature of Christ is an abstraction with no real content. This is the sticking point for Bulgakov: God does not simply appropriate an abstract human nature, but Mary's human nature. Influenced by the personalism of Russian religious thought, Bulgakov exports the ontological language of nature/*ousia* and hypostasis into an existential context. Christ assumed our human world, and enters into human life and history. Mariology reminds us that, albeit the Divine Son, the Son is Jesus that was born of Mary in the town of Bethlehem.

Moreover, Bulgakov was absolute in his insistence that how we view Mary is indicative of our Christology: if Mary is an instrumental figure in salvation history whom we only recall at Christmas, then she is Christokos, and Christ is not the Second Person of the Trinity but some kind of divine-human hybrid. Christ's humanity will also remain simply an instrumental abstraction, and, in the life of that church, Christ will simply be God in the flesh. As I will demonstrate below, this will affect that entire theological tradition.

Only the veneration of Mary provides us with the ability to overcome this tendency to abstractly consider Christ's humanity. Overcoming abstraction involves much more than professing Marian dogmas because dogmas are only signposts that direct out mind and will to the truth about who God is. For Bulgakov, without religious experience they are of little consequence since they become empty philosophical formulations. In the act of venerating Mary we encounter a living person, and from this encounter we receive a new insight about who Jesus is. By venerating Mary, we venerate Christ's humanity; by honoring Mary, we honor Her Son; and by loving Mary, we are led to love her Son. More practically, we recognize that God the Son was a son of this exceptional woman, and the man he was to become was in part a result of her influence and example.²⁹

²⁹ Bulgakov makes no distinction between spirituality, mysticism, and systematic theology. For Bulgakov, theology begins and ends in prayer. (Cf. Andrew Louth, "Sergii Bulgakov and the Task of Theology.") Prayer nourishes and inspires theological thought. Thus Mary's role in the Incarnation and her role in our salvation cannot be appreciated until we pray about and to her.

Recalling her humanness, therefore, prevents us from forgetting that Christ, albeit God, is a member of our race and family. By the same token this realization allows us to see that we are members of a human race and family that God personally redeems. The upshot of this is that insofar as Mary reveals the humanness of Christ, she also reveals the meaning of what it means to be human and in a redeemed society, the Church.

Theological teachings are interconnected, and, to use Bulgakov's words, a "maimed Christology" resulting from a lack of appreciation of the Mother of God, will affect other aspects of Christian theology negatively.³⁰ This was a logical step for Bulgakov since if we abstractly consider the humanity of Christ, the greatest human being, what will follow is an abstract consideration of the human race. What will result is an overemphasis on the sovereignty of God and the denial that humankind retains the image of God after the original sin.³¹ This conclusion proceeds from a failure to take seriously that God initiates the Incarnation, but the Incarnation required a woman who was able to accept the Incarnation without hesitation or reservation.³² Mary is this member of the human race

³⁰ Bulgakov writes that those who deny the Virgin birth or fail to understand the importance of Mary, limiting her solely an instrument in Jesus' birth, have a "maimed Christology" and an "absence of a clearly conceived anthropology is striking." (Bulgakov, "Correspondence," p. 33). Vladimir Lossky, the most well-known and vocal critic of Sergius Bulgakov, concurs with this idea. However, his focus is the *Filioque*. He argues that the *Filioque* is indicative of a false rationalization of the Trinity that negatively affects the Catholic and Reformation theological traditions. (Rowan Williams, "The Theology of Vladimir Nikolaievich Lossky: An Exposition and Critique" [PhD Diss., Oxford University, 1973], v.)

³¹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 325.

³² Mary's ability to accept God's offer to be the *Theotokos* is inextricably linked to her sinlessness. For Bulgakov, her *fiat* is evidence of her sinlessness. Sin is ultimately a choice for self; or hesitation to accept God's will. Mary, because she is sinless, can offer her *fiat*. In this giving up of self, she expresses her perfect sinlessness that has no desire for self. "The smallest sin would have broken the integrity of this self-giving and the power of this expression [i.e., Mary's *fiat*]" (Bulgakov, BB, 41). Mary's *fiat* was not simply a response but her acceptance of God's will with her entire being. This is necessary because God requires this. God will only become human when humankind is ready and willing to receive God. Otherwise God, Who vouchsafes human freedom, would in some way deny this freedom since God would incarnate in a woman who was not completely accepting of the Incarnation.

that was able to selflessly give her *fiat* and be filled with the grace of God. Due consideration of Mary allows for a healthy Christian anthropology that accounts for the dialogical relationship that Bulgakov finds in the Bible between God and humankind. Bulgakov calls this relationship the *Divine-Human synergy* of salvation history. Protestant theology that fails to venerate and consider Mary fails to account for this synergy, and the result is a fallacious anthropology whereby humanity no longer retains its divine image, a juridicism replaces the living faith.

Thus, as Bulgakov notes, the blessed event of the "Incarnation becomes something external, kenotic, a voluntary self-humiliation by the assumption of human nature as of a price necessary for the purchase of justification before God."³³ In this account God rescues us from our fallen nature rather than restores human nature to its inherent blessedness. The Incarnation is not an internal necessity, but an arbitrary event enacted by God to correct our faults, and thus it loses any real meaning for the human race other than that God will no longer damn us without the possibility of salvation. But this vision of salvation history is diametrically opposed to Bulgakov's synergistic vision.³⁴ God never compels but always invites humankind to participate in its salvation, because humankind retains its inherent blessedness and is capable of accepting God's offer.

³³ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 116.

³⁴ Graves provides an interesting insight into points of contact between Bulgakov and Martin Luther. He argues that Bulgakov like Luther agrees that Mary provides a preeminent example of commitment to God's will. (Charles Graves, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Sergius Bulgakov* [Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1972], 135.) He continues that Bulgakov's Mariology offers no diminution of Christ's significance for salvation history (Graves, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Sergius Bulgakov*, 141). Although Bulgakov does not address this similarity, in his *The Orthodox Church*, he argues that the active faith of Protestantism has affinity with the Orthodox notion of discipleship (Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 108). Mary is then the greatest example of active-faith. Like Luther, Mary is a great disciple of Christ. Nevertheless, Graves warns that Bulgakov divinizes Mary too greatly so as to make her impalpable for Protestants (Graves, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Sergius Bulgakov*, 145). Graves' concern is not new but rather reiterates the concern of Bulgakov's Orthodox contemporaries (cf. Geffert, "Anglicans & Orthodox," 143).

Mary is the penultimate expression of human receptivity to God's offer of salvation. She stands between the Old and New Testaments, and is the culmination of Old Testament holiness. In her, Israel and humanity are prepared to receive God incarnate. Rejecting the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as an incorrect expression of a correct idea, Bulgakov attributes the sinlessness of Mary to the prayers, holiness, and good works of her ancestors. In this way he further demonstrates the interconnectedness of Church teachings. For Bulgakov, Mary's holiness reveals the solidarity of the human race: all human persons share one nature, which Christ unites without confusion to his divinity. Mariology therefore helps to guard us against what he calls the "sickness" of individualism in the Reformation traditions, providing us with an ecclesial understanding of humankind.³⁵ Just as Mary was not saved without the human race, the human race cannot be saved without Mary. Bulgakov, in fact laments that the lack of the veneration of Mary and the saints is a self-imposed spiritual exile from our redeemed brothers, sisters, and mother; we "are destined to remain spiritually without a family, without a race, without home, without fathers and brothers in Christ . . . [we] traverse the way of salvation all alone, without looking for examples and without knowing communion with others."³⁶ But to the contrary, we share in one human nature, and we are all responsible for one another.

Stressing the corporate reality of salvation sets Bulgakov up to provide insights about the sobornicity or catholicity of the Church. It follows that the Church is not simply a meeting place of individuals, but the Body of Christ, an ontologically connected redeemed human family that is headed by Christ

³⁵ In *Unfading Light*, Bulgakov writes: "The whole of Protestantism is sick with this kind of individualism, which gnaws away at it like a worm, and it grows weak religiously. It is all the more difficult to believe that the truth is the truth, i.e., that it demands worship for it and selflessness; it is much easier to take this truth as *my opinion* which I propose as truth." (Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations*, ed. and trans. Thomas Allan Smith [Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012], 57-58; cf. Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim [Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004]: Kindle e-book, Ch. 5, Sec. IV, Location 4627 of 6301.)

³⁶ Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 123.

but includes humankind's greatest representative, the woman chosen to give birth to God Incarnate. By providing the perfect humanity for Christ, Mary reveals to us what it means to be human, and in so doing she reveals Who Christ is and why the Church is necessary.

Of course, if we grant that salvation is a communal experience, then we now begin to understand the role of Mary and the saints in heaven. The relationships we have here on earth, which are to an extent redeemed by Christ, continue in heaven; for, if they did not, this would violate who we are as connected to and in communion with one another. Understood within this anthropological context, Mary and the saints realize Christian anthropology, who we are meant to be, and that we are invited to live out the Divine-Human synergy, the realization of the Church as a full participation in the life and mission of its head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Within this context the veneration of Mary is important because it is our incipient participation in our true relationship to one another: to love and aid in the betterment of one another, so as to grow closer to God. Bulgakov writes that we are called to be "christs in Christ," who, expressed otherwise, are to act with Mary in the salvation of the human race.³⁷ By praying to Mary we are more fully incorporated into the Church, since we live out and benefit from the "churchly" activity of Mary. Therefore, the lack of Marian piety will result in a truncated experience of the Church.

To summarize: all theological teachings are connected to the most central tenet of Christianity, the Incarnation. If the Incarnation as expressed in the teachings of the first four ecumenical councils is not the center of our theology, then doctrine directly connected to the Incarnation such as ecclesiology and anthropology will also be affected. The result will be an entirely different Christianity with whom Orthodox Christianity is unable to fruitfully dialogue. Given this account and

³⁷ This illustrates why the Orthodox Church is the fullest representation of the Church triumphant on earth, for it fully communicates with and benefits from those closest to God, Mary and the saints. Cf. Sergius Bulgakov, "I Believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church (Conference Address)," *The Fellowship of St. Albans and St. Sergius* 12 (June 1931): 17-31, esp. 21-22.

Bulgakov's insistence that orthodox Christology is guaranteed by Mariology and Marian piety, then we can better understand why Bulgakov insisted that reconciliation could not occur with Protestants until they embraced the Mother of God.

Part Two: An Appraisal of Bulgakov and the Reception of Mary in the Evangelical Tradition

Although Bulgakov engages the Protestant tradition in polemics, he fails to substantiate many of his claims and stereotypes of Protestants. This is evident in the paucity of references to his contemporary Protestant theologians. Even his use of the term "Protestant" is problematic since by this he means all church traditions stemming from the Reformation, with exception to the Anglicans, irrespective of the variety of thought within the Reformation tradition. In addition, because much of Bulgakov's ecumenical proposal is based on observations about Protestantism, whether or not we find his insights valuable will depend upon whether or not we share his observations.

Despite these shortcomings, Bulgakov's insights about Mariology are relevant for at least three reasons. First, although Bulgakov is a controversial person within the Orthodox tradition, and thus he is not widely regarded as a representative of Orthodoxy, his ecumenical proposal is representative of the Orthodox tradition. Georges Florovsky, Bulgakov's successor in the multilateral ecumenical movement, who is possibly the most influential Eastern Orthodox theologian and ecumenist of the past century, reiterates verbatim Bulgakov's ecumenical Mariological proposal.³⁸

³⁸ Georges Florovsky, who is considered an adversary of Bulgakov's Sophiology, agrees with Bulgakov regarding the function of Mariology in Christology. He wrote: "Protestant theologians simply have nothing to say about her. Yet to ignore the Mother means to misinterpret the Son. On the other hand, the person of the Blessed Virgin can be properly understood and rightly described only within a Christological context. Mariology is to be but a chapter in the treatise on the Incarnation, never to be extended into an independent "treatise." Not, of course, an optional or occasional chapter, not an appendix. It belongs to the very body of doctrine. The Mystery of the Incarnation includes the Mother of the Incarnate" (Florovsky, "The Ever-Virgin Mother of God," 174).

Second, Bulgakov's ecumenical Mariological proposal has several ecumenically useful insights that may help us explain Marian devotion to non-Catholic/Orthodox Christians. First, it is Christocentric: Mary leads us to a better understanding of the person, work and mission of Jesus Christ. This starting point is ecumenically viable since it clearly demonstrates that Mary takes nothing away from the uniqueness of the Mediator. Second, although Bulgakov insists that Protestants must acknowledge Mary's role in Christ's life and mission, there is no indication that he would require them to accept the dogmas of the Dormition or Mary's Virginity, and his teaching on her sinlessness. The emphasis in his Mariology within the context of his ecumenical teaching is Mary's Divine Motherhood, which most Protestants at least formally accept, given their faithfulness to the teachings of the third ecumenical council. In this way, he is asking only that they reeducate themselves about this aspect of their tradition and recognize that there is no Christ without Mary. Third, though Bulgakov insists that Protestants venerate Mary, he does not specify a particular form of veneration. His concern was to reintroduce Mary to Protestants, not to make them Orthodox. Given Bulgakov's stress on human creativity and freedom,³⁹ there is little doubt that he would have been open to new forms of veneration that could arise from Reformation perspectives. In fact, Bulgakov, who was critical of Catholic Mariology, was very impressed with Catholic devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a Marian devotion that arose outside of his tradition.⁴⁰ Interestingly, according to his Yalta diaries, Catholic devotion to Mary's immaculate heart was an aspect of the Catholic tradition that he admired, which, in part, led to his consideration of converting to Catholicism.

Finally, irrespective of Bulgakov works, in recent times, various theologians from the Evangelical tradition have made

³⁹ Cf. Sergei Bulgakov, *Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household*, ed. and trans. Catherine Evtuhov (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 145; Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 323.

⁴⁰ Cf. Sergius Bulgakov, *Autobiograficheskie zametki*, ed. L.A. Zander (Paris: YMCA Press, 1946).

remarkably similar claims to Bulgakov's.⁴¹ The main theme that we find in these scholarly studies is that the loss of Mary for Evangelicals has resulted in an overemphasis on the Divinity of Christ at the cost of Christ's humanity.⁴²

Concurring on the need for Mariology to vouchsafe orthodox Christology, Tim Perry, in his book *Mary for Evangelicals*, argues that if Mary is not the *Theotokos*, then Christians are not saved.⁴³ Like Bulgakov, he recognizes the Christological function of Mary. He argues that Evangelicals need a Mariology in order to correct the "thinly veiled Appollinarianism" whereby God assumes not humanity but a "dispensable body for a period of time, intervening not to restore creation, but to rescue believers from it."⁴⁴ Likewise Nancy J. Duff, who is also an Evangelical theologian, argues that Evangelicals have lost the antidocetic function of Mary. In particular, they lost the Christological interpretation of the creedal affirmation that "Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary." In her estimation, what results is that the virgin birth becomes a litmus test for orthodoxy; however, it "has no real content at all."⁴⁵ Just as Bulgakov admonished his contemporaries, Mary's instrumental presence in the Evangelical tradition results in abstract considerations of the Incarnation. Jesus becomes God-in-the-flesh, but not the hypostatic union.

Moreover, again paralleling Bulgakov's argument about the relationship of Mariology to other tenets of theology, Tim Perry points his readers to the importance of a new reception of Mary within his tradition, since the superficial attention to

⁴¹ Cf. Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, The Works of God, Vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 200; Tim Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 267-269.

⁴² Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, 116.

⁴³ Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 271.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 273-274. Even though Perry shares much in common with Bulgakov, there is no evidence that he is familiar with him.

⁴⁵ Nancy J. Duff, "Mary, Servant of the Lord," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 61-62. In essence, by neglecting Mary they have unwittingly neglected Christ's humanity.

Mary “inevitably leaves other central Christian doctrines underdeveloped.”⁴⁶ For Perry, Church teachings are intimately connected; undervaluing one aspect, especially in the area of Christ’s humanity, will affect other teachings directly related to his humanity, for example, anthropology and ecclesiology.⁴⁷ Like Bulgakov, the underlying issue for Perry is the connection between Mariology and anthropology. Proper consideration of Mary’s humanity helps to guarantee a proper consideration of Christ’s humanity.

On the issue of the veneration of Mary, Scott McKnight, also a scholar from the Evangelical tradition, argues that the real Mary will also lead us to Jesus Christ, and he suggests that Evangelicals institute a “Mary Day,” where Evangelicals will devote a day to a study of Mary in the Scriptures, so as to encounter the real Mary.⁴⁸ McKnight notes that Evangelicals seem to know more about what they do not believe about Mary than what they do, and that Evangelicals must move away from these uncritical “reaction formations.”⁴⁹

On the issue of praying to Mary, McKnight and Duff do not argue that Evangelicals should pray to Mary; however, Perry is explicit in his openness to this possibility. Perry writes: “[T]o ask Mary to pray for us is to meet him there.” In her representative and maternal roles, Mary is the unique space for God, in and through whom the church continues to plead God’s Word not only to God but also to itself.⁵⁰ Similar to Buglakov, McKnight and Perry see that the veneration of Mary allows us to learn more about God and need not contradict their religious tradition.

⁴⁶ Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 268.

⁴⁷ Cf. Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*: Kindle e-book, Ch. 3, Sec. IV, Location 2968 of 7314.

⁴⁸ “Interview with Scott McKnight,” (Ill-Legalism, 2007), February 15, 2013, <http://www.ill-legalism.com/mcknightinterview.htm>.

⁴⁹ Scott McKnight, *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007), 5.

⁵⁰ Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 302.

Part Three: Implications of Bulgakov's Proposed Approach for Catholics

Given the importance of Mary to Catholic spirituality and theology and the openness of some Protestant theologians to Christocentric portrayals of the Mother of God, what practical suggestions might Bulgakov have to facilitate reunion between the Catholic Church and other Church traditions?

Though Bulgakov never offers practical suggestions for his thought, based on his work on intercommunion,⁵¹ it is clear that for him the most effective ecumenism is local and intimate. This is not to deny the importance of ecumenical statements, especially the recent statements about Mary (e.g., the Lutheran-Catholic [1990] and Anglican-Catholic [2004] dialogues),⁵² as well as multilateral statements that address Mary in part (e.g., document of the Faith and Order Commission, 1990). Recall that Bulgakov "wearied" his colleagues involved in the Faith and Order Commission with his insistent pleas for Mariology to be included on the agenda of the next meeting. These statements are important but, nevertheless, they need to be received by the people in the pews, and therefore they will not bear fruit unless these ideas are discussed and prayed over at the local churches. Thus, not only should proposals like biblical Marian Days be encouraged, but these days ought also to include Catholic and Orthodox Christians. These meetings will require a kenosis on the part of the Catholic Christian who must, as Bulgakov insists, "adapt [the] self by, as it were, minimizing itself, thereby losing some of its fullness" during these ecumenical prayers.⁵³ In these meetings it is important to

⁵¹ Sergius Bulgakov, "Ways of Church Reunion," *Sobornost* 2 (1935): 5-15.

⁵² The ecumenical movement recently bore witness to important agreed statements on Mary, including the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic statement, *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary* (1990) and the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission statement, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (2005). Although the Orthodox churches have not participated in any dialogue on Mary, she has been addressed in joint ecumenical statements published by the Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue. (Cf. *The Dublin Agreed Statement*, 1984.)

⁵³ Sergius Bulgakov, "By Jacob's Well," *The Fellowship of St. Albans and St. Sergius* 22 (Dec. 1933): 7-17, esp. 11.

stress that attentiveness to the Mother of God in the Bible leads us to a greater awareness of who Jesus Christ is. Nevertheless, only in these grassroot meetings can we help facilitate a mutual understanding of the importance of the Holy Mother of God for Christianity and a more effective evangelization of our society.

However, Catholics face unique challenges that Bulgakov did not consider, because Orthodoxy has never defined the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. These two dogmas, for a variety of reasons that include but are not limited to socio-political, theological, and ecclesiological factors, pose a serious problem for many Orthodox and Protestant Christians. Although the most recent ARCIC statement, entitled: *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (2004), raised the question if reunion can occur without the profession of these dogmas, the recent establishment of the Anglican ordinates by the Vatican, that allowed the Traditional Anglican Communion to enter into communion with the Roman Catholic Church, suggests that the profession of these dogmas is necessary for a reunion. In October 2007, for instance, the Bishops of the Traditional Anglican Communion signed the catechism that was a *de facto* acceptance of all that is included in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which includes the Marian dogmas. Moreover, when Robert Mercer, Peter Wilkinson, Carl Reid, Harry Entwistle and Louis Campese—all of whom are important bishops in the Traditional Anglican Communion—were received into the full communion of the Catholic Church, they followed exactly the same procedure as other baptized Christians. They made a profession of faith including the words, “I believe and profess all that the Holy Catholic Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God.”

However, to complicate matters, it seems that most traditional Anglicans have no qualms about these dogmas. In conversation with Rev. William Holiday, a prominent clergy member of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, I was told that traditional Anglicans had no problem accepting the teachings of the Catholic Catechism because they already believed all that was contained therein, and that one of the principal impetuses for reunion was the role of Mary. In fact,

he attributed the reunion with Rome to the intercession of the Mother of God, and stated that like-minded Anglican Christians feel closer to Roman Catholics than Anglicans who are not in communion with Rome, because Catholics venerate Mary. Although this evidence is antidotal and requires further study, it is important to note that the establishment of the Anglican ordinates occurred without discussion about the controversial Marian dogmas.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the recent publication of the *Ukrainian Catholic Catechism*, with respect to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, references the definition of Pope Pius IX's dogma of the Immaculate Conception and is further evidence that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which includes a Western interpretation of sin, is a non-negotiable item.⁵⁵ Note that before the publication of this catechism there was a dialogue within the Eastern Catholic Church on this issue. Although many Eastern theologians had no difficulty with Mary's perpetual sinlessness, to suggest that Mary had the stain of sin removed from her was for many an unwarranted Westernization.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Following Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, I have argued that the success of the new evangelization is intimately connected to the success of the ecumenical movement. Sergius Bul-

⁵⁴ No serious study has yet examined the role of Mary in the establishment of the Anglican ordinates. Also, the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter shares the theological and liturgical heritage of the TAC. It is commonly referred to as the TAC in the United States. Interestingly, it was established on the solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, January 1, 2012. The selection of this date was intentional, and reflects the intention of the Pope and Anglican-Catholic bishops that the ordinate exists under the special protection of the Mother of God.

⁵⁵ For Eastern Catholics, the dogma of the Assumption is less controversial. Since it is based on the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, it is clear that Mary died and then was assumed into heaven. Note the issue of the manner in which the dogma was defined is not an issue for most Eastern Catholics, as Eastern Catholics recognize the authority of the pope to define dogma.

⁵⁶ Cf. Walter N. Sisto, "Marian Dogmas and Reunion: What Can Eastern Catholics Teach Us about Catholic Ecumenism?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46, no. 2 (2011): 150-162.

gakov's insights on the nature and function of Mary within systematic theology offer a unique perspective on why the Protestants and Catholics remain divided and how to more effectively engage our energies and resources in the ecumenical movement. Stressing the pedagogical function of Mary, her role in the Incarnation, and that the Incarnation is a basis for anthropology, soteriology, and ecclesiology, he argues that a Church without a relationship to the Mother of God is a different form of Christianity. And thus, the most immediate need for the ecumenical movement is the Mother of God. However, it is not enough to simply recognize her role in salvation history; rather, we must love the women whom Jesus loves. In so doing, Mary leads us to understand the humanity of Christ and prevents a misinterpretation of him: if we can reach a shared understanding about the Mother of God, we will also reach a shared understanding about Christ, humankind and the Church.

I have demonstrated the relevance of Bulgakov's ecumenical proposal, based on recent studies by Evangelical theologians who have expressed similar insights about the pedagogical role of Mary and the implications regarding how the Catholic Church might proceed to aid in the re-reception of the Marian heritage in ecumenical circles.⁵⁷ Although this may seem idealistic given the lack of interest and funding in ecumenism today, we have a great advocate and example in heaven to help us, the Mother of Jesus. Yet only in approaching our Christian brothers and sisters with the faith, humility, and openness to the Holy Spirit that Mary demonstrated in Nazareth will this be possible.

⁵⁷The fact that many Evangelicals are re-examining the Mother of God, which, interestingly, was in no small way helped by popular Catholic presentations of Mary in recent films such as Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* and *The Nativity Story*, is a promising sign.