

**Christian Angelology in Pseudo-Dionysius and
Sergius Bulgakov**

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By

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To the memory of
Sergey Vladimirovich Vasilyev
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This thesis aims to explore the different theological languages employed by Pseudo-Dionysius and Sergius Bulgakov to express their respective ideas about angels. Although Bulgakov provides a number of references to Pseudo-Dionysius and draws on his ideas extensively, no single study exists dedicated to Bulgakov's appropriation of Pseudo-Dionysius.

We argue that in order to engage fully with Bulgakov's ideas there is a need to approach his texts not as *sui generis* theological or philosophical system but as an interpretation of traditional Christian theology as found in scriptural, liturgical and patristic sources. The main difference between these two approaches is that, while the former envisages only one logical level – the logic of the whole system (otherwise the system would disintegrate), the latter presupposes a parallel existence in the same text (or body of texts) of two distinct logical levels – the logic of that which is being interpreted, and the logic of the interpreter (the 'metalanguage'). We also argue that the same approach can be applied to the analysis of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*.

Thus, we distinguish three different theological languages in the writings on angels by Pseudo-Dionysius and Bulgakov. In Part 1 of the thesis we begin the reconstruction of their angelologies by analysing their respective metalanguages of hierarchy and Sophia. In Part 2, we proceed by engaging with the philosophical language of nature and hypostasis in both authors. In the final chapters of the thesis, in Part 3, we turn to the most fundamental level, which is referred to as the language of anthropology. This language is based on the immediate human experience of angels – the manner in which angels are depicted in the Bible, in visions and accounts of mystic experiences. We demonstrate that the anthropological and philosophical languages are continually reinterpreted by Pseudo-Dionysius in his metalanguage of hierarchy, and by Bulgakov in his metalanguage of Sophiology.

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The overall logic of our research is based on the assumption that any theology is an ongoing and continuous interpretation of the initial Christian message expressed in the tradition of the Church and in Holy Scripture. It may be argued that, in principle, the idea of a variety of interpretations is embodied in the New Testament itself, in its four distinct Gospel accounts. The four canonical Gospels might differ in their literary style and minor detail, but all are faithful to the initial Christian message, to be preserved in any theological interpretation considered to be Christian.

We argue that whenever new terms are introduced in a theological interpretation – or indeed when the interpretation itself is applied to a new discourse – one can speak of the emergence of a new theological language. For the purposes of this work we use the following two criteria in order to define when we are in a position to speak about a new theological language. The first criterion concerns the new theological terms employed by the authors. These terms are either not found in Scripture or in the works of their predecessors, or their content has been considerably altered by the authors. They may be either a new coinage or borrowings from another discourse, e.g. a philosophical one but, nevertheless, be used in the same original theological discourse. The second criterion of the emergent theological language is the introduction of a new discourse, in other words, when the talk on angels is appropriated in a non-theological discourse but with an ultimate theological purpose.

We maintain that one can point out at least three distinct theological languages, both in Pseudo-Dionysius and in Bulgakov. Firstly, this is the language of anthropology, which is almost identical in both authors, as each from time to time employs Biblical language in discussions on angels. Certain terminological differences arise from differences in their personal and liturgic experiences. Pseudo-Dionysius's second theological language comprises all the terms possibly not found in the Bible but appropriated in Christian theology by the time of *The Corpus Dionysiacum* (CD) from philosophy and other sources. The second theological language in Bulgakov is more complicated, as it embraces all theology before Bulgakov including Pseudo-Dionysius. Finally, the third language in Pseudo-Dionysius is his own theological language, which we call the language of hierarchy, and in Bulgakov it is his language of Sophia, or sophiology. These three languages in each author make up a hierarchy of theological languages and relate to each other as object-languages and metalanguages.

Chapter 1 focuses on the key Pseudo-Dionysian idea of hierarchy. The pseudonymous author of *The Celestial Hierarchies* placed the concept of 'hierarchy' at the heart of his angelology, considerably depreciating, if not eliminating, the role of personal relations with God, as a number of modern scholars have argued (Meyendorff (1969), Wesche (1989), Turovtsev (2008)). It is clear, however, that those authors often substitute the Pseudo-Dionysian idea of hierarchy with their own interpretations. Through a close critical examination of the CD this chapter elucidates the original meaning of the term hierarchy, as introduced by Pseudo-Dionysius. Furthermore, if hierarchy is a metalanguage in Pseudo-Dionysius, then what could be the purpose of the introduction of this metalanguage? In order to tackle this question, it is necessary to explore in detail Pseudo-Dionysius's definition of hierarchy, the historical context of its introduction, and the indications of the text of CD in this respect. First, we look at a

number of ancient and modern readings of Pseudo-Dionysius's notion of hierarchy. Then we systematise different approaches according to their methodology, which gives us the necessary foundation for establishing our own position and allows us to approach Bulgakov's reading of Pseudo-Dionysius's hierarchy.

Chapter 2 deals with the controversial idea of Sophia in Bulgakov's works. We start by looking at the context of Bulgakov's intellectual enterprise, relying mostly on his own words about the necessity of sophiology. Indeed, if Sophia is read as a metalanguage, one has to point out the purpose of the introduction of this metalanguage. This can be seen as the guiding question of Chapter 2. This chapter offers a wide spectrum of opinions of modern researchers concerning Bulgakov's methodology. These views are systematised according to their relation either to the discussion of Bulgakov's style of thought, or the assessment of his intellectual and spiritual sources, or the logical foundations of his thought.

Bearing in mind the reading of Sophia as a metalanguage, the main focus in **Chapter 3** is on the relation between angelology and sophiology. Bulgakov saw angels as mediators between the uncreated and the created realities. He referred to the Novgorodian icon of Wisdom which shows a fiery angel, arguing that this was not just an illustration, but that it had an essential symbolical meaning.

Part II, 'Angelology and ontological questions', deals predominantly with two fundamental concepts – nature and personhood, as well as other terms, which cannot be said to be 'new' in our authors.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed analysis of the term φύσις in CD. It also discusses other widely used Pseudo-Dionysian designations of angels, such as νοῦς and οὐσία, as well as the term οὐράνιος. The chapter reveals that all these terms belong to the metalanguage of the first level in Pseudo-Dionysius's works, comparing the Pseudo-

Dionysian usage of the terms with that of some of the patristic writers believed to be his predecessors. In **Chapter 5** Bulgakov's understanding of the nature of angels is examined, along with the questions of their creation and their relation to space and time. The terms 'nature' and 'hypostasis' belong to traditional philosophical and theological language that should be distinguished from the metalanguage of Sophia in Bulgakov's writings. When these terms are used to express Bulgakov's sophiological ideas, they acquire a supplementary sense, as for instance regards the notions of hypostasis and hypostaticity. The aim of Part 2 is therefore not only to answer the question, who the angels are in terms of nature and personhood, but also to analyse what these notions might mean in relation to the concept of Sophia.

In **Chapter 6**, we proceed by elucidating the characteristics of Pseudo-Dionysian angels as bearers of the image of God. We then turn to Bulgakov's understanding of personhood, both in the human and angelic worlds, and how he links it with the ideas of Sophia and hierarchy. In contrast to Pseudo-Dionysius, Bulgakov's book on angels *Jacob's Ladder* (1929) begins with a powerful meditation on love and human personhood. He, therefore, develops his angelology from a deeply personalistic point of view. Bulgakov does not exclude hierarchy from his theology but approaches it through personhood. Both Pseudo-Dionysius and Bulgakov imply some relations between angels and humans, between angelology and anthropology. What does it mean to be a 'person' of pure spirit, that is, a hypostasis, or a 'someone' realizing himself outside of chronological time? The purpose of this chapter is also to examine these relations in the two authors in light of the main personalistic categories such as love, creativity, freedom, dynamism and uniqueness, presented in Bulgakov.

Finally, there are places where our authors descend to the most foundational level of the hierarchy of theological languages and speak about the angels employing the

language of the Bible, which we also refer to as ‘the language of anthropology’. Part III ‘Angelology and anthropology’ answers the question: What are angels in relation to humanity? This can be seen in the light of Heidegger’s critique of onto-theology and of the anthropological turning-point in some of the 20th-century theology associated with Karl Rahner.

Part III comprises two chapters. **Chapter 7** focuses on the relationship between angelology and anthropology in Pseudo-Dionysius. It analyses the Dionysian approach to anthropomorphisms in the description of angels in the light of his understanding of symbols and images (εἰκόν). It then proceeds by assessing different approaches to the relationship between the angelic world and that of human beings, paying particular attention to the concept of love (ἔρως). The chapter also deals with the metaphor of light (φῶς) in the CD in the context of the idea of guardian angels. **Chapter 8** offers the analysis of the three theological languages in Bulgakov’s angelology as they are found in his book on angels *Jacob’s Ladder*. The most general anthropological definition of angels given by Bulgakov is that they are *co-human*. Though angels are related to human beings, they still differ. What are the other *anthropological* languages used by Bulgakov in speaking of angels? The language of communion, of mutual relationship – the guardians, the ministers, the messengers and, more importantly, our closest intimate friends, *those who love us*. Close analysis of the text of Bulgakov’s *Jacob’s Ladder* demonstrates that, although the places in the text where the language of anthropology is employed can be easily identified, these are not self-sufficient, but have the purpose of creating a foundation, on which the author develops his theology and sophiology. Bulgakov’s own liturgical and mystic experience appears to be another source of his angelology, which is also dealt with in this final chapter.

In **the Conclusion** I discuss the benefits of the approach to hierarchy in Pseudo-Dionysius and to Sophia in Bulgakov as their respective metalanguages.

In the first place, conceptualising hierarchy as a metalanguage enables a lucid and fertile articulation of a key original contribution of Pseudo-Dionysius to theological discourse. It is conditioned by the afore-mentioned conceptual novelty of metalanguage.

Moreover, when hierarchy is seen merely as a concept alongside other neo-Platonic philosophical and Christian theological conceptions, it becomes inevitably reduced to only one of its aspects. In this case, it has to be incorporated in the previously existing systems of thought, rather than being analysed as an independent concept in its own right. The understanding of hierarchy as a metalanguage preserves its original variety of meanings.

Thirdly, an extrapolation of the concept of hierarchy and its incorporation in the neo-Platonic paradigm is ahistorical, as it combines in a non-nuanced manner earlier philosophical systems with a later concept. By contrast, readings of hierarchy as a metalanguage presupposes a nuanced analysis of the historical context of the creation of the CD. While not precluding scrutiny of preceding philosophical terms and concepts, it sets justifiable limits to such analyses.

Finally, the reading of hierarchy as a metalanguage confirms the orthodoxy of Pseudo-Dionysius. Nuanced engagement with the different theological languages of the CD reveals it as unmistakably Christian.

The principal advantage of applying the concept of metalanguage to Sophia is that, it may be argued, the principle of metalanguage corresponds to Bulgakov's *own* understanding of Sophiology as hermeneutics that preserves the content of the doctrines of the Church. As has been seen, Bulgakov's textual interpretations may vary

depending on whether or not Sophia is read as a metalanguage. On the whole, understanding Sophia as a metalanguage salvages Bulgakov himself from charges of ‘heterodoxy’ and of the intention to impose upon fellow Christians his own, dissenting, biblical interpretations as the sole acceptable for all times. At the same time, reading Sophia as a metalanguage does not remove the need to examine Bulgakov’s interpretations and views on the subject of its Orthodoxy.

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Introduction

Angels ‘survive’ in our sceptical age. Angelology attracts researchers from different disciplines, including the history of art, philosophy, anthropology, and theology. The challenges of our time, however, mostly concern problems of anthropology. Theologians struggle to cope with challenges to theological thought and to keep up with advances in biological and physical sciences. Is it relevant to write about angels nowadays?

Before we justify the topic of angelology as such, we would like to emphasise that the focus of this research is on the works of two specific Christian theologians – (Pseudo)-Dionysius the Areopagite (V-VI cent.) and Father Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944).¹ Both authors wrote on angels in a systematic way. Although it is difficult to say whether Bulgakov appropriated the ideas of Dionysius directly or indirectly, our primary concern is not with the question of possible influences. First of all, there are obvious differences between the two authors. They lived in different and distant epochs: one died about 1300 years before the other was born. More importantly, the only source of knowledge about Dionysius is his own text – we do not know for sure who he was and what he did in his life, apart from writing theological treatises under the name of the first bishop of Athens. We do not know the reasons behind his decision not just to take on the pseudonym, but also to invent a whole reality around the treatises – with letters, correspondents, references to other works, and so on. In contrast, we know a good deal about Bulgakov, his inner spiritual development as well as the actual circumstances of his life. Despite these striking differences, some remarkable parallels between the two theologians can still be drawn. First of all, they were both creative theologians, knowledgeable in philosophy and employing its concepts to express the truths of Christianity. Neither was afraid of using new approaches and introducing new terms in their work. And that is where our primary research

¹ I will follow P. Rorem in omitting the negative prefix Pseudo- in citing the name of the author of *The Corpus Dionysiacum*, at the same time recognising that he was not the actual Dionysius the Areopagite, the convert of St Paul. Cf. Rorem (1993) *Pseudo-Dionysius: a commentary*, 3.

interest lies. We explore various theological languages, different ways of speaking about angels as was accomplished by our authors.

There is no doubt that angelology is not as central to Christian theology as the doctrine of the Trinity or Christology. However, angelology can still be said to be an integral part of Christian doctrine, as well as of the other monotheistic religions - as the prominent historian of Islam, Henry Corbin, has demonstrated in his 'Le paradoxe du monothéisme'.² The 'necessity of angelology' presents itself to the Christian mind, first of all, on account of frequent New Testament references to angels.³ Jesus Himself spoke about angels in His parable of the sower, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, His conversation with the Sadducees concerning the Resurrection and on other occasions.⁴ Probably even more significant than the sheer frequency of the discussions of angels in the Gospels are the representations of angels in the Bible, not merely as allegories and attributes of the divine power but as immediate and personal participants in a number of key events within the history of salvation, from the Annunciation to the Resurrection and the Ascension.

Yet one might respond that angels still form something like the background or the "context" of Salvation history and cannot be said to be central to proper theological concerns. What then can be said to constitute the importance of angelology as a subject of theological study in its own right?

To our mind, angelology is that area where one can find boundless perspectives for Christian thought. In thinking about Christian anthropology in the light of Trinitarian theology, the notion of human personhood comes to prominence.⁵ Similarly, angelology appears in a completely new light in the context of the Christian doctrine of God, even compared with the

² Corbin (1981) 'Necessite de l'angelologie', 99-210.

³ Cf. A. Losev speaks about 'the dialectical necessity of angelology' in Losev (2005) 'Pervozdannaya suschnost', 495-500.

⁴ Mt 22:30; 25:31; 26:53; Lk 12:8; 15:10 etc.

⁵ Zachhuber (2014) 'Individuality and the Theological Debate about "Hypostasis"'; Zizioulas (1985) *Being and Communion*, 27-49; Hierotheos, Metr. (1999) *The person in the Orthodox Tradition*, 68; Lossky (1991) *Mystical theology*.

angelology of the Old Testament. On the other hand, angelology inevitably enriches and brings into relief Christian anthropology – the teaching on humans.⁶ Thus angelology is central for asceticism insofar as, in striving to become fully human, the ascetic lives a life that is said to be ‘akin to that of the angels’.⁷

We cannot say much about the author of *The Celestial Hierarchy* (CH), apart from what has been said in the text of *The Corpus Dionysiacum* (CD). After it was demonstrated that the text of the Syriac Liturgy was referred to in the CD, most modern scholars consider him to be a sixth-century Syrian monk.⁸

In fact, the first known reference to the CD was made by Severan Monophysites in AD 533, where one of the letters was quoted in their polemic against the Pro-Chalcedonians. The Syriac translation of the CD appeared surprisingly soon after or even before this event. The first known translator of Dionysius into Syriac died in 536 AD.⁹ The Corpus was later translated from Greek into Armenian in Constantinople in the second decade of the 8th century.¹⁰ The Arabic translation was also made in the 8th century. The CD was translated into Coptic and Latin in the 9th century, into Georgian at the end of the 11th, and into Slavonic in the 14th century.¹¹ Numerous translations into other languages have appeared in more recent times. As is well known, the CD has been vastly influential in both Eastern and Western Christian theologies.

Numerous scholars have dedicated their efforts toward a general analysis of Dionysius’ methodology and the identification of his sources, but far fewer works have been published concerning the problems of Dionysius’ angelology.¹² P. Rorem (1993) notes that ‘in terms of

⁶ On connections between the anthropology and the angelology, see: Gilson (1957) *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 160; Gavin (2009) *Angelology and anthropology in Maximus the Confessor*; Malkov (1996) ‘Heaven and Earth’; Turovtsev (2015) *Vvedenie*, 90-105.

⁷ The evidence of the importance of this concept for monastics is found in the monastic foundation documents. See Constable (2000) ‘Preface’ in *Byzantine monastic foundation documents*, xiv; Vasiliy, Archb (1996) ‘Angels and demons in spiritual life’; Flew (1934) *The idea of perfection in Christian theology*. See Soloviev’s critical remarks concerning the term ‘angelic order’: Pilch (2018) *Deification in the Work of Vladimir Solovi’ev*, 42.

⁸ Nelstrop, Magill, Onishi (2009) *Christian mysticism*, 107; Pousset (2001) *De l’allure de Dieu*, 4; Arthur (2008) *Pseudo-Dionysius as polemicist*; Golitzin, Bucur (2013) *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita*.

⁹ Sherwood (1952) ‘Sergius of Reshaina and the Syriac Versions of the Pseudo-Denis’, 174.

¹⁰ Thomson (1987) ‘Introduction’, in *The Armenian version*, VII.

¹¹ Prokhorov (2003) ‘Foreword’, 5.

¹² Golitzin (1994) *Et introibo ad altare Dei: the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita*; Louth (1989) *Denys the Areopagite*; Rorem (1993) *Pseudo-Dionysius: a commentary*.

studies available in English, CH has been the least accessible part of the Dionysian corpus.’ Yet a number of serious monographs touching upon and examining the angelology of Dionysius have been published in recent years.¹³

One has to admit that it is almost impossible to write on Dionysius without engaging in the now classic debate concerning to what extent his Neo-Platonism is asserted in the CD at the expense of his Christianity.¹⁴ We will make an attempt to situate this debate within the framework of my methodological approach. The same sort of concern is seen in the understanding of Bulgakov’s sophiology where the question of the significance of his debt to German Idealism and Romanticism is at the forefront.

Bulgakov differs from the majority of modern Christian theologians in that he wrote a separate book entirely dedicated to angels, a book full of deep thought and meaningful insights. This book, however, was not meant to be absolutely independent – it belongs to his so-called ‘small trilogy’ (*The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God* (1927); *The friend of the Bridegroom: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner* (1928); *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels* (1929)) and plays an important role in Bulgakov’s construction of sophiology. Sophiology, or the teaching on Sophia, is a characteristic feature of Russian religious thought in the late 19th and first part of the 20th century and was essential for such thinkers as Soloviev, Florenskii and Bulgakov. Bulgakov presents not only the latest but also the most developed example of sophiology.

On the other hand, Bulgakov’s significance is not limited to the sophiological trend of Orthodox theology. His influence on his opponents such as Lossky and Florovsky is now becoming widely recognised.

¹³ Arthur (2008) *Pseudo-Dionysius as polemicist*; Wear (2007) *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist tradition*, (especially chapter 4 ‘On Hierarchy’); Gavin (2009) *Angelology and anthropology in Maximus the Confessor*, 52-64.

¹⁴ Perl (1994) ‘Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysius the Areopagite’; Vanneste (1959) *Le mystère de Dieu : essai sur la structure rationnelle de la doctrine mystique du Pseudo-Denys l’Aréopagite*.

The overall logic of our research is based on the assumption that any theology is an ongoing and continuous interpretation of the initial Christian message expressed in the tradition of the Church and in Holy Scripture. It is arguable that, in principle, the idea of a variety of interpretations is embodied in the New Testament itself, in its four distinct accounts of the four Evangelists. The four canonical Gospels might differ in their literary style and some minor details, but all are faithful to the initial Christian message, which is to be preserved in any theological interpretation considered to be Christian.

One can argue that, when new terms are introduced in a theological interpretation – or indeed when the interpretation itself is introduced within a new discourse – one can speak about the emergence of a new theological language. The obvious example of such a new language can be said the *ousia-hypostasis* terminology of ‘the Cappadocian Fathers’. What exactly can be defined as a theological language is an open question.¹⁵ However, for the purposes of this work I will use the above-mentioned two criteria in order to define when we are in a position to speak about a new theological language.

Thus, the first criterion concerns the new theological terms employed by the authors. These terms are either not found in the Scripture or in the works of their predecessors, or their content has been considerably changed by the authors. As such, they could be a new coinage, or they could be borrowed from another discourse, e.g. a philosophical one but, nevertheless, be used in the same original theological discourse.

The second criterion of the emergent theological language is the introduction of a new discourse, in other words when the talk on angels is appropriated in a non-theological discourse but with an ultimate theological purpose.¹⁶

¹⁵See how the problem of theological language has been approached from different perspectives: Rosmini (2004) *Theological language*; Bray (1989) *A Christian theological language*; Whillier (1990) *Two theological languages by George Grant*; Hordern (1964) *Speaking of God: the nature and purpose of theological language*; Houston (1971) *Some logical issues, chiefly concerning reference, raised by theological language*, 94 (theological language as language about God); Hovorun (2013) ‘Influence of Neoplatonism on Formation of Theological Language’.

¹⁶ See for example DN, 5, 7-8; also, Florenskii’s mathematical appendix in *The Pillar* (1997), and Bulgakov’s *The Tragedy of Philosophy* (1993) where, in his own words, philosophy is used for theological purposes.

In relation to our authors, the question arises: How many theological languages can be identified in their works? I argue that we can point out at least three distinct theological languages, both in Dionysius and in Bulgakov. Firstly, there is the language of anthropology, which is almost the same in both, as each from time to time employs Biblical language in discussions on angels. Some terminological differences come from differences in their personal and liturgic experiences. The second theological language in Dionysius comprises all the terms, which are possibly not found in the Bible, but which were appropriated in Christian theology by the time of the CD from philosophy and other sources. The second theological language in Bulgakov is more complicated, as it embraces all theology before Bulgakov including Dionysius. Finally, the third language in Dionysius is his own theological language, which I call the language of hierarchy, and in Bulgakov it is his language of Sophia, or sophiology.

These three languages in each author make up a hierarchy of theological languages and relate to each other as object-languages and metalanguages.

By way of example, a person learned in several foreign languages does not necessarily mean that she will always be speaking in the one most recently acquired. He or she may wish to employ that or another language, depending on the circumstances. For instance, if someone knows how to use a differential calculus to solve certain mathematical tasks, it does not mean that they would not employ arithmetic for other purposes. In a similar way, I argue, our authors employed different theological languages depending on their needs.

Each of these three languages has its own logic. The Biblical language is the language of immediate experience. Its terms appeal to our feelings. It is assumed that we understand this language due to its principal compatibility with our own experience. The second theological language, or the metalanguage of the first level, is the language of the established philosophical and theological terms. These terms appeal to our philosophical knowledge, to our acquaintance with the Fathers of the Church and the previous generations of theologians. It is assumed that we understand this language when we agree on the precise meaning of some established terms.

Finally, the metalanguage of the second level is a new and idiosyncratic language, introduced by the author. It relies on emerging terms, whose meaning is not universally accepted. Initially, this new language is meaningful only to the author, but may later be appropriated by the following generations and its terms contribute to the set of the established ones.

To be able to define what languages are used in a text, one must analyse the terms of that text in respect to the criterion of newness. This thesis analyses most of the terms which were used by Dionysius and Bulgakov, either to designate angels as individual beings or to describe them collectively and suggests a classification which is reflected in its structure.

Those terms which can with confidence be defined as ‘new’, belong to the metalanguage of the second level and are dealt with in Part 1 of the thesis, which comprises the first three chapters. We begin the reconstruction of Dionysius’s and Bulgakov’s angelologies by analysing their respective metalanguages of hierarchy and Sophia. In Part 2, we proceed by looking at the philosophical language of nature and hypostasis in both authors. In the final chapters of the thesis, in Part 3, we turn to the most fundamental level, which we call the language of anthropology. It is based on the immediate human experience of angels - how angels are described in the Bible, in visions and mystic encounters. This language is especially characterised by anthropomorphisms.

Chapter 1 focuses on the key Dionysian idea of hierarchy. The pseudonymous author of *The Celestial Hierarchies* placed the concept of ‘hierarchy’ at the heart of his angelology, considerably depreciating if not eliminating the role of personal relations with God, as a number of modern scholars have argued.¹⁷ It is clear, however, that those authors often substitute the Dionysian idea of hierarchy with their own interpretations. Through close examination of *The Corpus Dionysiacum* this chapter seeks to elucidate the original meaning of the term hierarchy, as it was introduced by Dionysius. Furthermore, if hierarchy is a metalanguage in Dionysius,

¹⁷ Meyendorff (1969) *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought*, 80-83; Wesche (1989) ‘Christological Doctrine and Liturgical Interpretation in Pseudo-Dionysius’, 53-73; Turovtsev (2008) ‘The Angelology of Dionysius the Areopogite from the dogmatic point of view’.

then what could be the purpose of the introduction of this metalanguage? In order to tackle this question, it is necessary to explore in detail Dionysius's definition of hierarchy, the historical context of its introduction, and the indications of the text of CD in this respect. First, we look at a number of ancient and modern readings of Dionysius' notion of hierarchy. Then we systematise different approaches according to their methodology, which gives us the necessary foundation for establishing our own position and allows us to approach Bulgakov's reading of Dionysius's hierarchy.

Chapter 2 deals with the controversial idea of Sophia in Bulgakov's works. We start by looking at the context of Bulgakov's intellectual enterprise, relying mostly on his own words about the necessity of sophiology. Indeed, if Sophia is read as a metalanguage, one has to point out the purpose of the introduction of this metalanguage. This can be seen as the guiding question of Chapter 2. This chapter offers the wide spectrum of opinions of modern researchers concerning Bulgakov's methodology. These opinions are systematised according to their relation either to the discussion of Bulgakov's style of thought, or to the assessment of his intellectual and spiritual sources, or to the logical foundations of his thought.

Bearing in mind the reading of Sophia as a metalanguage, the main focus in **Chapter 3** is on the relation between angelology and sophiology. Bulgakov saw angels as mediators between the uncreated and the created realities. He referred to the Novgorodian icon of Wisdom which shows a fiery angel, arguing that this is not just an illustration, but has an essential symbolical meaning.

Part II, 'Angelology and ontological questions', deals predominantly with two fundamental concepts – nature and personhood, as well as with other terms which cannot be said to be 'new' in our authors.

Chapter 4 suggests the detailed analysis of the term φύσις in CD. It also discusses the other widely used Dionysian designations of angels such as νοῦς and οὐσία, as well as the term οὐράνιος. The chapter reveals that all these terms belong to the metalanguage of the first level in

Dionysius' works, comparing the Dionysian usage of the terms with that of some of the Fathers who are believed to be his predecessors. In **Chapter 5** Bulgakov's understanding of the nature of angels is examined, along with the questions of their creation and their relation to space and time. The terms 'nature' and 'hypostasis' belong to a traditional philosophical and theological language which should be distinguished from the metalanguage of Sophia in Bulgakov's writings. When these terms are used to express Bulgakov's sophiological ideas, they acquire a supplementary meaning, as for example in the notions of hypostasis and hypostaticity. The aim of Part 2 is therefore not only to answer the question of who the angels are in terms of nature and personhood, but also to analyse what these notions might mean in relation to the concept of Sophia.

In **Chapter 6**, we proceed by elucidating the characteristics of angels as bearers of the image of God in Dionysius. Then we turn to Bulgakov's understanding of personhood, both in the human and angelic worlds, and how he links it with the ideas of Sophia and hierarchy. In contrast to Dionysius, Bulgakov begins his book on angels *Jacob's Ladder* (1929) with a powerful meditation on love and human personhood. He, therefore, develops his angelology from a deeply personalistic point of view. Bulgakov does not exclude hierarchy from his theology but approaches it through personhood. Both Dionysius and Bulgakov imply some relations between angels and humans, between angelology and anthropology. What does it mean to be a 'person' of pure spirit, that is, a hypostasis, or a 'someone', who realizes himself outside of chronological time? The purpose of this chapter is also to examine these relations in the two authors in light of the main personalistic categories as love, creativity, freedom, dynamism, and uniqueness, which are presented in Bulgakov.

Finally, there are places where our authors descend to the most foundational level of the hierarchy of theological languages and speak about the angels employing the language of the Bible, which I also call 'the language of anthropology'. Part III 'Angelology and anthropology' answers the question: What are angels in relation to humanity? This can be seen in the light of

Heidegger's critique of onto-theology and of the anthropological turning-point in 20th century theology associated with Karl Rahner.

Part III comprises two chapters. **Chapter 7** focuses on the relationship between angelology and anthropology in Dionysius. It analyses the Dionysian approach to anthropomorphisms in the description of angels in the light of his understanding of symbols and images (εἰκόν). It then proceeds by assessing different approaches to the relationship between the angelic world and that of human beings, paying particular attention to the concept of love (ἔρωζ). The chapter also deals with the metaphor of light (φῶς) in the CD in the context of the idea of guardian angels.

Chapter 8 offers the analysis of the three theological languages in Bulgakov's angelology as they are found in his book on angels *Jacob's Ladder*. The most general anthropological definition of angels given by Bulgakov is that they are *co-human*. Though angels are related to human beings, they still differ. What are the other *anthropological* languages used by Bulgakov in speaking of angels? The language of communion, of mutual relationship – the guardians, the ministers, the messengers and, more importantly, our closest intimate friends, *those who love us*. Close analysis of the text of Bulgakov's *Jacob's Ladder* demonstrates that, although the places in the text where the language of anthropology is employed can be easily identified, these are not self-sufficient, but have the purpose of creating a foundation, on which the author develops his theology and sophiology. Bulgakov's own liturgical and mystic experience appears to be another source of his angelology, which is also dealt with in this final chapter.

Concluding this brief introduction, we would like to reiterate that the most important issue for this thesis is to reveal new theological senses rather than to examine possible influences and historical contexts. The historical method will however be used where this helps us to better understand the texts. *The Celestial Hierarchy* appears to be the first system of Christian angelology, whereas Bulgakov's work *Jacob's Ladder* is one of the more recent theological works on angels.

There is an urgent need for bringing together Dionysius' and Bulgakov's insights on angels for the following reasons.

First of all, in their respective theological systems both authors sought to correlate the uncreated reality of God with the created universe. The Bulgakovian notion of *Sophia* and the Dionysian idea of *hierarchy* are the respective key concepts that can only be properly grasped within the context of angelology. Angels, as the intermediary figures *par excellence*, play a fundamental role in both authors. The methodology of this thesis seeks to give a new perspective to studying the angelology of Dionysius, using the conceptual framework of modern theological and philosophical discourse.

Secondly, both authors were deemed problematic if not puzzling figures by their respective contemporaries and have stimulated extensive scholarly debate in recent years.¹⁸ Putting them together will elucidate both the commonalities and the particularities of their theologies, which will enable new exciting readings of both. Moreover, the history of modern Orthodox theology is now being re-evaluated, and one of the significant trends of this re-evaluation is the re-appraisal of the work of Bulgakov in respect to his use and interpretation of Patristic thought.¹⁹ This thesis is a contribution to this ongoing reassessment.

¹⁸ Dionysius: Golitzin, Bucur (2013) *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita*; Ivanović (2011) *Dionysius the Areopagite between orthodoxy and heresy*; Perl (2008) *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*. For further publications on Dionysius see above in the footnotes. Bulgakov: Naumov (1984) *Bibliographie des oeuvres de Serge Bulgakov*; Williams (1999) *Sergii Bulgakov. Towards a Russian Political Theology*; Swierkosz (1980) *L'Église visible selon Serge Bulgakov. Structure hiérarchique et sacramentelle*; Berd (2003) 'Bogoslovie o.Sergii Bulgakova: eres' ili eresologii'; Saprnov (2006) *Russkaya sophiologia i sophiynost' (Russian Sophiology and Sophianity)*; Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology: Modern Russian Religious Consciousness and Sergei Bulgakov's Critical Appropriation of German Idealism*; Gallaher (2016) *Freedom and necessity in modern Trinitarian theology*; Zaviysky (2011) *Shaping modern Russian Orthodox Trinitarian theology: a critical study of Sergii Bulgakov with reference to Vladimir Lossky and Georgii Florovsky*.

¹⁹ Gavriilyuk (2013) *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*; Gallaher (2013) 'The "Sophiological" Origins of Vladimir Lossky's Apophaticism', 278-298; Nichols (2017) *Mystical Theologian*, 251-254.

Part I. Hierarchy and Sophia - metalanguages in Dionysius and Bulgakov

The term ‘metalanguage’ can be found in publications on semiology, in linguistics, and in mathematical logic.²⁰ For the purposes of this work, however, we will use the term ‘metalanguage’, as it is expounded above in the general Introduction. It is based on the idea that in theological works in certain authors it is possible to point out different theological languages, which make up a system, or hierarchy of theological languages in that particular author. The missionary imperative of Christianity is expressed in the words of the Great Commission: ‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28: 18-20). Christian preaching theoretically can be entirely Biblical, when all the terms are borrowed from Scripture, and no new terms or concepts are employed in preaching the Gospel. However, the effect of such a sermon seems to be very limited. The fulfilment of the missionary commandment potentially involves the process of interpretation of the initial Christian message, using new terms and concepts, employing new theological languages to express the initial Christian message for wider and more diverse audiences. We see it already in St Paul, in his sermon at the Areopagus (Acts 17: 22-31), when he refers to the pagan authors rather than to the Hebrew Prophets. It is also true that the process of interpretation always involves the danger of misinterpretation and misrepresentation, the danger of the distortion or even the loss of the original content. The term ‘theological metalanguage’ supposes that the original Christian content is preserved, although the new terms and concepts are employed to express it. In this way, a heretical teaching, which substantially distorts the original Christian message, cannot be called a metalanguage. We apply the term ‘connotation’ to a case when the Christian terms are used to express non-Christian ideas.

²⁰ Cf. Barthes (1967) *Elements of Semiology*, 90; Hjelmslev (1961) *Prolegomena to a theory of language*, 119; the term ‘metalanguage’ was also employed in logic and mathematics, see: Tarski (1956) ‘The concept of truth in formalized languages’, 152–278.

Dionysius points out two different languages, used in speaking about the invisible.²¹ Namely, the sensual and symbolic language of the Bible, and the language of concepts - which one might call in his case the language of Neo-Platonic philosophy.²² Apparently, they are related to each other as the old and the new system in the definition of a metalanguage in the discussion above. Our understanding of whether Dionysius is a Christian or a Neoplatonist will depend on whether Neo-Platonic philosophy is seen as a connotation or as a metalanguage in relation to the Bible. In other words, whether the Bible becomes a signifier and the content remains Neo-Platonic, or it becomes the signified, which means that Neo-Platonic terms are used to express Christian content. I argue that the actual picture is even more complicated than this, because Dionysius introduces his own metalanguage of hierarchy. The concept of hierarchy has to be approached not as belonging to the language of Neo-Platonic philosophy, but as a distinct metalanguage, related to both the language of philosophy and the Bible. The reading of Dionysius' hierarchy as a metalanguage allows us to embrace all its possible meanings without falling into the one-sided approach of seeing it simply either as a Neoplatonic concept or as a Christian one; this is demonstrated in Chapter 1 of the thesis.

I also argue that, in order to properly understand Bulgakov's texts, one should distinguish in his writings between those terms which belong to the languages of theology and philosophy and the terms of his own metalanguage of sophiology. This metalanguage was created by Bulgakov without any desire to replace the language of traditional theology. The introduction of the metalanguage in theological narrative means for Bulgakov an opportunity to bring in new terms and concepts and to solve his own tasks, where the terms and concepts of traditional theology are instrumental in solving the problems of his time: 'a consideration of anthropology in its connection with cosmology, which is a special characteristic of sophiology'.²³

²¹ EH, 4, 5-6; PG 3, 480C-D.

²² Cf. Hovorun (2013) 'Influence of Neoplatonism on Formation of Theological Language', 13-18.

²³ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God*, 5.

Bulgakov's answer to the existential questions of modernity is the creation of a new Christian anthropology. Which is the reason why his texts should be read as prescriptive and performative. Indeed, his language and style in some places speaks for him:

'We are confronted in this process by a bad "dialectic" of unresolved contradictions, which burdens and exhausts our time.

But such a "dialectic" in no sense represents the last word of wisdom. We need a true Christian asceticism in relation to the world, which consists in a struggle with the world out of love for the world. We must discover how we can overcome the secularizing forces of the Reformation and the Renaissance, not in a negative way or "dialectically", which is in any case merely theoretical and powerless, but in a positive way – through love for the world.'²⁴

Chapter 2 deals with different approaches to Bulgakov's sophiology and attempts to demonstrate why it is possible and even necessary to speak about sophiology as a metalanguage.

Chapter 3 focuses on the role of angelology in Bulgakov's sophiology.

Neither 'hierarchy' in Dionysius nor 'Sophia' in Bulgakov belong to the logic of the object-language but create, as it were, a new logic. In the case of Dionysius, this means the systematic application of the concept of hierarchy to different areas: theology of creation, ecclesiology, anthropology etc. It is important to stress that a metalanguage is not merely an expansion of the old system - it is a new one, with a new kind of inner logic. In the following chapter we will endeavour to pinpoint the logic of hierarchy in Dionysius.

²⁴ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God*, 20.

Chapter 1. The idea of hierarchy in Dionysius and its perception in medieval and modern thought

The concept of hierarchy (Ἱεραρχία) is a pivotal idea not only for *CH* but for the rest of *CD* as well.²⁵ A modern reader can however be easily misled by the contemporary meaning of the word ‘hierarchy’ and its major associations. For example, in the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (OUP, 2010) one can find the following entry:

‘Hierarchy, noun (pl. hierarchies) - a system in which members of an organization or society are ranked according to relative status or authority: *the initiative was with those lower down in the hierarchy* [mass noun]: *the trend is to get away from hierarchy and control*.

□ (the hierarchy) the clergy of the Catholic Church or of an episcopal Church: *The Roman Catholic hierarchy in Romania*.

□ (the hierarchy) the upper echelons of a hierarchical system: *the magazine was read quite widely even by some of the hierarchy*.

□ an arrangement or classification of things according to relative importance or inclusiveness: *a taxonomic hierarchy of phyla, classes, orders, families, genera, and species*.

□ (*Theology*) the traditional system of orders of angels and other heavenly beings: *the heavenly hierarchy*.²⁶

The key terms in the above entry are ‘status’ and ‘authority’. They are what immediately comes to mind when we come across the word ‘hierarchy’. This is true not only for English. For instance, in the most authoritative dictionary of Russian, ‘hierarchy’ is explained as ‘the order of subordination’.²⁷

What is not mentioned in these dictionary entries is that the word Ἱεραρχία was coined by Dionysius, and its initial meaning had little to do with the ideas of authority or subordination.²⁸ Quite the contrary, it was linked with the Christian understanding of active love and purifying knowledge, although from the twelfth century onwards, as Luscombe notes, in the Latin West it was increasingly applied to different ecclesiastical and secular structures.²⁹ In the Greek East the work *On Hierarchy*, by an eleventh-century monk Nicetas Stethatos, considerably promoted the

²⁵ Louth (1989) *Denys the Areopagite*, 38.

²⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, [OUP, 2010] (Italics in the dictionary)

²⁷ *Tolkovy slovar' russkogo iazyka*, ed. S. Ozhegov (1992).

²⁸ Louth (1989) *Denys the Areopagite*, 38.

²⁹ Luscombe (1997) *Medieval thought*, 25.

modern understanding of hierarchy as ‘a system of subordinate authority that ministers to those outside the hierarchy’.³⁰ Perhaps the only link which unites both the Dionysian and modern understanding of hierarchy is their ‘systematic’ nature characterised by such words as ‘system’ and ‘order’. In the following subchapter we will try to rediscover the original meaning of the term by looking at its use in CD contrasting it with some later interpretations.

1.1. The etymology of the word ‘hierarchy’ and its use by Dionysius and his medieval readers

1.1.1. ‘Hierarchy’ as Dionysius’ coinage and new theological language

One cannot find the word *ἱεραρχία* in a classical Greek-English lexicon because it was not used by ancient authors. This word, as well as many of its derivatives, is found in *CD* for the first time. Dionysius was very fond of coining new words and expressions, which makes the understanding of his works particularly difficult. This practice of Dionysius is evidence that he was trying to say something different to that which could have been said without those neologisms. It is arguable that, with the help of his neologisms, Dionysius introduces new concepts rather than disguises the old ones.

The word *ἱεράρχης* can be found in texts before Dionysius, signifying a ‘high-priest or a president of sacred rites’. If *ἱεραρχία* had been formed as an abstract form of *ἱεράρχης*, it would have meant ‘high-priesthood’ or something similar. Apparently, Dionysius gave to this word a much broader sense than can be seen in a mere abstraction from ‘high-priest’.

ἱεραρχία is a compound abstract noun made up of the two words: *ἱερός* and *ἀρχή*.

The first one is an adjective and can mean either ‘holy’, ‘consecrated’, ‘filled with divine power’, or ‘supernatural’. The word *ἀρχή* also has several meanings: ‘beginning, origin’, ‘first principle’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘authorities’ and some others mainly from the field of politics.

³⁰ Louth (2008) ‘The reception of Dionysius in the Byzantine World: Maximus to Palamas’, 594.

We shall approach the idea of hierarchy in Dionysius first by looking at his own definition and then by analysing how he uses the word *ἱεραρχία* and its derivatives in his texts.³¹

The idea of hierarchy in general is mentioned in the Corpus several times. Dionysius pays particular attention to the term *ἱεραρχία*, dedicating an entire chapter to its notion in *CH*. The most important definition is expressed in the following words:

Ἔστι μὲν ἱεραρχία κατ' ἐμὲ τάξις ἱερὰ καὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἐνέργεια πρὸς τὸ θεοειδὲς ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοιουμένη καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἐνδιδόμενας αὐτῇ θεόθεν ἐλλάμψεις ἀναλόγως ἐπὶ τὸ θεομίμητον ἀναγομένη· τὸ δὲ θεοπρεπὲς κάλλος ὡς ἀπλοῦν ὡς ἀγαθὸν ὡς τελεταρχικὸν ἀμιγῆ μὲν ἔστι καθόλου πάσης ἀνομοιότητος, μεταδοτικὸν δὲ κατ' ἀξίαν ἐκάστῳ τοῦ οἰκείου φωτὸς καὶ τελειωτικὸν ἐν τελειῇ θειοτάτη κατὰ τὴν πρὸς ἑαυτὸ τῶν τελουμένων ἐναρμονίως ἀπαράλλακτον μόρφωσιν.³²

The only full translation of the Corpus into English in the 20th century was made by C. Luibheid and P. Rorem. This edition puts Dionysius' notion of hierarchy as follows:

‘In my opinion a hierarchy is a sacred order (*τάξις*), a state of understanding (*ἐπιστήμη*) and an activity (*ἐνέργεια*) approximating as closely as possible to the divine. And it is uplifted to the imitation of God in proportion (*ἀναλόγως*) to the enlightments divinely given to it. The beauty of God—so simple, so good, so much the source of perfection—is completely uncontaminated by dissimilarity. It reaches out to grant every being, according to merit, a share of light and then through a divine sacrament, in harmony and in peace, it bestows on each of those being perfected its own form.’³³

One can see that the most significant part of this definition is given in the first sentence and the rest of the quote is just the explanation and clarification of what has been said before. Three nouns catch one's eye in the first sentence, namely *τάξις*, *ἐπιστήμη* and *ἐνέργεια*. All of them are together said to be a hierarchy. Apparently, hierarchy is not any of them separately from the others, but necessarily those three in interconnection. Judging from the context, one can argue that this definition does not pretend to be an objective or scientific judgement.³⁴ On the contrary, it concerns a subject, reaching out ‘to grant every being, according to merit, a share of light’. Indeed, when we speak of a state of understanding or knowledge, as *ἐπιστήμη* was translated by

³¹ For quotations in English I will use the most recent English translation of the Corpus by Luibheid: *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (1987). When I am not satisfied with Luibheid's translation I will provide my own, consulting where possible with the following ones: *The works of Dionysius the Areopagite*. Translated by Parker (1897); *The divine names and mystical theology*. Translated by Jones (1980); Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine names and the Mystical theology*. Translated by Rolt (1940); *The ecclesiastical hierarchy. Pseudo-Dionysius, the Areopagite*. Translated by Campbell (c1981).

³² CH, 3, 1; PG 3, 164D

³³ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 153; Cf. Louth's translation below.

³⁴ This is supported by the remark of the scholiast: ‘Note that he speaks using some symbols and images, and not scientifically (φυσιολογικῶς)’ (Scholion CH, 1, 2, 6, in *Dionysius the Areopagite. Works*, 38).

A.Louth, we cannot but speak about someone's knowledge or someone's understanding.³⁵ The presence of the subject is implied. The same can be said of ἐνέργεια or activity. An activity must be someone's activity. Moreover, an activity can be sensible only if it is performed in accordance with knowledge. There is a sort of primacy of knowledge over activity because activity is conditioned by knowledge. And here we come up with the notion of order (τάξις) which can also be understood in a subjective way as a proper relation between someone's knowledge and activity. However, if τάξις had meant only the correlation between ἐπιστήμη and ἐνέργεια, it would have been placed after but not before them. Its position before knowledge (or understanding) may point to the source or object of knowledge. It is something which is to be known or understood.

All three terms are well established in Greek philosophy and patristics.

Roques notes that the term τάξις is less marked by philosophical meanings than the other terms which express the idea of order.³⁶ Nevertheless, it is found in Plato's *Timaeus* (30a) as well as in Aristotle's *Physics* (252a 4), where it is employed to express the orderliness of nature. In the New Testament St Paul uses τάξις in *1 Corinthians* (14: 40), applying it to the liturgical life of Christians, and in *Colossians* (2:5) with a similar meaning of 'good order' in the life of a Christian community. This meaning is clearly articulated and expanded in the letter of St Ignatius to the Ephesians:

Αὐτὸς μὲν οὖν Ὀνήσιμος ὑπερ εἰπαινεῖ ὑμῶν τὴν ἐν θεῷ εὐταξίαν, ὅτι πάντες κατὰ ἀλήθειαν ζῆτε καὶ ὅτι ἐν ὑμῖν οὐδε μία αἵρεσις κατοικεῖ· ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἀκούετε τιν οὐκ ἐπὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ λαλοῦντος ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.³⁷

'Now indeed Onesimus himself praises highly your godly orderliness – that you all live according to the truth, and that no faction dwells among you; but you do not even listen to anyone except him who speaks truly concerning Jesus Christ'.³⁸

³⁵ Hierarchy is, as I understand it, a sacred order [τάξις], knowledge [ἐπιστήμη] and activity [ἐνέργεια], which is being assimilated to likeness with God as much as possible and, in response to the illuminations that are given it from God, is raised to the imitation of Him in its own measure [ἀναλόγως] (Louth (1989) *Denys the Areopagite*, 38).

³⁶ Roques (1954) *L'Univers Dionysien*, 36.

³⁷ Ignatius, *Aux Ephésiens*, VI,2.

³⁸ Schoedel, Köster (1985) *Ignatius of Antioch: a commentary*, Ephesians, 6.2.

Stang argues for a link between the ideas of Ignatius and Dionysius, particularly in respect to the definition of hierarchy.³⁹ Certain influence can be said to be highly likely, considering that the name of Ignatius and a reference to one of his epistles is found in CD.⁴⁰ Roques further points out that the Fathers of the Church Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great employ the term τάξις with the two above-mentioned meanings of the order in nature and the order in Church.⁴¹

In his *On the Eternity of the World* Proclus analyses the term τάξις in relation to the matter (ἡ ὕλη) and the cosmos (κόσμος). He holds τάξις as something inherent to the cosmos and which is both ungenerated and incorruptible.⁴² The order (τάξις) comes down from the Demiurge.⁴³ The term ‘order’ (τάξις) can have different meanings, depending on whether it is applied to space and time relationships or used in logics.⁴⁴ Golitzin maintains that Dionysius’ τάξις should not be understood as a purely rational chain of descending causes and effects but rather as the analogous definition of Divine Providence.⁴⁵

A Greek-English Lexicon (Liddell and Scott) gives two main meanings for the term ἐπιστήμη: 1) acquaintance with a matter, understanding, skill, experience, and 2) scientific knowledge, science. *The Greek Philosophical Vocabulary* specifies that ἐπιστήμη ‘is possible only of unchanging and necessary... in Plato ...and in Aristotle, and similarly in their followers’.⁴⁶ Proclus says in his *Elements of Theology*: ‘Only when we recognise the causes of things do we say that we have knowledge,’ and elsewhere: ‘Therefore it is as if Plato said that the one who has scientific knowledge (ὁ ἐπιστήμων) is immune to mistake (ἀπαραλόγιστος) in every way except intellect (νοῦ), since he is not immune to mistake by intellect. But it is not

³⁹ Stang (2012) *Apophysis and pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite*, 84.

⁴⁰ DN, 4, 12; PG 3, 709B

⁴¹ Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, III, XI, 8. PG 7, 886B; cf. IV, VIII, 3; Ibid. 995A; Gregory of Nyssa, *In Hexaemeron Explicatio Apologetica*, PG 44, 120B; Ibid. 76 B/C; Ibid. 113C; 72C; Basil, *Homiliae in Hexaemeron*, Homilies 2.2; 3.10; 5.3 etc.

⁴² Proclus, *On the eternity of the world*, XIV, 20-25, 114-115.

⁴³ Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, vol. IV, book 3, part 2, 102.30, 57.

⁴⁴ Rorem (1993) *Pseudo-Dionysius: a commentary*, 51-52.

⁴⁵ Golitzin (1994) *Et introibo ad altare Dei: the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita*, 121-124.

⁴⁶ Urmson (1990) *The Greek Philosophical Vocabulary*, 59; see also *Plato’s theory of knowledge: the Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato* (1960).

enough for intellect not to lead into error: really it should make the soul wise (φρενοῖ τὴν ψυχὴν).⁴⁷

The term ἐνέργεια is also well researched in modern scholarship.⁴⁸ It means ‘activity’ or ‘operation’ and can be applied to divine, human, angelic, and even demonic reality. Lampe’s *Patristic Lexicon* offers five columns of references to Patristic works with various nuances in meaning.

On saying all this, we are in a position to reformulate the Dionysian definition of hierarchy in the following way:

‘A hierarchy is a mode of life and activity (ἐνέργεια) based on the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of Divine Providence (τάξις) in so far as it is given from God in accordance with one’s own measure (ἀναλόγως) and leading to likeness with God as much as possible’.

Dionysius uses a number of different concepts and images in order to explain the complex notion of hierarchy. It seems extremely important that this notion is preceded by his profound deliberation on the boundaries of human reason and possible ways of speaking about angels and God.

The author of the CD precedes the notion of hierarchy in the CH with pointing out the symbolical character of theological texts and liturgical actions. This kind of introduction to the Dionysian angelology corresponds very much with the distinctive spirit of his apophatic theology. Beginning with the affirmation of God as the only source of any knowledge, he again and again repeats that our mind cannot perceive an immaterial reality by itself and has to employ some material means – symbols and images – in order to approach it as closely as possible. ‘In

⁴⁷ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 11; *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, vol. IV, book 3, Part 1, [Procli Diadochi, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*, II, ed. E. Diehl, 56.3-6], p.109; cf. ἐπιστήμη kata ousian/ kata energian – Proclus, *Commentary on the first Alciviades of Plato*, Westerlink, 240.13-14; 242.13.

⁴⁸ Tollefsen (2012) *Activity and participation in late antique and early Christian thought*; Kosman (1984), ‘Substance, Being, and *Energieia*’; Witt (1989) *Substance and Essence in Aristotle*.

so far as we are endowed with flesh we cannot look upon immaterial and bodiless things without types and symbols', notes the scholiast.⁴⁹

Dionysius does not only show the necessity of symbols; he also explains how he understands their role and their relation to the reality which they signify. Unfortunately, the thought of Dionysius in this regard is not always properly grasped by his readers and interpreters. In fact, there is a significant difference in the understanding of the meaning of Dionysian symbols among some modern authors. For example, L. Nelstrop opposes the ontological reality of perceptible symbols, whereas E. Perl convincingly substantiates 'the ontology of symbolism' in Dionysius.⁵⁰ He argues that creation as a whole should be understood as a symbol of God in 'the realist sense of symbol'.⁵¹ 'Things are not simply the occasion for his seeing God; rather he sees God in things', summarising von Balthasar.⁵²

Indeed, Dionysius calls Holy Communion a symbol of partaking in Jesus:

καὶ τῆς Ἰησοῦ μετουσίας τὴν τῆς θειοτάτης εὐχαριστίας μετάληψιν, καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ταῖς οὐρανίαις μὲν οὐσίαις ὑπερκοσμίως, ἡμῖν δὲ συμβολικῶς παραδέδοται.

'The reception of the most divine Eucharist is a symbol of participation in Jesus. And so it goes for all the gifts transcendentally received by the beings of heaven, gifts which are granted to us in a symbolic mode.'⁵³

One can hardly find a more powerful example of the ontological rootedness of symbol. To put it briefly, there is no other way of thinking about God and angels than by symbols. However, symbol is not opposed to ontological reality but actually participates in it.⁵⁴ Hierarchy can thus be said to be a sort of a symbol⁵⁵ and one can participate in it, gaining through this participation

⁴⁹ Rorem, Lamoreaux (1998) *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian corpus: annotating the Areopagite*, 32. 8 on 8. 12 (121B), 150.

⁵⁰ Nelstrop, Magill, Onishi (2009) *Christian mysticism: an introduction to contemporary theoretical approaches*, 115; Perl (1994) 'Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysius the Areopagite', 313-324.

⁵¹ Perl (1994), *Ibid.*

⁵² Von Balthasar (1984) *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, 179.

⁵³ CH, 1, 3; PG 3, 124A; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 145.

⁵⁴ Schmemmann (1973) 'Sacrament and Symbol', 141.

⁵⁵

a participation in the divine reality.⁵⁶ In Dionysius, there is no separation between knowledge and being, between epistemology and ontology.⁵⁷

Dionysius notes further that one can talk about hierarchy as a complex idea. Indeed, it is both an *arrangement* (διακόσμησιν), and an *icon* (εικόνα), which is revealed in *order* (τάξεσι) and in *hierarchical knowledge* (ἐπιστήμαις ιεραρχικαῖς).

Οὐκοῦν ιεραρχίαν ὁ λέγων ιεράν τινα καθόλου δηλοῖ διακόσμησιν, εικόνα τῆς θεαρχικῆς ὠραιότητος, ἐν τάξεσι καὶ ἐπιστήμαις ιεραρχικαῖς τὰ τῆς οἰκειᾶς ἐλλάμπειως ἱερουργοῦσαν μυστήρια καὶ πρὸς τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν ὡς θεμιτὸν ἀφομοιουμένην...⁵⁸

‘If one talks then of hierarchy, what is meant is a certain perfect arrangement, an image of the beauty of God which sacredly works out the mysteries of its own enlightenment in the orders and levels of understanding of the hierarchy, and which is likened toward its own source as much as is permitted.’⁵⁹

Dionysius says here something extremely important for him and at the same time very unusual for a modern reader: he links the notion of hierarchy with the ideas of harmony and beauty. Hierarchy is the image of God’s beauty. Von Balthasar refers to Dionysius as ‘the most aesthetic of all Christian theologians’.⁶⁰

Another important passage shows that the idea of hierarchy can be understood only through Christ:

Ἠγήσοιτο δὲ τοῦ λόγου Χριστός, εἴπερ ἐμοὶ θέμις εἰπεῖν, ὁ ἐμός, ἡ πάσης ιεραρχικῆς ἐκφαντορίας ἐπίπνοια.⁶¹

‘I hope that my discourse will be guided by Christ, by my Christ, if I may put it this way, the inspiration of what has been made known about the hierarchy.’⁶²

Christ and hierarchy are linked through the idea of divinisation. The Incarnation of Christ has made divinisation possible for human beings. This is clearly stated in the EH:

Διαγράφει γὰρ ἐν τούτοις αἰσθητῶς ὑπ’ ὄψιν ἄγων Ἰησοῦν τὸν Χριστὸν τὴν νοητὴν ἡμῶν ὡς ἐν εἰκόσι ζωῆν ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ τὸ θεῖον κρυφίου τῆ παντελεῖ καὶ ἀσυγχύτω καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐνανθρωπήσει

⁵⁶Cf. EH, 1, 5; PG 3, 377A; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 198; also: ἐξῆς δὲ ἀφορίσασθαι χρὴ τί μὲν αὐτὴν εἶναι τὴν ιεραρχίαν οἴομεθα, τί δὲ πρὸς αὐτῆς τῆς ιεραρχίας ὀνίνασθαι τοὺς ιεραρχία κεκληρωμένους. CH, 2, 5; PG 3, 145B.

‘What I must now do is to explain what I mean by hierarchy and to say what advantage such hierarchy offers to those who are members of it’ (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 152)

⁵⁷ EH, 1, 3; PG 3, 373C; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 196.

⁵⁸ CH, 3, 2; PG 3, 165B.

⁵⁹ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 153.

⁶⁰ Von Balthasar (1984) *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, 168.

⁶¹ CH, 2, 5; PG 3, 145C.

⁶² ‘By my Christ’ – a meaningful remark! *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 152; Cf. CH, 4,1; EH,1,1; EH, 5,5: ‘And just as we observe that every hierarchy ends in Jesus, so each individual hierarchy reaches its term in its own inspired hierarch.’ [PG 3, 505B] Ὡς γὰρ ἅπασαν ιεραρχίαν ὀρώμεν εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀποπεραιουμένην, οὕτως ἐκάστην εἰς τὸν οἰκεῖον ἐνθεον ιεράρχην.

φιλανθρώπως ἐξ ἡμῶν εἰδοποιούμενον καὶ πρὸς τὸ μεριστὸν ἡμῶν ἀναλλοιώτως ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν ἐνὸς προϊόντα καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀγαθοῦ ταύτης φιλανθρωπίας εἰς μετουσίαν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν οἰκείων ἀγαθῶν καλοῦντα τὸ ἀνθρώπειον φύλον, εἶπερ ἐνωθῶμεν αὐτοῦ τῇ θειοτάτῃ ζῶν τῇ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἡμῶν κατὰ δύναμιν ἀφομοίωσει καὶ ταύτη πρὸς ἀλήθειαν κοινωνοὶ θεοῦ καὶ τῶν θείων ἀποτελεσθησόμεθα.⁶³

‘By resorting to the perceptible, to imagery, he makes clear that which gives life to our minds. He offers Jesus Christ to our view. He shows how out of love for humanity Christ emerged from the hiddenness of his divinity to take on human shape, to be utterly incarnate among us while yet remaining unmixed. He shows how he came down to us from his own natural unity to our own fragmented level, yet without change. He shows how, inspired by love for us, his kindly activities called the human race to enter participation with himself and to have a share in his own goodness, if we would make ourselves one with his divine life and imitate it as far as we can, so that we may achieve perfection and truly enter into communion with God and with the divine things’.⁶⁴

It is only through Christ that one reaches perfection and divinisation. Hierarchy as a means of divinisation is possible only in Christ. Dionysian hierarchy is unthinkable without Christ. The idea of hierarchy can be seen in many different existing hierarchies and each of them has the same task of divinization⁶⁵:

Τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἀπάσης ἱεραρχίας σκοπὸν τῆς θεομιμήτου θεοειδεῖας ἐξηρητημένον ἀρρεπῶς εἶναι καὶ τὸ διαιρεῖσθαι πᾶσαν ἱεραρχικὴν πραγματείαν εἰς μετοχὴν ἱερὰν καὶ μετάδοσιν καθάρσεως ἀμιγοῦς καὶ θεοῦ φωτὸς καὶ τελεστικῆς ἐπιστήμης ἀρκούντως ἤδη πρὸς ἡμῶν εἰρῆσθαι νομίζω.⁶⁶

‘Now I think I have already said enough about the fact that the aim of every hierarchy is always to imitate God so as to take on his form, that the task of every hierarchy is to receive and to pass on undiluted purification, the divine light, and the understanding which brings perfection’.⁶⁷

The above-mentioned example of mutual relations between Christ, the Incarnation, the ideas of divinisation and hierarchy in the texts of Dionysius supports our guiding thesis that Dionysian hierarchy can be called a metalanguage.⁶⁸ Indeed, the above quotation from EH 3,13 illustrates the use of the language of traditional Christian theology by Dionysius without references to the term ‘hierarchy’. It speaks of the Incarnation and the work of Christ as the salvific events leading to the participation of fallen humanity in the divine life, perfection and true communion with God. These all become ‘signified’ in his metalanguage of hierarchy, which is clear from the above quotation from CH 7,2 as well as from the definition of hierarchy in CH3.⁶⁹

⁶³ EH, 3, 13; PG 3, 444D.

⁶⁴ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 222.

⁶⁵ τὰς ἀγγελικὰς ἱεραρχίας διακοσμήσεως (CH, 5; PG 3, 196C) - in plural Cf.: CH, 6, 1; PG 3, 200C.

⁶⁶ CH, 7, 2; PG 3, 208A.

⁶⁷ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 161.

⁶⁸ Cf. Hovorun (2013) ‘Influence of Neoplatonism on Formation of Theological Language’, 18.

⁶⁹ See comments on the term ‘signified’ in the introduction to Part 1 of this thesis.

Apparently, the word ‘hierarchy’ is used in CD with different meanings in different places. Dionysius sees hierarchies in the world of angels, in the Church and in every individual soul. He also mentions the idea of ‘hierarchical knowledge’ in speaking of the relation between God and creation. In fact, the notion of hierarchy, which is given in Chapter 3 and is referred to in other places, can be seen as an attempt to express systematically the idea of the relation between God and creatures.⁷⁰ This allows us to speak about hierarchy not only as a particular concept, but as if about a new theological language. Although the idea of hierarchy is not something which is at length discussed in DN, the term is found in this treatise as well, and its usage supports the idea of hierarchy as a universal principle:

‘And as hierarchical law leads us [ὁ ἱεραρχικός θεσμός ὑφηγείται] whenever we study the entire Word of God, let us behold these acts of heavenly contemplation—which is indeed what they are—ready for a sight of God and our hearing made holy as we listen to the explication of the divine names. As the divine tradition so commands us, let the holy be there only for the holy [τοῖς ἁγίοις τὰ ἅγια κατὰ τὴν θεϊαν παράδοσιν ἐνιδρύοντες], and let such things be kept away from the mockery and the laughter of the uninitiated’.⁷¹

All our studying and understanding of the Holy Scriptures is dependent on ‘hierarchical law’. All the divine names discussed, all the concepts and teachings which are found in the pages of the DN are united and held together in the ‘hierarchical law’. This is the sphere of ‘heavenly contemplation’ and is available only to ‘the holy’.⁷² All these teachings become ‘hierarchical words’ in the sense that they are learned within hierarchy:

Ὅρας γάρ, ὅτι καὶ ἡμεῖς οὐδένα τῶν παραδοθέντων ἡμῖν ἱεραρχικῶν λόγων εἰς ἑαυτοῦς συνεστείλαμεν,

‘I have not kept to myself any of the hierarchical words which were handed down to me.’⁷³

Earlier, in Chapter 1, DN Dionysius mentions ‘hierarchical traditions’:

‘We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils of that love toward humanity with which scripture and hierarchical traditions cover the truths of the mind with things derived from the realm of the senses.’⁷⁴

⁷⁰ McGinn (1992) *The Foundations of Mysticism. Origins to the Fifth Century*, 158.

⁷¹ DN, 1, 8; PG 3, 597B-C.

⁷² Cf. an exclamation in the liturgy of St John Chrysostom: τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις.

⁷³ DN, 13, 4; PG 3, 984A.

⁷⁴ DN, 1, 4; PG 3, 592 B.

Rorem notes that ‘the “hierarchical traditions” are elsewhere associated with the liturgy’ (CH, 2, PG 3, 145C; EH, 1, PG 3, 372A; EH, 6, PG 3, 532D)⁷⁵. In fact, it is not just the liturgy which is defined through hierarchy. In Dionysius everything can be either defined through or related to hierarchy. The Holy Trinity is ‘the beginning of hierarchy’.⁷⁶ The Holy Scripture is ‘the substance of our hierarchy’ [Οὐσία γὰρ τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς ἱεραρχίας].⁷⁷ The Old Testament has the legal hierarchy [τὴν νομικὴν ἱεραρχίαν], which is continued in ‘our hierarchy’.⁷⁸ The love of God as well as the likeness and the union with God is ‘the goal of hierarchy’.⁷⁹ Hierarchy is a gift of ‘salvation and divinisation’ for all reasonable creatures.⁸⁰ Jesus is ‘the source and the being underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God, who is the ultimate in divine power’ [ἡ πάσης ἱεραρχίας ἁγιαστείας τε καὶ θεουργίας ἀρχὴ καὶ οὐσία καὶ θεαρχικωτάτη δύναμις].⁸¹

Any conclusions concerning the language of hierarchy in Dionysius will be premature before looking in greater detail at his use of the term ‘hierarchy’ within the whole text of *CD*, but it is clear from the definition itself and its nearest context that it can be seen as pointing to a personal stance of a Christian rather than describing an ‘objective reality’ from the Christian point of view.

1.1.2. Celestial hierarchy

Hierarchy is therefore an epistemological principle not pretending to provide the description of ontological reality, but rather ensuring participation in it. In fact, Dionysius repeatedly writes about the lack of precision in the knowledge about angels:

Ὅσοι μὲν εἰσι καὶ οἷοι τῶν ὑπερουρανίων οὐσιῶν οἱ διάκοσμοι καὶ ὅπως αἱ κατ' αὐτοὺς ἱεραρχίαι τελοῦνται, μόνην ἀκριβῶς εἰδέναι φημι τὴν θεωτικὴν αὐτῶν τελεταρχίαν, προσέτι καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐγνωκέναι τὰς οἰκειάς δυνάμεις τε καὶ ἐλλάμψεις καὶ τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἱερὰν καὶ ὑπερκόσμιον εὐταξίαν.⁸²

⁷⁵ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 51 (in footnotes, n.12)

⁷⁶ EH, 1, 3; PG 3, 373D; cf. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 197.

⁷⁷ EH, 1, 4; PG 3, 376B.

⁷⁸ EH, 3, 4; PG 3, 429C.

⁷⁹ EH, 1, 3; PG 3, 376A; cf. EH 2, PG 3, 392A.

⁸⁰ EH, 1, 4; PG 3, 376B.

⁸¹ EH, 1, 1; PG 3, 372B; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 195.

⁸² CH, 6, 1; PG 3, 200C.

‘How many, and of what sort, are the orders of the above-heavenly beings? How does each hierarchy achieve perfection? I say that only the divine source of their perfection knows exactly, and further, that they know their own proper powers and illuminations, and their sacred and transcendent good order’.⁸³

It is clear from these words that when Dionysius describes heavenly hierarchies, he does not pretend to give us, as it were, a map of heaven. He does not, and cannot have, an accurate (ἀκριβῶς) account of heavenly reality.⁸⁴ He applies, ‘as well as he can’, his ‘hierarchical understanding’ (ἱεραρχικῆ ἐπιστήμη) to the data contained in Scripture and comes up with a symbolic description of the angelic world.⁸⁵

...καὶ τὰς ὑπ’ αὐτῶν συμβολικῶς ἡμῖν καὶ ἀναγωγικῶς ἐκφανθείσας τῶν οὐρανίων νοῶν ἱεραρχίας ὡς οἷόν τέ ἐσμεν ἐποπτεύσωμεν, καὶ τὴν ἀρχικὴν καὶ ὑπεράρχιον τοῦ θεαρχικοῦ Πατρὸς φωτοδοσίαν, ἣ τὰς τῶν ἀγγέλων ἡμῖν ἐν τυπωτικοῖς συμβόλοις ἐκφαίνει μακαριωτάτας ἱεραρχίας, ἀύλοις καὶ ἀτρεμέσι νοδὸς ὀφθαλμοῖς εἰσδεξάμενοι.⁸⁶

‘...As far as we can, we should behold the intelligent hierarchies of heaven and we should do so in accordance with what scripture has revealed to us in symbolic and uplifting fashion. We must lift up the immaterial and steady eyes of our minds to that outpouring of Light which is so primal, indeed much more so, and which comes from that source of divinity, I mean the Father. This is the Light which, by way of representative symbols, makes known to us the most blessed hierarchies among the angels.’⁸⁷

The citation above clearly demonstrates that the ‘intelligent hierarchies’ can be seen and contemplated by the eyes of our mind (νοδὸς ὀφθαλμοῖς), i.e. intellectually. Dionysius applies the term hierarchy both to the angelic world as a whole and to each of the groupings of the angels he mentions in the course of his work.

One needs to hymn (ὑμνητέον) the hierarchy of angels in order to hymn the Beginning of ‘hierarchical knowledge’. Angels have their existence, and they come from non-existence. The angelic beings partake in godhead (θεότητος) through their existence, power and mind.⁸⁸ Angels were created after the image of God and they are growing in it freely. All their life is noetic (νοερὰν) and they are given the divine enlightenment first among the reasonable creatures.⁸⁹ Dionysius argues that all the theophanies and revelations of the Old Testament were mediated by

⁸³ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 159 – is not satisfactory translated (Translation is mine).

⁸⁴ Cf.: τὰς ἡμῖν ἀναριθμήτους τῶν οὐρανίων οὐσιῶν διατάξεις. CH, 14, 1; PG 3, 321A.

‘...the ranks of the heavenly beings are for us innumerable’. (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 180)

⁸⁵ CH, 4, 1; PG 3, 177C.

⁸⁶ CH, 1, 2; PG 3, 121B.

⁸⁷ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 144.

⁸⁸ CH, 4, 1; PG 3, 177C-D.

⁸⁹ CH, 4, 2; PG 3, 180A.

the angels. It is possible to speak about the intermediary function of the heavenly powers.

Moreover, each angelic hierarchy has its own first, middle and the last ranks. The first ranks are those who have the powers and enlightenments of the lowest. The superior ranks lift up (ἀνάγει) the lower ones.⁹⁰

καὶ κάθαρσις ἐστὶ καὶ φωτισμὸς καὶ τελείωσις ἢ τῆς θεαρχικῆς ἐπιστήμης μετάληψις
'Purification, illumination, and perfection are all three the participation in the divine knowledge'.⁹¹

The aim (σκοπὸν) of each hierarchy is linked with likening to God. The labour of each hierarchy (πᾶσαν ἱεραρχικὴν πραγματείαν) is partaking in purification as well as transmitting it.⁹²

1.1.3. Ecclesiastical hierarchy

Ecclesiastical hierarchy embraces all human relationships with God as they are found in the Church. 'If you talk of "hierarchy" you are referring in effect to the arrangement of all the sacred realities.'⁹³ The Ecclesiastical hierarchy is perceived in connection with the Heavenly hierarchy.

τὴν δὲ τῶν ἀρχῶν καὶ ἀρχαγγέλων καὶ ἀγγέλων ἐκφαντορικὴν διακόσμησιν ταῖς ἀνθρωπίναις ἱεραρχίαις δι' ἀλλήλων ἐπιστατεῖν, ἵν' ἢ κατὰ τάξιν ἢ πρὸς Θεὸν ἀναγωγὴ καὶ ἐπιστροφή καὶ κοινωνία καὶ ἔνωσις καὶ μὴν καὶ ἡ παρὰ Θεοῦ πάσους ταῖς ἱεραρχίαις ἀγαθοπρεπῶς ἐνδιδομένη καὶ κοινωνικῶς ἐπιφοιτῶσα μετ' εὐκοσμίας ἱερωτάτης πρόδοσ.⁹⁴

'The revealing rank of principalities, archangels, and angels presides among themselves over the human hierarchies, in order that the uplifting and return toward God, and the communion and union, might occur according to proper order, and indeed so that the procession might be benignly given by God to all hierarchies and might arrive at each one in a shared way in sacred harmony.'⁹⁵

The relation between the two hierarchies is not static and external. They are engaged in a constant and very deep interaction on many levels.

πρὸς ταύτης δὲ πάλιν ἀναλόγως ἢ δευτέρα καὶ πρὸς τῆς δευτέρας ἢ τρίτη καὶ πρὸς τῆς τρίτης ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἱεραρχία κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τῆς εὐκόσμου ταξιαρχίας θεσμὸν ἐν ἀρμονίᾳ θεῖα καὶ ἀναλογία πρὸς τὴν ἀπάσης εὐκοσμίας ὑπεράρχιον ἀρχὴν καὶ περάτωσιν ἱεραρχικῶς ἀνάγεται.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ CH, 5; PG 3, 196C.

⁹¹ CH, 7, 3; PG 3, 209C. (Translation is mine)

⁹² CH, 7, 2; PG 3, 208A.

⁹³ EH, 1, 3; PG 3, 373C; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 196.

⁹⁴ CH, 9, 2; PG 3, 260B.

⁹⁵ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 170; see also the very end of CH, 8, 2 that angelic hierarchy is an image for us.

⁹⁶ CH, 10; PG 3, 273A.

‘Then by this rank [of angels] the second one, and by the second the third, and by the third our hierarchy is hierarchically uplifted, in due proportion and divine concord and according to this regulation of the harmonious source of order, toward that source beyond every source and consummation of all harmony.’⁹⁷

Dionysius often refers to the ecclesiastical hierarchy as ‘our hierarchy’. He points out its symbolical character and links it to the essence of human being:

‘Our own hierarchy is itself symbolical and adapted to what we are. In a divine fashion it needs perceptible things to lift us up into the domain of conceptions’.⁹⁸

And in the final paragraphs of the EH he writes:

‘My son, these are the fine and unifying sights presented by our hierarchy. Doubtless more perceptive minds would not be confined to what I have seen. They would contemplate sights more outstanding and also more in conformity with God. And I believe that more stunning and more divine beauties will enlighten you too as you employ my remarks as steps up to a more sublime ray. Dear friend, be generous with me. Bring before my eyes that more perfect and more evident enlightenment which will be yours as you learn of a beauty more lovely and closer to the One. For I feel sure that my words will rekindle the sparks of God's fire which sleep in you’.⁹⁹

One can see that Dionysius does not pretend to have said the last word on the matter of hierarchy. He states that what has been said is entirely conditioned by his own abilities and limitations. To accept hierarchy does not mean to become subjected to someone or something. To participate in hierarchy is to be open to new experiences and applications of ‘hierarchical knowledge’.

The readers of Dionysius accepted this invitation and offered their own readings, sometimes appropriating only some aspects of the rich Dionysian understanding of hierarchy. The Dionysian ecclesiastical hierarchy was substantially modified, becoming what we now usually mean by it due to the work of Nicetas Stethatos, a monk from the monastery of Stoudios. He lived and wrote in Constantinople in the 11th century and dedicated an entire treatise to the problem of hierarchy.¹⁰⁰ Although he largely drew on Dionysius, he was not interested so much in the concept of hierarchy as in hierarchies themselves, namely in the relation between the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Nicetas preserved the Dionysian triadic structure, but

⁹⁷ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 172.

⁹⁸ EH, 1, 5; PG 3, 377A; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 198.

⁹⁹ EH, 7, 11; PG 3, 568D-569A ; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 258.

¹⁰⁰ Nikētas Stēthatos, *Opuscules et lettres*, 292-365.

considerably changed the content of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He replaced the highest order of rites and mysteries with one of the Patriarchs, Metropolitans and Archbishops. The second order consisting of bishops, priests and deacons was left untouched, whereas the third experienced significant changes. Nicetas added sub-deacons and readers above monastics, dismissing laymen and catechumens.

Due to these alterations, the idea of hierarchy acquires a new and quite different sense than that found in Dionysius. Indeed, Dionysius's ecclesiastical hierarchy reflects the conceptual scheme of the process of theosis ongoing in the Church. Each rank is linked with one of three functions – perfection, illumination and purification.¹⁰¹ What we have in Nicetas is a nine-rank clerical hierarchy designed to serve the needs of the lay people and catechumens who are now found outside the hierarchy. In Nicetas, the idea of hierarchy loses its universal sense and instead takes on supplementary and supporting traits of a markedly “clerical” nature. The exclusion of the rank of mysteries and rites clearly points to the relations of status and authority within the hierarchy of Stethatos, which apparently contributed to the modern understanding of hierarchy.

1.1.4. *The hierarchy of the mind*

The idea of the hierarchy of the mind runs all through the CD. In the CH Dionysius says that every individual angel as well as every human being has his or her inner hierarchy.

Προσθεῖν δ' ἂν καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἀπεικότως, ὅτι καὶ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἕκαστος οὐράνιος τε καὶ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς ἰδικὰς ἔχει καὶ πρώτας καὶ μέσας καὶ τελευταίας τάξεις τε καὶ δυνάμεις πρὸς τὰς εἰρημένας τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον ἱεραρχικῶν ἐλλάμψεων οἰκείας ἀναγωγὰς ἀναλόγως ἐκφαινομένας, καθ' ἃς ἕκαστος ἐν μετουσίᾳ γίνεται κατὰ τὸ αὐτῷ θεμιτὸν τε καὶ ἐφικτὸν τῆς ὑπεραγνοτάτης καθάρσεως, τοῦ ὑπερπλήρους φωτός, τῆς προτελείου τελειώσεως.¹⁰²

‘There is something else which I could reasonably add here. Each intelligent being, heavenly or human, has his own set of primary, middle, and lower orders and powers, and in accordance with his capacities these indicate the aforementioned upliftings, directly relative to the hierarchic enlightenment available to every being. It is in accordance with this arrangement that each intelligent entity—as far as he properly can and to the extent he may—participates in that purification beyond purity, that superabundant light, that perfection preceding all perfection’.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ ‘...In our sacred tradition every hierarchy is divided in three. There are the most reverend sacraments. There are those, inspired by God, who understand and purvey them. And there are those who are sacredly initiated by these.’
EH, 5, 1; PG 3, 501A.

¹⁰² CH, 10, 3; PG 3, 273C.

¹⁰³ *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 173.

The author of the CD indicates that this inner arrangement, which we call ‘the hierarchy of the mind’, is relative to the hierarchic enlightenment, which is received from the other members of the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies. Although we cannot find in the CD the term ‘hierarchy of the mind’, there are several terms in the EH which clearly point in this direction. Indeed, one must live according to ‘the hierarchical mind’ [κατὰ νοῦν ἱεραρχικόν] and ‘think hierarchically’ [ἱεραρχικῶς ἐννόησον]¹⁰⁴.

Dionysius mentions the inner hierarchy in one of his letters.

‘For the one who commands himself will command another. The one who commands another will command a household. The commander of a household will command a city, and the commander of a city will command a nation. In short, as scripture says, he who is faithful in a little is faithful also in much and he who is unfaithful in a little will be unfaithful in much.’¹⁰⁵

The text above affirms the connection between the hierarchy of the mind and any other hierarchies in society.

This aspect of hierarchy was particularly developed in the works of Thomas Gallus (c. 1190-1246).¹⁰⁶ This is a good illustration of how the metalanguage of hierarchy in Dionysius was appropriated by a later theologian and becomes part of his theological language. Thomas Gallus produced commentaries on the works of Dionysius and some of these were extremely popular in the later Middle Ages.¹⁰⁷ He picks up Dionysius’ idea that every mind has its own hierarchy, correlating the triads of the heavenly hierarchy with the different features and powers of the human person to the end of describing one’s own spiritual development. This interiorized hierarchy speaks of the human soul’s relationship with God using ‘angelic’ terminology. Angelic hierarchy in Dionysius is read by Thomas as an allegorical description of the human path to God:

‘The lowest hierarchy of mind consists in its very own nature; the middle in what it can do by effort, which incomparably exceeds nature; the highest in ecstasy. At the lowest, only nature is at work; at the highest, only grace; at the middle, both grace and effort work together. The lowest rank of the lowest hierarchy, called the “angelic”, includes the basic and simple natural modes of apprehension, both of

¹⁰⁴ EH, 4, 12; PG 3, 485A; EH, 4, 12; PG 3, 484C; cf. ἡἱεραρχικὴ σύννεσις (EH, 3, PG 3, 425A) – ‘hierarchical wisdom’.

¹⁰⁵ Ep. 8, 3; PG 3, 1093B; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 275.

¹⁰⁶ Turner (1995) *Eros and allegory: medieval exegesis of The Song of Songs*, 317.

¹⁰⁷ Nelstrop, Magill, Onishi (2009) *Christian mysticism: an introduction to contemporary theoretical approaches*, 111.

knowledge and love, without any judgement of the appropriate and inappropriate, which is just like the angels, that is, the “announcers”, who, in the simplest sense, bring news to the soul’.¹⁰⁸

Now it might be argued that such a psychological reading of hierarchy is not entirely alien to Dionysius. However, it also deprives the original notion of hierarchy in Dionysius of some features connected with the mutual purifying activities of the participants.

1.1: Conclusion

One can see that the concept of hierarchy in Dionysius links together God and creation, our visible human world and the invisible reality of angels. Different aspects of this concept were picked up and developed by later medieval commentators of Dionysius, who usually emphasised one or another particular aspect of hierarchy. In some cases, later interpretations introduced deliberate alterations of the original thought of Dionysius and were designed to serve their theological or ideological interest. In other words, what appears to be the universal theological language in Dionysius becomes one of the particular theological concepts in the works of later theologians.

In the following subchapter we will turn to some modern interpretations of Dionysius, which are often characterised by the desire of their adherents to extract the original meaning from his writings.

1.2. Contemporary theoretical approaches

Modern authors have different understandings of the concept of hierarchy in Dionysius depending on their methodological approach. L. Nelstrop in her monograph on contemporary

¹⁰⁸ Turner (1995) *Eros and allegory: medieval exegesis of The Song of Songs*, 321; Cf.: Bonaventure (1960) ‘The Journey of the Mind to God’, 38-39.

theoretical approaches to Christian mysticism affirms the importance of hierarchy for the majority of mystical texts and for Dionysius in particular.¹⁰⁹ However, despite its importance, the theme of hierarchy is rather neglected in modern scholarship. She distinguishes the following approaches: epistemological (P. Rorem), symbolical – metaphorical - intellectual (A. Louth, D. Turner), experiential – liturgical (G. Shaw) and feminist (G. Jantzen). Yet Nelstrop considers only authors who have written on Christian mysticism. We would like to offer our own classification of modern approaches to the Dionysian understanding of hierarchy, based on that of Nelstrop, slightly modifying it and adding some new categories and names. Our aim is not to include in it all the authors who have written on Dionysius but to critically engage with some of the existing approaches to the understanding of hierarchy and, through this, to build towards a novel and potentially fruitful understanding of the CD.

We will analyse each one of the approaches in respect to our own approach to hierarchy as a metalanguage.

1.2.1. Philosophical

The philosophical approach to Dionysius comprises several authors and has two major subdivisions: ontological and epistemological. By the philosophical approach I understand the modern trend to see Dionysius mainly as a philosopher, either Christian or Neo-Platonic. Which means that the notion of hierarchy serves Dionysius's philosophical or intellectual purposes and is designed to contribute to his philosophical system.

The work of R. Hathaway is a good example of what might be called an *ontological philosophical approach*. This author speaks about 'the metaphysics of hierarchy' in Dionysius. He argues that, in introducing the term 'hierarchy', Dionysius follows the philosophy of Proclus. In particular, Hathaway is trying to show that and how Dionysius 'adapts the perspective, legal

¹⁰⁹ Nelstrop, Magill, Onishi (2009) *Christian mysticism: an introduction to contemporary theoretical approaches*, 114.

definition of hierarchic order to an ontological definition of order through his use of the term θεσμός for “law”, explaining also the nature of that “ontological definition of order”.¹¹⁰ In other words, Dionysius’ hierarchy becomes in Hathaway a slightly modernised version of Neo-Platonic ontology. Some authors prefer to speak about applying the ideas of Neo-Platonic ontology to the Christian Scripture.¹¹¹ But their basic thought would be the same: the notion of hierarchy is an attempt to grasp and describe some sort of ontological reality, something which really exists outside the human mind.

I argue that the ontological philosophical approach causes Neo-Platonic ontology to merge with the metalanguage of hierarchy in such a way that hierarchy becomes just one of the concepts along with the other philosophical and theological concepts in Dionysius. According to this approach, the language of the Bible and Christian faith remains only a signifier, which helps to express some ‘neo-Platonic truths’ (Table 1)

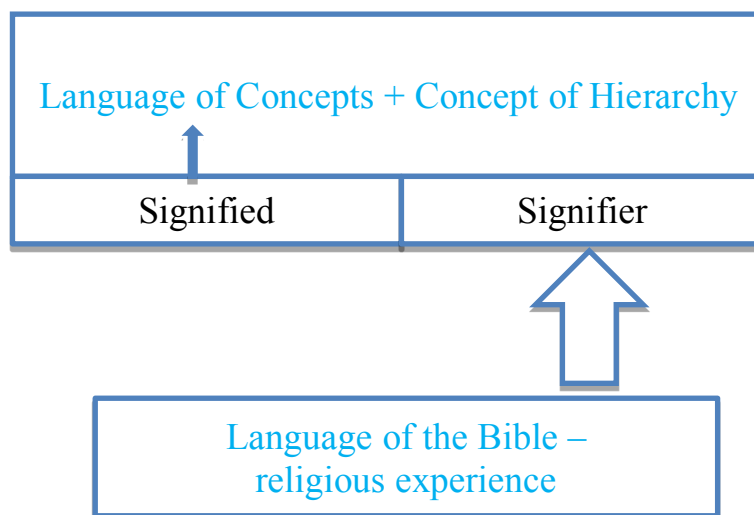


Table 1

¹¹⁰ Hathaway (1970) *Hierarchy and the definition of order in the letters of Pseudo-Dionysius*, 37.

¹¹¹ Turovtsev (2015) *Vvedenie v dogmaticheskoe uchenie ob angelakh*, 32, 47.

The epistemological philosophical approach can be represented by the work of P. Rorem. He argues that Dionysius is more concerned with ‘subjective or cognitive epistemology’ than with ‘objective or metaphysical ontology’.¹¹² In respect to our topic, this means that Rorem is stressing the importance for Dionysius of the concept of hierarchy for individual subjects, as a ‘cognitive exercise’. It has to be noted that Rorem opposes the ‘mystical’ understanding of hierarchy, which introduces an experiential or emotional element within it.

A. Louth was put into this group by Nelstrop. Indeed, Louth emphasises the difference between Dionysian hierarchy and the Neo-Platonic chain of being. Being is not mediated in the Dionysian hierarchies. What is mediated, Louth argues, is knowledge and illumination. The hierarchy represents Dionysian cataphatic theology manifesting knowledge about the absolutely unknowable and transcendent God.¹¹³ However, one cannot agree with Nelstrop who opposes the reality of symbol and ontology. She writes, for example, that ‘Louth ascribes Christ purely symbolic status, which seems odd given his ontological reality for Christians and the relationship between this and liturgical encounter’.¹¹⁴ To be sure, it might seem odd if one does not grasp the meaning of symbol in Dionysius, where symbol is not just an intellectual tool but something which allows us to partake in a reality otherwise inaccessible and unperceivable.

The epistemological philosophical approach differs crucially from the ontological approach because the language of the Bible and the Christian faith are considered to be signified rather than a signifier in the works of Dionysius, whereas the concept of hierarchy remains a signifier, or purely a ‘cognitive exercise’. However, this approach is still very similar to the ontological one in the way it downgrades the Dionysian language of hierarchy to just being one

¹¹² Rorem (1993) *Pseudo-Dionysius: a commentary*, 52; ‘He does not depict God as the source and the goal, the origin and the destiny of the world in terms of creation and salvation, although this is implied. Rather ... his principal use of this motif of procession and return is subjective epistemology. God has provided a self-revelation in terms of the created order so that we might be uplifted through and beyond the interpretation of the things in the created order to the final silent union with the transcendent God. The entire Dionysian enterprise is a cognitive exercise, dominated throughout by the right interpretation of the revealed names and symbols for God, whether in the Bible or in the liturgy, and climaxed by the intentional abandonment of all such interpretations. The abandonment is itself a conscious cognitive technique.’ (Ibid, 200)

¹¹³ Louth (2007) *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: from Plato to Denys*, 171.

¹¹⁴ Nelstrop, Magill, Onishi (2009) *Christian mysticism: an introduction to contemporary theoretical approaches*, 115.

of the concepts along with the others, which were adopted by Dionysius from previous generations of theologians and philosophers. This understanding can be presented by the following diagram:

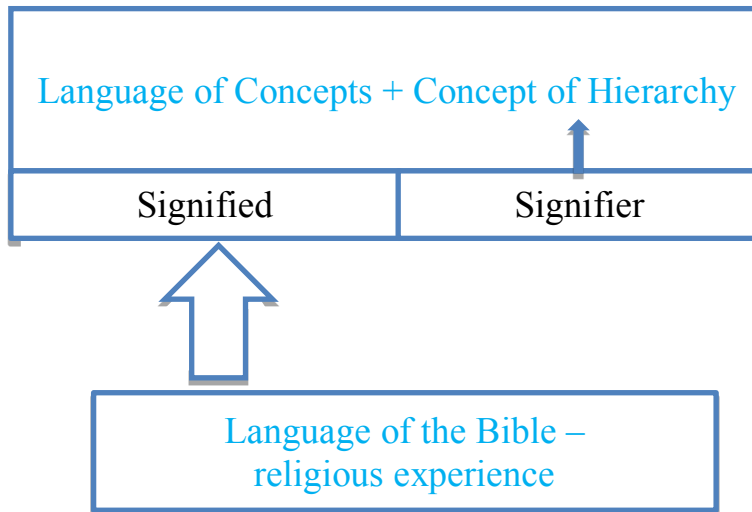


Table 2.

1.2.2. Liturgical – mystic

G. Shaw maintains that the Dionysian account of Christian liturgy manifests close parallels with the Iamblichean understanding of theurgy and presupposes not only intellectual but also experiential participation in it. However, Shaw continues, while the Neo-Platonic theurgy was cosmocentric, Dionysius is anthropocentric. From this vantage point, he concludes, the idea of Dionysius’ hierarchy can be seen as an attempt to describe ‘an ineffable union with God’, and this union concerns not only the human mind but also the body.¹¹⁵

The human body was unambiguously condemned by some of the most influential philosophers of antiquity, especially by the Platonists and Neo-Platonists. Pejorative evaluations

¹¹⁵ Shaw (1999) ‘Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite’, 573-599.

of the human body in the works of Plato and Plotinus are well attested.¹¹⁶ This is not accidental. Such a negative attitude towards the sensible realities is an intrinsic feature of Platonic philosophies.

However, despite Early Christianity's indebtedness to the Platonic tradition, in some key aspects of its orientation, early Christian theological attitudes toward the human body are overtly positive.¹¹⁷ It is arguable that emphatic justifications of the human body can be found in John, Paul, in the works of the second-century Apologists and in the later Church Fathers.¹¹⁸ These are not isolated examples. Indeed, the Early Church's positive attitude to the body has a solid doctrinal foundation which is the reality of the Incarnation and the Resurrection. The incarnational core of the early Christian teaching concerning the body is above all expressed in Christian liturgy. To be sure, Christian liturgy at its most basic is a physical activity: it is the bringing, the offering and the sharing of the Eucharistic bread and wine, which become transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁹ When the human body is actively involved in prayer, humans overcome the limits of individual bodies and begin to constitute the new body of the Eucharistic community. This idea is reflected in the text and rite of the Byzantine Liturgy and is found in the EH:

'Every sacredly initiating operation draws our fragmented lives together into a one-like divinization. It forges a divine unity out of the divisions within us. It grants us communion and union with the One.'¹²⁰

The principle of hierarchy can be seen in the mode of celebrating the Byzantine Liturgy in a particular Christian community. The bishop and the priest are alone entitled to celebrate the Eucharist. If a number of bishops and priests are present, only one of them can be the main

¹¹⁶ For example, in *Phaedo*, *First Alcibiades*, *Cratylus*; Plotinus, *Enneads IV*, 4, 8, 1; trans. Armstrong, 1984, vol. 4, 396-401.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Cooper (2008) *Life in the Flesh*.

¹¹⁸ Jn 1:14; 1Jn 1:1; 1 Cor. 6: 19-20; Rom 6: 12-13; Cf. Gundry (1976) *Soma in biblical theology: with emphasis on Pauline anthropology*; Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, V, 6, 1; Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* (IV, 26); notably, Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, PG 44, 225B-229C, John of Damascus, *Expositio fidei*, PG 94, 1297C-1300B, John Chrysostom, *Ad populum Antiochenum*, Homily 11.2, PG 49, 121, (Budge (1842) *The homilies of S. John Chrysostom on the statues: Or, To the people of Antioch*, 190-193); see also Cooper (2005) *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified*.

¹¹⁹ EH, 3; PG 3, 425C.

¹²⁰ EH, 3; PG 3, 424D.

celebrant. All other bishops or priests are merely able to concelebrate. The remaining levels of the hierarchy are made up of deacons, lay people and catechumens. Every member of the community takes his or her place in the Church's gathering, performing more or less important functions. However, the Liturgy cannot be celebrated without the celebrant.

Here is where Liturgical hierarchy is inextricably linked with the theology of the body, constituting part of the overall theology of the Body of Christ. St Paul thus details his conception of the Church as the Body of Christ, hierarchically ordered:

‘For as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office: so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another’ (Rom 12: 4-5).

More fundamentally, the liturgy puts into relief the harmony and mutual interdependence of the members of the human race - a key feature of the redeemed humanity. Using the metaphor of the unity within the individual organism for that of the body of the Church, Paul affirms:

‘God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.’¹²¹

The prayer of intercession that the celebrating priest offers for the living and the departed members of the community builds on the principle of mutual care for one another that Paul highlights.¹²² G. Shaw would agree with Catherine Pickstock that ‘sacramental signs... are not just illustrative or metaphorical. They prompt us to new thought and guide us into deeper modes of meditation because they contain a surplus that thought can never fully fathom’.¹²³ That is why the physical activity of the participants in the Liturgy does not merely support their prayer but

¹²¹ 1Cor 12:24-26. Note the presence of Paul's ideas of the Church as a body in Dionysian hierarchy in Stang (2012) *Apophysis and pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: 'no longer I'*, 84-116.

¹²² See in particular EH, 3, 8-9; PG 3, 437A-B: ‘Then there is the proclamation, mystical and transcendent, of the holy volumes. For it is not possible to be gathered together toward the One and to partake of peaceful union with the One while divided among ourselves. If, however, we are enlightened by the contemplation of and knowledge of the One we are enabled to be unified, to achieve a truly divine oneness and it will never happen that we succumb to that fragmentation of desire which is the source of corporeal and impassioned hostility between equals. This, it seems to me, is the united and undivided life prescribed for us by the kiss of peace as it joins like to like and turns the fragmented away from the divine and unique visions. Following on the peace there is the proclamation of the sacred volumes and here the names are announced of those who have lived holy lives and whose consistent efforts earned for them the perfection of a virtuous life.’

¹²³ Pickstock (2010) ‘Liturgy and the Senses’, 126.

can be said to be a form of prayer, a way of communication with God, and the liturgical approach to the idea of hierarchy is thus justified.¹²⁴

However, in terms of theological languages, the liturgical mystic approach rejects the existence of both the metalanguage of hierarchy and the language of concepts, downgrading them all to the level of the language of experience. This approach can be presented by the following concise scheme:

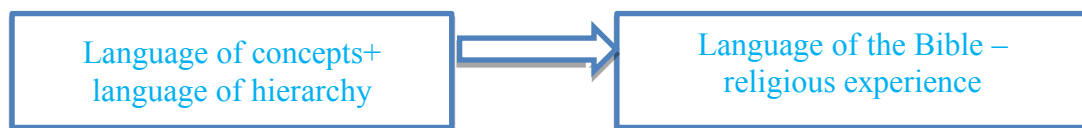


Table 3.

1.2.3. Historical

Whereas philosophical and liturgical approaches are interested primarily in the texts themselves, dealing predominantly with the content of the CD, the historical approach intends to identify the historical context of the CD. I suggest considering the two following subcategories within the historical approach: sociological and ascetic.

Sociological

The historical sociological approach is represented by Phil Booth. In his book *'Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity'* (2013) he presents monastic movement as essentially polemical with the clerical component of the Church. Monastic ideal,

¹²⁴ That the physical activity is a form of prayer is clear from some of the liturgical sources: 'Accept the lifting up of our hands as an evening sacrifice' ('Sunday of Pentecost Vespers', *The Pentecostarion* (1990), 423). In this text 'the lifting up of our hands' is asked to be accepted as a prayerful sacrifice. In the same service, the deacon says: 'For our bending of knees, that it may be received like incense before Him, let us pray to the Lord'. (*The Pentecostarion* (1990), 418); *The Prayer of the Trisagion Hymn* says: 'O Master, accept even from the lips of us sinners the thrice-holy hymn.' (*The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 11).

especially in its early times, was linked to individual contemplation and the cultivation of virtues not necessarily connected with the Sacramental life of the Church. In its most extreme form this worldview is known as Messalianism. The opposed clerical point of view was represented primarily by bishops, who emphasised the importance of ecclesiastical structures for salvation and, in particular, the role of the Sacraments in the spiritual life of Christians. Booth analyses a considerable body of ecclesiastical texts, including church canons, monastic rules, hagiographic material, and sermons in the light of the above-mentioned clerical-monastic opposition.

There is a clear evidence in the disciplinary canons of the early councils that there were tensions between the bishops and the monks, starting at least from the 4th Century. In this context, Dionysian hierarchy is seen as promoting the ‘clerical ideology’ among the monks. Booth notes, that CD ‘can be appreciated as a direct challenge to an Evagrian “minimalist” conception of ecclesial structures’.¹²⁵ He is convinced that Dionysius ‘demonstrates an acute concern with the subordination of monks to their clerical superiors.’¹²⁶ Overall, Dionysius’ ‘liturgical vision presented nothing less than the full institutional, cosmological, and spiritual dependence of monks upon the external realities of the Church.’¹²⁷

Historical sociological approach singles out the concept of hierarchy in Dionysius and attempts to explain why it was employed in those particular historical circumstances. In fact, this approach corresponds to our approach to hierarchy in Dionysius as a metalanguage. [See Table 4.] However, it still fails to embrace the plenitude of Dionysian understandings of hierarchy and needs to be complemented with the ascetic (or monastic) approach.

¹²⁵ Booth (2014) *Crisis of empire*, 47.

¹²⁶ Booth (2014) *Crisis of empire*, 48.

¹²⁷ Booth (2014) *Crisis of empire*, 50.

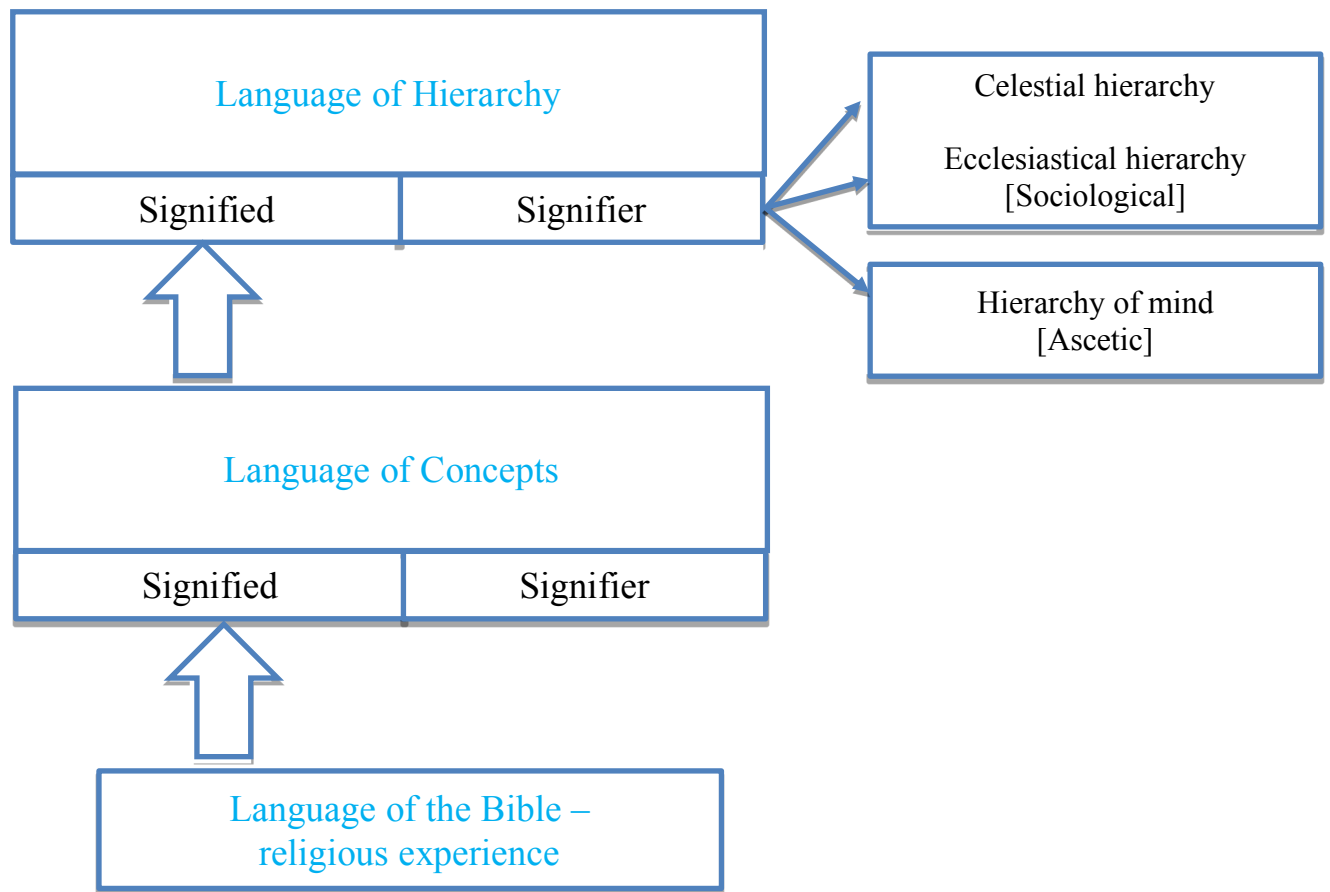


Table 4.

Ascetic or monastic approach

There is almost no doubt amongst scholars that the author of the CD was a Syrian monk. Five out of ten of his epistles were addressed to monks and, generally, the first audience of the CD most probably consisted of Syrian monks. In his *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita* (2013) Alexander Golitzin argues that the CD must be read in light of what he believes to be the origin and intentions of the author.¹²⁸ If we consider the author to be a monk,

¹²⁸ Golitzin, Bucur (2013) *Mystagogy: A Monastic Reading of Dionysius Areopagita*. See Part 2 of the Introduction ‘The Corpus Dionysiacum: Christian Mysticism and Monastic Mystagogy’.

his intentions would be likely to be connected in some way with ascetic practice.¹²⁹ The personal or inner dimension of hierarchy – a frequent theme in early Syriac ascetic literature – appears to be important to the author of the CD.¹³⁰ The most detailed description of the inner hierarchy is given in the 8th epistle (to Demophilus), where Dionysius distinguishes and hierarchically orders the faculties of reason, anger and desire in the soul, asserting the priority of reason.

‘So, then, let Demophilus give due place within himself to reason, to anger, and to desire. Let him do no harm to the due order within himself. May reason prevail over the inferior things by virtue of its priority.’¹³¹

In the same epistle Dionysius affirms the principle of compliance of the state of the inner order with that of the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy.

‘Each rank around God conforms more to him than the one farther away. Those closest to the true Light are more capable of receiving light and of passing it on. Do not imagine that the proximity here is physical.

Rather, what I mean by nearness is the greatest possible capacity to receive God. If then the rank of priests is that most able to pass on illumination, he who does not bestow illumination is thereby excluded from the priestly order and from the power reserved to the priesthood. For he is unilluminated... This is no priest. He is an enemy, deceitful, self-deluded, a wolf in sheep's clothing, ready to attack the people of God.’¹³²

If one does not have harmony within himself, he cannot be a member of hierarchy and he is not even if he is eager to seem to be one.

1.2: Conclusion

To sum up, several distinct aspects characterise the Dionysian hierarchy. In the first place, we have the concept of hierarchy as expounded in Chapter 3 of CH where the definition of hierarchy is given. The application of the concept of hierarchy to the world of angels can be seen as its second aspect. In the third place, it is ecclesiastical hierarchy; in other words, the application of the idea of hierarchy in the human world. Fourthly and finally, the inner hierarchy

¹²⁹ Cf.: ‘Denys was a monk... His theology too ... is a theology of monasticism’. (Von Balthasar (1984) *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, 178)

¹³⁰ See e.g. *The Liber Graduum* in Brock (c1987) *The Syriac fathers on prayer and the spiritual life*, 45-53.

¹³¹ Ep. 8; PG 3, 1093A; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 274.

¹³² Ep. 8; PG 3, 1092B-C; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 273-274.

of the mind is the result of seeing an individual in terms of hierarchy. One might notice that modern theoretical approaches to the Dionysian concept can be linked with all of these aspects. Each of these approaches emphasises one particular aspect in the idea of hierarchy, while understating the others. In fact, the philosophical epistemological approach focuses on the concept of hierarchy as it is. The philosophical ontological approach primarily concerns the ideal realization of this principle in the celestial hierarchy. Whereas the liturgical mystical approach and the historical sociological approach are concerned with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the ascetic approach prefers to speak of the significance of the idea of hierarchy in the spiritual life of the person. Only the historical approach allows analysis of hierarchy as a metalanguage. Any metalanguage has a performative function, and therefore a certain goal is meant to be achieved by means of the text. Unless it is given within the text, to identify this goal is only possible through analysis of the historical context of the work. Approaches other than these confuse and merge the metalanguage of hierarchy with other theological languages, each in its own way.

1.3. Bulgakov's appropriation of the term 'hierarchy'

After dealing in previous sections with Dionysius' definition of hierarchy and its perception in medieval and modern thought, we will continue by looking at Bulgakov's understanding of this concept and its application in ecclesiastical and angelic hierarchies.

1.3.1. Ecclesiastical hierarchy

Bulgakov offers his theological comprehension of ecclesiastical hierarchy in several works dedicated to teachings on the Church.

The principle of hierarchy, according to him, is an intrinsic feature of any society that has a spiritual foundation and goal. Bulgakov links the idea of ecclesiastical hierarchy with that of the

body, referring to St Paul's epistle to the Corinthians (Chapter 12). He mentions that hierarchy does not deny but affirms and realises universal equality in natural and spiritual differences.¹³³

Although the influence of Dionysius on Bulgakov is without question, the latter introduces key new themes, not present in Dionysius, first and foremost the historically embedded nature of hierarchy.

'Hierarchy appears in history as it were spontaneously and, of course, in accordance with the spirit of the apostolic tradition and by no means against it, though there was a time when it did not exist'.¹³⁴

Bulgakov argues that it is impossible to demonstrate convincingly where, when and how the hierarchy was established in its current form of ranks of bishops, presbyters and deacons. Canon law enters into the life of the Church as the consequence of this establishment.

'Initially, the hierarchic principle, being of divine origin, would come to be spontaneously and indefinitely as enthusiastic inspiration and then it received a form of canonical statutes'.¹³⁵

What makes Bulgakov really close to Dionysius in respect to ecclesiastical hierarchy is that Bulgakov does not confine it only to the clergy. He highlights the mediating function of the hierarchy. The hierarchs are the mediators, the ministers of Christ who have received the Holy Spirit to preach and bestow it upon newly baptized or ordained members of the Church by performing mysteries.

'First of all, hierarchy is a Eucharistic establishment'.¹³⁶

In Bulgakov, as in Dionysius, the mysteries and rites are said to be the gifts of grace to the Church which have to be accepted and mediated by the hierarchy. Both theologians include lay people in the hierarchy. The laity rank in the ecclesiastical hierarchy as a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood' (1 Peter 2:9). The relation between the clergy and lay people is not that of subordination and domination but one of love. Bulgakov writes:

'The service of hierarchy is one of love. Love is the power of hierarchism'.¹³⁷

¹³³ Bulgakov (1965) *Pravoslavie*, 'O Tsetkovnoi ierarhii'.

¹³⁴ Bulgakov (1935) 'Ierarhia i tainstva', 26.

¹³⁵ Bulgakov (1935) 'Ierarhia i tainstva', 31.

¹³⁶ Bulgakov (1935) 'Ierarhia i tainstva', 32.

¹³⁷ Bulgakov (1935) 'Ierarhia i tainstva', 33.

Bulgakov does not refer to monastics but speaks of the laity as the ‘royal priesthood’, however, the general scheme of his vision of ecclesiastical hierarchy proves to be very much Dionysian.

Bulgakov further contrasts the modern understanding of hierarchy, itself associated with authority and power, with an understanding of hierarchy which ‘is rather function and ministry which exists in the Body of Christ along with other functions and ministries’.¹³⁸

Another point of convergence between Dionysius and Bulgakov is their reference to the symbolic being of the Church in the world.¹³⁹

Among the differences between their approach to Ecclesiastical hierarchy, apart from the already mentioned historicism, is the idea of conciliarism (‘sobornost’). Bulgakov maintains that hierarchy has a ‘conciliar nature’ which is itself revealed in a Eucharistic understanding.¹⁴⁰

Furthermore, despite the outlined historicism, Bulgakov points to the principle of hierarchy as the essence of the being of the Church.¹⁴¹

1.3.2. Hierarchy and angelic nature

Having looked at Bulgakov’s understanding of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, we now turn to his deliberations on hierarchy in the angelic world. Before approaching the idea of hierarchy, Bulgakov juxtaposes the human and angelic natures. The Bible says that man was created by God in His image and likeness. However, many theologians hold that the angels were also created in the image of God but in a different way, although we do not have any scriptural data on this matter.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Bulgakov (2002) *The Bride of the Lamb*, 303.

¹³⁹ Bulgakov (2002) *The Bride of the Lamb*, 296.

¹⁴⁰ Bulgakov (1935) ‘Ierarhia i tainstva’, 33; Bulgakov (2002) *The Bride of the Lamb*, 299.

¹⁴¹ ‘In fact, the Church is hierarchical all the way along, and the hierarchy is nothing but the organised manifestation of this hierarchicity (ierarkhichosti), which is the very being of the Church, and not only an establishment’.
Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 305.

¹⁴² Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 66; Cf. Thunberg (1965) *Microcosm and mediator: the theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 121-124.

Bulgakov considered the fullness of the image in humans to be the key point in distinguishing man from angel. ‘Nevertheless, the fundamental difference between human beings and angels consists in the fact that *only* human beings possess the *fullness* of the image of God. Not only does a human being bear the image of God in a hierarchical union with all other human beings, but every human being has this image in himself. Therefore, humankind is not an “assembly”, i.e. a hierarchical whole, but a “genus”, i.e., a multi-unity, where every member possesses ontological fullness. A clear proof of this is the Incarnation: in His single person the Lord could assume perfect humanity, in which the fullness is present corporeally. And every human being is deified in Him: For ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3, 28)’¹⁴³

Human nature can be perceived as one shared by all human hypostases. It can be found in every particular individual, but it is still the same nature which is based on oneness of being. Bulgakov argues that unity among the angels is of a different quality from that of human beings. According to him, angels possess the image of God but only altogether, namely in their hierarchies.

The unity in the angelic world is essentially hierarchical. As Bulgakov put it elsewhere:

‘The collectivity of the angelic world... is constructed... on the union of plurality which is preserved but not absorbed by it. Such a union in which difference is preserved can only be hierarchical, and we know that the angelic world consists of hierarchies in nine ranks’.¹⁴⁴

These last words, that ‘the angelic world ‘consists of hierarchies’, reveal Bulgakov’s fundamentally ontological approach. His reading of Dionysius is entirely conditioned by that fact.

‘According to him [Dionysius] nine ranks of angels exist, which are distinguished by their proximity to God and which hand down divine enlightenment and initiation into the divine mysteries from the highest to the lowest rank’.¹⁴⁵

The difference between the human and the angelic hierarchies is fundamental and lies in their different ontological status, and the concept of hierarchy appears to be ontologically rooted.

¹⁴³ Bulgakov (2003) *The friend of the Bridegroom: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner*, 166.

¹⁴⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 77.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

‘The foundation of hierarchic distinctions must be seen rather in an objectively ontological principle, namely in the individualization of angels, in the distinction of their Sophianic ideas, in their real dissimilarity one to the other, their non-oneness of being’.¹⁴⁶

1.3.3. *The Holy Trinity, Sophia, and hierarchy*

The creation of angels after the image of God is one of the accepted tenets in early Christian and patristic writings. However, there is no single opinion concerning the manner in which the image of the Holy Trinity is reflected in angels. Bulgakov mentions two main options in this regard. First, that every individual angel can bear the image of the Trinity. Alternatively, the entire angelic hierarchy as a whole may be created after the image of the Holy Trinity, and consequently some of the angelic ranks as well as individual angels would bear the image of particular Persons of the Trinity. Taking a clue from Dionysius, Bulgakov leans to the second option:

‘In the threefold triple hierarchy of the angelic ranks one can distinguish not only a triplicity of degrees according to the proximity to God, but also a triplicity of modes of their standing before the three persons of the Holy Trinity’.¹⁴⁷

According to this understanding, the highest hierarchy of angels is related to the hypostasis of the Father. The Father is the beginning both for the Son and for the Holy Spirit. The first hypostasis is therefore the most apophatic of all the divine hypostases and is not revealed immediately but through the mediation of the second and the third divine hypostases. Similarly, the highest rank of angels serves as the foundation of the angelic world abiding entirely in the presence of God, receiving immediately from Him the most secret and sacred knowledge. One can see how Bulgakov’s characteristic is close to the one given to the highest angelic rank in CH.¹⁴⁸ He writes:

‘If, according to the opinion of the Church’s teachers, there are angelic ranks which do not serve the world or humans, for their life consists entirely in standing before God, it is all the more appropriate to think this about the angels of the Father’s hypostasis, about those hypostatic movements of the Father’s Will, which is Goodness, about these substances of Love, who are mute in superabundance, wonderstruck over the fullness, growing faint in the blessedness of God’s Love!’¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 78.

¹⁴⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 80.

¹⁴⁸ CH 7, 2; PG 3, 208A-B.

¹⁴⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 81.

Apart from being a characteristic of the highest rank of angels, the passage above is a good example of Bulgakov's peculiar style, which he uses in *Jacob's Ladder*, his metaphorical language and personal engagement which is witnessed by the exclamation mark at the end of the sentence. The citation also concisely demonstrates Bulgakov's theological method: to build upon 'the opinion of the Church's teachers'. Finally, it is noteworthy which additional expressions are employed by Bulgakov here to designate angels. He calls them the 'hypostatic movements of the Father's Will' and the 'substances of Love'. Both expressions are highly significant for Bulgakov's angelology and point to his understanding of the angelic nature.¹⁵⁰ He first speaks about angels as hypostases performing the will of God. It does not make much sense to speak about hypostases without connection with nature, as hypostasis is a philosophical notion designed to designate the individual in general. Bulgakov elsewhere suggests that the angelic nature is so transparent that it is just totally replaced by Divine energies and angels, therefore, can be said to be created hypostases which manifest uncreated Divine Will.¹⁵¹ This understanding can be said to be very close to the Thomistic idea of angels as pure forms.¹⁵² The naming of the angels as 'substances' in the second expression echoes Dionysius' usage of the term οὐσία.¹⁵³

The angels of the second hypostasis are called 'minds'. This very Dionysian term is applied to the angels who bear the seal of the Son or the Logos. Bulgakov links this hierarchy with the idea of creation:

'These are the noetic powers of cosmourgic service corresponding to the cosmourgic character of the Second hypostasis. They press themselves close to the world and penetrate it, as its ideal foundation, ideas and forms. Their interior hierarchy is the hierarchy of world ideas, the ideal structure of the world, or more correctly the contrary: the world in its constitution carries the form of the hierarchy of the angels of the Word'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter 5 'Bulgakov on the nature of angels'

¹⁵¹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 74: 'Humanity lives its own proper life and in its own proper world even when God will be all in all. Angels do not have in this sense their own proper nature and their own world. Because their nature is perfectly transparent to God, theophanies can also occur as angelophanies'.

¹⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, 1a, 50, 2.

¹⁵³ See Chapter 4.2. of this thesis

¹⁵⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 83.

The angels of the Logos reflect God's idea about the created world. They constitute as it were the ideal scheme of being. Bulgakov refers to the Platonic world of ideas in this respect. He claims that Plato's teaching can be seen as orthodox in a traditional Christian sense when applied to Divine Sophia and not to the Godhead as Plato taught.

Perhaps, by assigning different names to the angelic hierarchies Bulgakov wanted to emphasise their ontological difference. A peculiar name was given by him to the angels of the third hypostasis. Bulgakov calls them the 'blessed spirit-souls' pointing to their role in the actual being of creation – life in its different forms. However, it is not just any life which can be observed in our fallen world, but life enlightened, which acquired its ideal meaning. In this way Bulgakov comes to the ideas of perfection and beauty.

'The angels of the Holy Spirit are servants of Beauty, which lives in them prior to its appearance on earth'.¹⁵⁵ The theme of beauty (διακόσμησιν) is essential for Dionysius' definition of hierarchy in CH 3.¹⁵⁶ One might assume that Bulgakov's discussion of the ideas of perfection and beauty in the context of the angelic hierarchy is influenced by Dionysius.¹⁵⁷

Before summing up this chapter one should answer a fundamental question: Is it legitimate within the Christian Trinitarian doctrine to build such constructions and to speak about creation after the image of one particular Trinitarian Person and not the entire Trinity?

In order to support his right to do so, Bulgakov makes a reference to iconography and particularly to the famous icon of the Holy Trinity of the venerable fifteenth-century iconographer Andrei Rublev. The icon depicts three angels at a table by the oak of Mamre (cf.

¹⁵⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 84.

¹⁵⁶ CH, 3, 2; PG 3, 165B.

¹⁵⁷ For immediate contemporary sources for Bulgakov's nomenclature for the celestial hierarchy, see first and foremost Soloviev. He, in turn, draws on Schelling's *Potenzenlehre*, applying it to a 'divine world' unified by the active divine principle of unity, the direct manifestation of the Deity, which is the Logos. In his *Chtenia o Bogochelovechestve*, 7: 116-117, Solov'ev differentiates the divine world into three spheres of what he calls substantial ideas, forces or potencies. The first sphere is pure spirits abiding in the bosom of the Father undifferentiated by the Logos from the Father's all-one will and so identified with the will or the moral principle (the good). The second sphere is minds in an ideal unity with the Logos, forming a pleroma of divine determinate ideas in an ideal cosmos. It is only the last sphere, however, that has 'real particularity' (Ibid. 9:137). This last sphere is the sphere of divine creation and is thus identified with the content of feeling or the aesthetic principle (beauty). There each mind is an independent and living entity/soul and can act freely upon the divine principle as it shapes its own form in autonomy (Ibid. 9:137). See: Soloviev (1944) *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 170.

Gen. 18:2) symbolizing the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. Bulgakov argues that each of the three angels represents a distinct hypostasis, ‘each imprinted with it’.¹⁵⁸

However, a case can be made that, on the contrary, it is impossible to tell and show definitely which hypostasis is represented by which angel on the icon. It can be argued that it is here that the genius of Rublev is manifested: he managed to reflect through this ambivalence the concept of perichoresis, which denotes the mutual penetration and indwelling of the divine Persons in the Trinity. In the light of this concept, the question of the angelic representation of the Persons of the Trinity and, more generally, which bears the image of a particular Person becomes quite problematic.

Expressed in terms of philosophy, the idea of Sophia can be paralleled with the notion of substance.¹⁵⁹ As has already been previously shown, Bulgakov claims that there is no ontological distinction among humans as there is only one human nature, whereas angelic hierarchies comprise angels which are ontologically different. This ontological distinction expressed in hierarchies is rooted in creation, understood as the Created Sophia, and therefore ultimately in its foundation which is the Divine Wisdom – Sophia.

‘The uncreated world, Divine Sophia, the Divine All, Chastity and Wholeness, contains the spiritual organism of the ideas, of the prototypes of creation in general and of the angelic world in particular. These ideas, which in their spiritual articulation form a divine unity, when disclosed in a creaturely fashion are a hierarchical whole, a cosmos in which every creative idea, the seed of being, has a definite place, indispensable and irreplaceable for the whole, and in this sense, they are equally worthy and yet special, hierarchically determined’.¹⁶⁰

This text emphasizes the centrality of Bulgakov’s conception of the hierarchy: it permeates the notion of the Divine Sophia through and through. The Divine Sophia is ‘a hierarchical whole’ which contains ‘the prototypes of creation in general’. One can say that the Divine Sophia from the beginning bears the seal of hierarchy. This is especially the case as the Divine

¹⁵⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 80.

¹⁵⁹ Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology: Modern Russian Religious Consciousness and Sergey Bulgakov's Critical Appropriation of German Idealism*, 8: ‘Although Sophia received divinity from God, Sophia is not God but the divine substance resting at the first order of the created universe. In this way Sophia functions for Bulgakov in a similar manner that *natura sive substantia* functioned for the rationalist philosophy of Benedict Spinoza’.

¹⁶⁰ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 78.

Sophia is the protoimage (*нервообраз*) and this is reflected in the creation, or the created Sophia headed by man who contains the divine image (*образ*).

Chapter 1: Conclusion

The definition of hierarchy is found in CH 3 as a particular kind of *knowledge*, *activity*, and *order*. Some of the analysed modern approaches appear to be concerned with a particular aspect of this definition, namely the philosophical approach - with *knowledge*, the liturgical one - with *activity*, and the sociological one - with *order*. It is also possible to argue that these three approaches try to objectify hierarchy, whereas the ascetic approach is more focused on the subject. The ascetic approach therefore appears to be the most synthetic: *knowledge*, *activity*, and *order* are synthesized in the subject. If hierarchy is a metalanguage in Dionysius, then what could be the purpose of the introduction of this metalanguage? The purpose can be only performative – the upbringing of the monks. The introduction of a new metalanguage is always connected with the performative function of this metalanguage.¹⁶¹

This chapter has shown that the epistemological status of the concept of hierarchy is different in Dionysius from that in Bulgakov. Whereas in Dionysius hierarchy is a metalanguage and the most foundational concept in his cataphatic theology, Bulgakov devaluates its significance to an explanatory principle, which is subordinated to the concept of Sophia.

As he discusses hierarchy, Bulgakov focuses on its two aspects: ecclesiastical and angelic. While Soloviev and Schelling are clearly among his more contemporary influences, it is Dionysius that is Bulgakov's fundamental direct inspiration. He makes explicit references to both EH and CH. Yet the way he develops his conception of hierarchy differs from that of Dionysius. In contrast to Dionysius' approach, Bulgakov's take on hierarchy exemplifies what can be called the ontological approach to the idea of hierarchy. We have seen how Bulgakov's

¹⁶¹ Cf. Hjelmslev (1961) *Prolegomena to a theory of language*, 120.

use of such expressions as ‘hierarchical structure’, ‘natural hierarchy’, ‘cosmic hierarchy’ indicates the ontological status of hierarchy in Bulgakov’s thought. The idea of hierarchy, therefore, is a key for Bulgakov, as according to him the fundamental concept of Sophia is also hierarchical. In order to understand how Sophia can be hierarchical, we will look at Bulgakov’s sophiology in greater detail, in the following two chapters.

Chapter 2. Sophia as a metalanguage in Bulgakov

2.1. Why was Sophia necessary for Bulgakov? Sophia in Russian culture at the beginning of the 20th century

It is quite natural to begin this chapter on sophiology with a question. In fact, there are many questions which have been posed by Bulgakov's sophiology, perhaps more questions than answers. However, there is a fundamental one which questions the necessity for the whole enterprise of sophiology. Indeed, how did it happen that the concept of Sophia, which had always been rather a peripheral issue in Christian thought, suddenly became a focal point of theology for some authors in the 20th century? Was it a result of sheer caprice, as Father Alexander Schmemmann expressively writes in his diaries?

'I continue reading the issue of *Vestnik* about Father Seergii Bulgakov. This is still a "capricious" theology, very personal and in some sense "emotional". That is why it is unlikely that it will have any future. It seems we can say this about almost all "Russian religious thought"... I want and I will impose "Sophia" on Orthodoxy, I will show them what they believe in. But no, they did not impose... because *we do not need her*...' ¹⁶²

In this case, Sophia is seen as coming from someone's personal experience. Schmemmann does not question that experience itself, he does not deny the possibility of the necessity of Sophia for some particular persons or for Bulgakov himself. But *we do not need* Sophia; the Church can do without her. Other opponents of Bulgakov argue that Sophia is a temptation, a captivity of philosophical and theological thought by the mythological way of thinking.¹⁶³ This critical approach is supposed to demonstrate the immaturity of Russian thinkers, their incapability of understanding either philosophy or theology in depth. In both cases, Bulgakov's Sophia is understood by his opponents as being unnecessary for Christian theology. Some of Bulgakov's sympathisers found his sophiology 'an unnecessary hypothesis' too.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Schmemmann (2005) *Dnevniki. 1973-1983*, 527. (Cf. Vaganova (2011) *Sophiologia protoiereya Sergia Bulgakova*, 11)

¹⁶³ Saprionov (2001) 'Russkaya religiozno-filosofskaya mysl i sovremennost' (Russian religious philosophical thought and modernity), 165.

¹⁶⁴ Geffert (2004) 'Sergii Bulgakov, the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, Intercommunion and Sofiology', 126.

Bulgakov was aware of this opinion and tried to counter such criticisms in his work. In fact, he gave a detailed answer in *Sophia The Wisdom of God. An Outline of Sophiology*, published in English in 1937. This does not mean that Bulgakov's opponents did not read him carefully (although sometimes this was the case). It seems, however, more important that the question of the necessity of sophiology ultimately concerns the nature of theology and the understanding of the task of the theologian. Bulgakov wrote in relation to sophiology:

‘Our own particular time with its special revelations and destiny has a peculiar call to this task’.¹⁶⁵

In other words, the necessity of sophiology is conditioned by the main cultural themes of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in Russia. Consequently, in order to assess the necessity of sophiology one has to turn to an analysis of those themes. In the above-mentioned publication Bulgakov says that the most prominent religious thinkers in Russia in the 19th century were mainly concerned with the religious meaning of history, creativity, and culture.¹⁶⁶ He refers in the first place to the creative search of Gogol, Bukharev, and Dostoevsky with his ‘profound feeling for “mother earth”, for the cosmic aspect of the Church, together with the anthropological revelation found in the Church, and a vivid apocalyptic interpretation of history’.¹⁶⁷ Among the first-rank poets of the time, Bulgakov mentions Tiutchev, Fiet and Baratinsky as those who paved the way to the formulations of sophiology in the theology and poetry of Vladimir Soloviev. Sophianic and sophiological themes in Russian poetry and literature have been recently elaborated in Russia by a number of authors.¹⁶⁸ This very recent line of research not only confirms but also develops Bulgakov's intuitions, referring to sophiological themes in the works of many Russian writers and poets.

¹⁶⁵ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, 5.

¹⁶⁶ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, 7.

¹⁶⁷ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, 8.

¹⁶⁸ Krokhnina (2011) *Sofynost i ejo konnotatsii v russkoy literature XIX – nachala XX vekov (poetika vseidinstva)* [Sofianity and its connotations in Russian literature in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries (the poetics of all-unity)]; Monina (2004) *Idea Sofii v russkoy poezii: filosofsko-kulturologichesky analiz* [The idea of Sophia in Russian poetry: Philosophical and culturological analysis]; Shirshova (2004) *Poeticheskaya sofologia F.I. Tiutcheva* [The Poetical Sophiology of F.I. Tiutchev].

Soloviev gave a philosophical and theological formulation of the Wisdom of God, introducing sophiology as we know it in the Russian context. Soloviev was one of the key figures in the Russian Silver Age, and had a profound influence on the whole subsequent generation of poets and philosophers.¹⁶⁹ Although Soloviev's influence on Bulgakov in general is beyond any doubt and is recognised by Bulgakov himself, most of the authors do not speak about the direct influence of Soloviev's sophiology on him.¹⁷⁰ In the previous chapter we have seen an example of this influence, but more often it makes sense to speak of Bulgakov's polemics with Soloviev, rather than influence. What I want to emphasise here is that, through Soloviev, Sophia became one of the main cultural themes in Russia at the very beginning of the 20th century. However, his Sophia was not purely Christian. According to Bulgakov, Soloviev's doctrine of Sophia is decisively syncretistic, being 'far from the Orthodox conception of Sophia'.¹⁷¹ This was precisely the task which Bulgakov reserved for himself: to formulate and elaborate on 'the Orthodox conception of Sophia'.

Bulgakov points out that it was Florenskii who first 'puts the problem of sophiology in an absolutely Orthodox setting'. Indeed, Florenskii's main sophiological work *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914) was defended as his Master's thesis at the Moscow Theological Academy, where he later became a tutor. By that time, the idea of Sophia was very much in the air, and no less than through the poetical works of such poets-symbolists as Alexander Blok, Andrey Bely and Sergey Soloviev, Vladimir Soloviev's nephew.¹⁷² The poetical appropriations of Sophia were often closer to paganism and Gnosticism than to Christianity. Which is why, when Florenskii's theological interpretation appeared, as Bulgakov notes, it 'produced a profound impression in Russian theological thought and led to much discussion'.¹⁷³ These

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Rylkova (2007) *The Archaeology of Anxiety: The Russian Silver Age and Its Legacy*, 190.

¹⁷⁰ 'I regard Soloviev as having been my philosophical "guide to Christ"' (Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, 10); cf. Vaganova (2011) *Sophiologia protoiereya Sergia Bulgakova*, 260-2.

¹⁷¹ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, 9.

¹⁷² Gaidenko (2001) *Vladimir Soloviev i filozofia Serebrianoogo veka* [Vladimir Soloviev and the philosophy of the Silver Age], 356-383.

¹⁷³ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, 11; cf. N. Lossky (1952) *History of Russian Philosophy*, 176-177.

discussions, inspired Florenskii's book, resulted in the foundation of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sophia. In fact, there were three Brotherhoods of the Holy Sophia. The most renowned and lasting was created by Bulgakov in Prague in 1923 and in 1925 moved to Paris. Among its members were famous Russian thinkers: N. Berdyaev, G. Florovsky, V. Zenkovsky, A. Elchaninov, L. Zander, A. Kartashev, I. Lagovsky (now canonised in the Constantinople Patriarchate), P. Struve, S. Chetverikov, N. Afanasiev and others.¹⁷⁴ But, before this, some were already members of an earlier Brotherhood of the Holy Sophia, created in Petrograd in 1918.¹⁷⁵ The foundation of this Brotherhood was blessed and supported by the Patriarch of Moscow. However, the very first attempt to create the Brotherhood of the Holy Sophia goes back to 1915. Apparently, at that time the idea received no support from the Holy Synod, and its opening was postponed.¹⁷⁶ It is very likely that the patriotic and nationalistic enthusiasm of the first stage (1914/1915) of World War I, along with the publication of Florenskii's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914), contributed significantly to the decision to form the Brotherhood of the Holy Sophia. For example, in 1914 E. Trubetsky gave a talk '*The national question, Constantinople and the Hagia Sophia*' in which he presented religious arguments to substantiate the necessity of the military annexation of Istanbul (Constantinople) with its former main cathedral – the Hagia Sophia.¹⁷⁷

In those years, just before and during the war, Bulgakov started working on his first sophiological books. Bearing in mind the historical and cultural situation where the concept of Sophia comes to the fore, it seems quite logical for Bulgakov to continue developing Florenskii's project of bringing Sophia into an Orthodox setting, and through this intellectual enterprise to

¹⁷⁴ *Bratstvo Svyatoi Sofii. Materialy i dokumenty 1923-1939*. [The Brotherhood of the Holy Sophia. Materials and documents 1923-1939], 2000; Nakonechnaya, *Tri bratstva sviatoy Sofii* [Three brotherhoods of the Holy Sophia] (<http://psmb.ru/community/article/tri-bratstva-svjatoi-sofii-5606/> accessed on 25.06.2015)

¹⁷⁵ Gollerbakh (2000) *K nezrimomu Gradu: Religiozno-filosofskaya grupa Put' (1910-1919) v poiskah novoy russkoy identichnosti* [Towards the invisible City: The religious and philosophical group of Put (1910-1919) in the search for a new Russian identity], 411.

¹⁷⁶ Nakonechnaya, *Tri bratstva sviatoy Sofii* [Three brotherhoods of the Holy Sophia] (<http://psmb.ru/community/article/tri-bratstva-svjatoi-sofii-5606/> accessed on 25.06.2015)

¹⁷⁷ Gollerbakh (2000) *K nezrimomu Gradu: Religiozno-filosofskaya grupa Put' (1910-1919) v poiskah novoy russkoy identichnosti*, 250.

build bridges between the *intelligentsia* (or the people of secularised culture) and the Church.

This understanding of the task of a theologian fully corresponds to Bulgakov's own words:

‘Sophiology represents a theological or, if you prefer, a dogmatic, interpretation of the world within Christianity’.¹⁷⁸

2.2. The development of the concept of Sophia in Bulgakov's theological works

The idea of Sophia is crucial for our study of Bulgakov. It is not only the essence of his theology, which runs like a golden thread through all his major works, but is also a concept which reflects his deeply personal religious, aesthetic and liturgical experience.¹⁷⁹ Sophia can be said to be a sort of theological intuition rather than a solid concept.

In a very general sense, the concept of Sophia or Divine Wisdom speaks about the relationship between God and creation. It is an attempt to grasp and articulate, theologically and philosophically, how the absolutely inconceivable and transcendent God relates to the world created *ex nihilo*. Bulgakov argued that, although creation and the Creator have very different ontological statuses, the world due to the simple fact of being created is ontologically rooted in its Creator. The idea of creation and its goodness belongs eternally to God's Wisdom. Creation was not a play of chance but the realization of God's Providence or Divine Economy. At the same time, we are bestowed with the capacity to be partakers of Divine Wisdom through our created wisdom. To be partakers of the Divine Wisdom is our eternal longing, which is manifested in the Incarnation of the Logos and in the life of the Church. To Bulgakov, this is our hope and expectation in the eschatological perspective of theosis.

One of the difficulties for Bulgakov scholars is that his theological views evolved significantly during his lifetime. This concerns in the first place his formulations of the hypostasis of Sophia.

¹⁷⁸ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, 13.

¹⁷⁹ Bulgakov (1976) ‘Hagia Sophia’ in *A Bulgakov anthology*; Louth (1999) ‘Wisdom and the Russians: The Sophiology of Fr Sergei Bulgakov’, 177-9.

In *The Philosophy of Economy* (1912) Bulgakov tried to construct a Sophiological metaphysics of economic life. In this work Bulgakov extensively draws on various of Schelling's ideas in a bid to overcome his own Marxist-Hegelian heritage. Marx suggests a mechanistic view of human society and lacks the idea of the person. By contrast, Schelling was seen in nineteenth-century Russia as putting forward a picture of nature as 'alive', where cosmology itself is 'personalised'. Schelling is especially helpful in constructing the vision of nature as beautiful, *aesthetical*, as a temple, where the concept of art is applicable. In this way, Schelling's holistic vision and his thoughts on Sophia in particular became significant not only for philosophers or religious thinkers, but also in the wider Russian cultural context. The integral function of Sophia makes it one of the more noticeable symbols of the Silver Age and the epitome of the Russian Religious Renaissance of the twentieth century.¹⁸⁰

In his early theological work, *The Unfading Light* (1917), Bulgakov calls Sophia 'a fourth hypostasis':

'And as the love of Love and the love for Love, Sophia possesses personhood and countenance, is a subject, a person or, let us say it with theological terminology, a hypostasis; of course she is different from the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity, and is a special hypostasis, of a different order, a fourth hypostasis. She does not participate in the inner-divine life, she is not God, and that is why she does not convert the trihypostaseity into a tetrehypostaseity, the trinity into quaternity. But she is the beginning of a new, creaturely multi-hypostaseity, for after her follow many hypostases (people and angels) which are found in a sophianic relation to the Divinity.'¹⁸¹

These formulations, as well as Bulgakov's naming of Sophia as the Soul of the world, were criticised by E. Trubetskoy in his *The Meaning of Life* (1918). He accuses Bulgakov's 'gnostic way of thinking about Sophia' and does not accept the idea of doubling her.¹⁸² According to Trubetskoy, Sophia can only be divine, as one of God's qualities. She acts within the world but is never associated with it, being always separate from created reality. The understanding of Sophia as a fourth hypostasis was also attacked by Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, the head of the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in exile, who in 1924 published an article in the newspaper *Novoe Vremya*. Khrapovitsky called sophiology 'a very

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Zernov (1963) *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, 283-308.

¹⁸¹ Bulgakov (2012) *The Unfading Light*, 217; cf. Florenskii (1997) *Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 235.

¹⁸² Trubetskoy (1922) *Smysl Zhizni*, 128-129.

dangerous trend' in Russian theology, which could result in a heresy through the introduction of the fourth hypostasis in the Holy Trinity. Bulgakov reacted immediately, publishing his response in another newspaper, where he confessed his Orthodoxy and refuted the idea of 'the fourth hypostasis'. Metropolitan Anthony accepted his confession and apologised for the harsh style of his article. In the following year, Bulgakov's essay *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity* (1925) was meant to be the explanation and interpretation of these controversial sophiological formulations. First, he refuses to accept Sophia as a fourth hypostasis or even a hypostasis at all. Bulgakov then introduces the notion of hypostaticity (*ипостасность*) which is, as it were, a new mode of being in the realm of the spirit.

'Sophia cannot have her own hypostasis, since that would mean her self-existent existence, similar to that of the three hypostases, and would introduce into the Trinity a quaternity. But this denial of a hypostasis to Sophia does not yet mean a rejection of *hypostaticity* in her and the reduction of Sophia to an allegory or attribute of the Godhead, to a "property" instead of a living reality. The concept of *hypostaticity*, which is being introduced here, equally differs from both *hypostasis* and from *unhypostaticity*, which is characteristic of everything non-existent in itself, i.e., the dead or abstract. Thus in the realm of the spirit, along with the hypostasis and its nature, is determined still one more possible state—hypostaticity. This is the capacity to hypostasize oneself [*ипостасироваться*], to belong to a hypostasis, to be its disclosure, to give oneself up to it. This is the special hypostatic state, not through one's own, but through another hypostasis, hypostasization through self-surrender.'¹⁸³

Having started from a definition of Sophia in terms of the category of the person, Bulgakov comes to a not exactly personalistic notion. He dismisses any personal character of Sophia but holds that she is a living reality which belongs to the realm of the spirit. Bulgakov opposes the realm of the spirit as something alive and really existent to that which is dead and abstract. In this regard, one might recall the medieval argument between realists and nominalists. Some of the modern researchers call Bulgakov a 'metaphysical realist' and even an 'ultra-realist'.¹⁸⁴ However, Bulgakov himself argues that his position is above the argument and that 'it is possible to reconcile the antithesis between nominalism and realism in the sense of joining both, for the concepts are simultaneously *realia* and *nomina*, albeit in a different degree and

¹⁸³ Bulgakov (2005) 'Hypostasis and Hypostaticity', 28; Cf.: 'There is spirit, as hypostasis, having its nature, and there is hypostaticity, hypostasizing itself around that hypostasis as its content' (Ibid., 30).

¹⁸⁴ Gavriilyuk (2014) *Georges Florovsky and the Russian religious renaissance*, 118; cf. *Correlating Sobornost: Conversations Between Karl Barth and the Russian Orthodox Tradition* (2016), 87.

intensity.¹⁸⁵ The understanding of the concept of hypostaticity as a capacity to belong to a hypostasis can be approached through the example of art, which is the manifestation of the personal in human culture. A piece of art is not a hypostasis, but it has a capacity to influence hypostases and even to form personality, and therefore it belongs to the realm of the spirit. It is in this light that one can read the following passage:

‘Sophia as the object of the love of God, as the Glory of God or his revelation, is necessarily a living intelligent reality, since God does not love illusory abstractness and deadness, all that is concrete, worthy of love is alive, has the power of life, receiving it from the life-giving Holy Spirit.’¹⁸⁶

This contributes to the complexity of the concept of Sophia. Bulgakov draws on the ideas of Palamas and explicitly refers to his teaching about the divine energies.¹⁸⁷ In *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity*, from his earlier period, he does not directly link the concepts of the divine energies and Sophia but certainly these can be said to be very close indeed.¹⁸⁸

‘...The Wisdom of God, Sophia, is the revelation of the transcendental substance of God. And, as in the teaching of St Gregory Palamas, the divine energies are not ascribed exclusively to only one of the divine hypostases, but reveal the whole of the Holy Trinity as well as each of the hypostases according to its eternal qualities, likewise Sophia, as the Glory of God, corresponds not only to the Second Hypostasis alone as its personal quality, but is found in the possession of the whole Holy Trinity and consequently of each of the hypostases.’¹⁸⁹

According to St Gregory, the Divine Wisdom which is revealed should be considered as one of the uncreated divine energies as opposed to the transcendental substance of God.

Bulgakov was accused of reading the Divine Sophia in the Gnostic way, when she becomes a mediating reality. One might ask what is the difference, if there is any, between the mediation in Gnostic and in Bulgakov’s Sophia? In Gnosticism, the mediation has an ontological character – mediation between different kinds of beings, whereas in Bulgakov the mediation is between hypostases: either between the uncreated Hypostases of God and the created human hypostases (created Sophia in nature) or between the human persons (created Sophia in art).

¹⁸⁵ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 226.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸⁷ Palamas’ divine energies: See Gregory Palamas, *150 Chapters* (Toronto, 1988), §§132-145, 237-251 [PG 150, 1214A-1222C].

¹⁸⁸ From at least 1933 onwards, Bulgakov identifies the created Sophia with the divine energies, but he also identifies the divine Sophia with *Ousia* and sometimes the created Sophia with creation as such. See Bulgakov, *Agnets Bozhii* (1933) 144n [*The Lamb of God*, 122n] and *Nevesta Agntsa* (1945), 72; *The Bride of the Lamb*, 63.

¹⁸⁹ Bulgakov (2005) *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity*, 24.

Further development of Bulgakov's thought about Sophia can be found in the *The Lamb of God* (1933). Sophia is here even more depersonalised and directly associated with the Divine Essence – Ousia. In one of his later works Bulgakov mentions that it is even possible to fuse the terms Sophia, Ousia and Glory in order to simplify the use of these terms. Therefore, Sophia is Ousia and is called in some places Sophia-Ousia.¹⁹⁰ On the one hand, one can infer from this a divergence of Bulgakov's thought from the ideas of Palamas, as the latter would differentiate between the notions of Ousia and the divine energies. On the other hand, however, Bulgakov speaks here about the revealed, rather than the transcendent Ousia, which makes his concept quasi-identical with that of Palamas' divine energy.

The above-mentioned article by Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky was not the only critical publication directed against Bulgakov's theology which appeared in the 1920s. One can mention articles written by the now canonized hieromonk John (Maksimovich) in which he critically assessed the then newly published *The Burning Bush* and *The Friend of the Bridegroom*, also critical publications by Archbishop Seraphim Sobolev (1935), Y. Grabbe (1927), N. Arseniev, V. Lossky, as well as the documents produced by the bishops and commissions in all three jurisdictions of the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁹¹

Even from our brief overview one can see how the ontological status of Sophia was being changed by Bulgakov from one publication to another. This fact returns us to Bulgakov's reflection on the main issue of the whole enterprise of sophiology, which he links with the task of a theologian and – more broadly – with the nature of the Christian vocation:

'The real point at issue is that of the Christian vocation as it is related to the very nature of Christianity; it is the problem of a dogmatic *metanoia*, nothing less than a change and a renewal of human hearts. The doctrine of divine Sophia has nothing to do with putting forward any new dogma, and certainly cannot be described as a new heresy within Christianity, although such is the attitude adopted by

¹⁹⁰ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, the Wisdom of God*, 33.

¹⁹¹ Maximovich (1928) 'Pochitanie Bogoroditsy i Ioanna Krestitelia i novoe napravlenie russkoi religiozno-filosofskoi mysli'; Archbishop Seraphim (1993) *Novoe uchenie o Sofii, Premudrosti Bozhiey*; Grabbe (1927) *Korni tserkovnoi smuty. Parizhskoe bratstvo Sviatoy Sofii i rozenkreitsery*; Arseniev (1936) *Mudrovaniye v bogoslovii? Sofiologia o. Bulgakova*; 'Ukaz Moskovskoy Patriarkhii preosviaschennomu mitropolitu Litovskomu i Vilenskomu Elevferiyu', see *O Sofii Premudrosti Bozhiey* (1935), 5-19; 'The Act of the Meeting of the Bishops of the Orthodox Russian Churches in Western Europe of November 26, 27 and 29, 1937, who considered the theological opinions of Prof. S. N. Bulgakov on Holy Sophia, the Wisdom of God', see *Appendix* in Eikalovich (1980) *Delo prot. Sergia Bulgakova. Istoricheskaya kanva spora o Sofii*.

certain “guardians” of the faith, who see in complete stagnation the only guarantee of a true faith and dread all new ideas accordingly’.¹⁹²

Bulgakov insists that sophiology is by no means something new in Christianity. On the contrary, he speaks elsewhere about the reinstating of the broken tradition of the Church which he calls the ‘dogmatic *metanoia*’. In this way Christianity can become relevant in modern cultural society. However, our acceptance of his arguments depends on our understanding of Bulgakov’s theological method.

2.3. Discussion concerning Bulgakov’s method

In this subchapter, I will discuss different approaches to Bulgakov’s theological method. All approaches are systematised in three large groups. The first is titled ‘The styles of thought’ and is concerned with such problems as the relationship of philosophy and theology in Bulgakov’s works, as well as his use of poetry and myth. The second group will deal with the sources of Bulgakov’s thought. Specifically, I will look at the intuitivist and liturgical approaches. In the third group I will concentrate on the logical foundations of Bulgakov’s works such as his method of antinomies, exegetical approach, performative approach to Bulgakov; finally, I will expound my own approach to Bulgakov’s Sophia as a metalanguage.

2.3.1. *Style of thought: theology, philosophy or mythology?*

One can argue that there were three main stages in Bulgakov’s personal development – economic (or materialist Marxist), philosophical, and theological.¹⁹³ All his works can thus be divided into three categories: economic, primarily philosophical, and primarily theological. However, this approach rather oversimplifies the problem. Indeed, Bulgakov considered himself

¹⁹² Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, the Wisdom of God*, 13.

¹⁹³ Cf. Zander (1948) *Bog i mir*, Vol. I, 27-28; Reznichenko (2003) “‘Ya”. K metafizike subiekta S.N. Bulgakova v rabotakh 20-h godov’, 219, 240.

to be a theologian, whereas his at one time spiritual son and disciple – and later his opponent and critic – George Florovsky, referred to him long after his death as ‘a Christian philosopher, rather than a theologian’.¹⁹⁴

In order to elucidate Bulgakov’s position, let us look at his preface to *The Tragedy of Philosophy* (1927). He writes:

‘Although this work appears to be a sort of summing-up in the field of philosophy judging from its content... its inner guiding question... is about the nature of the relationship between philosophy and theology, or the religious-intuitive origins of *any* philosophising’.¹⁹⁵

Basically, Bulgakov is saying that, while he is focusing on philosophy in his book, he is at the same time – and less evidently – performing theological tasks. We can see from these words that the theological gist of the book is more important for Bulgakov than its philosophical content. He does not reject philosophy, but he claims that theology is a more fundamental reality upon which philosophy can only be constructed. Even more, he opines a little further on:

‘The history of modern philosophy can be seen in its genuine religious nature as Christian heresiology and the tragedy of thought’.¹⁹⁶

For Bulgakov any philosophy appears to be theology in the final analysis, and, in a way, philosophy can be said to be a part of theology. He tries to substantiate that theology constitutes the essence of philosophy. Philosophy operates with human thought, which is expressed in the form of judgement, and the nature of judgement is mysterious as it is connected with human hypostasis and has a triune structure, which Bulgakov attempts to demonstrate. In fact, Bulgakov’s ideas are close to Gilson’s thoughts in respect to the indispensable presence of nonrational elements in every philosopher’s reasoning.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Zaviysky (2011) *Shaping modern Russian Orthodox Trinitarian theology: a critical study of Sergii Bulgakov with reference to Vladimir Lossky and Georgii Florovsky*, 257.

¹⁹⁵ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 311.

¹⁹⁶ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 311. Hadot argues that Bulgakov inherited both the definition of heresy and more broadly his ‘heresiological approach’ from Schelling. Cf. Hadot (1957) ‘La philosophie comme hérésie trinitaire – A propos du livre de Serge Boulgakov : «La tragédie de la philosophie»», 247-249.

¹⁹⁷ Gilson argues that every philosopher’s reasoning coexists with something nonrational. The Christian philosopher is “convinced of the rational fertility of his faith and . . . sure that this fertility is inexhaustible.” In short, philosophy requires the positive influence of faith and therefore it simply ought to be Christian. (See Sadler (2011) *Reason fulfilled by revelation: the 1930s Christian philosophy debates in France*, 54)

This fusion between philosophy and theology in Bulgakov's thought has provoked almost opposite assessments by modern authors. For instance, J. Milbank comments on 'the integral links between theological and philosophical discourse' in Russian religious thought. It was possible for the Russian 'religious philosophers in the nineteenth century to resume a mode of thought in which the philosophical and the theological were seamlessly fused', apparently seen as its great advantage. Milbank further notes that 'greater rooting in ancient Christian tradition also allowed the Russians to respond to post-Kantian German thought in a manner not only significantly different from that of the Western Europeans, but also, arguably, more attentive to the deep character of German idealism'.¹⁹⁸

By contrast, modern Russian philosopher O. Ivanov argues that the symmetry construed by Bulgakov is a very dangerous move because it turns the three-hypostaseity of God into a 'formula' or 'theorem' for perceiving human nature. However, this kind of 'neutral' threeness also allows one to argue from the opposite end, as was done by Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), i.e. to 'explain' religion, and therefore the dogmas on the assumption of human nature as 'inseparable and unconfused', which can be identified without the dogma. It means the loss of any theological perspective for philosophy, because in this case 'it finds itself entirely within its own boundaries, making theological meanings its own. At the same time, philosophy leaves its own territory because it does not know its boundaries anymore'.¹⁹⁹ Ivanov contends that philosophy has to be independent from theology in order to avoid any kind of confusion and inconsistency; however, philosophy has to be also considered from a theological perspective. Only in maintaining the theological perspective can philosophy be given an opportunity to fully realise its own boundaries.

Apparently, Bulgakov does not speak about independent philosophy in the perspective of theology. Again, for him any philosophy from the beginning appears to be (good or bad) theology. According to Bulgakov, systematic thinking is an intrinsic feature of human reason.

¹⁹⁸ Milbank (2009) 'Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon', 45.

¹⁹⁹ Ivanov (1999) *Metaphizika v bogoslovskoy perspective*, 14.

Any genuine thinker inevitably creates a system. However, no philosophical system can ever be complete. And herein lies the tragedy of any philosophy which does not recognise its theological foundations, and which wants to eliminate the antinomies of reason.

As has already been mentioned, Florovsky did not consider Bulgakov to be a theologian in the proper sense of the word. The reason for this can be seen in their different understanding of the relation between theology and philosophy. Zaviyskiy points to the ‘silent’ argument between Bulgakov and Florovsky on the matter of the place and role of philosophy in theology.²⁰⁰

In fact, Florovsky maintained that Christianity is essentially a historical religion. And that is why we cannot speak about ‘a pure Christian theory’ which can be expressed in many different ways and should be applied in different times and in different cultural contexts. He said that the Church had created her own philosophy, employing the philosophical vocabulary of a particular epoch of Hellenism, when God entered human history. The Church transforms reality and creates her own Christian culture. Florovsky states:

‘When divine truth is expressed in human language, the words themselves are transformed. And the fact that the truths of the faith are veiled in logical images and concepts testifies to the transformation of word and thought – words become sanctified through this usage. The words of dogmatic definitions are not ‘simple words’, they are not ‘accidental’ words which one can replace by other words. They are eternal words, incapable of being replaced. This means that certain words – certain concepts – are eternalised by the very fact that they express divine truth. This means that there is a so-called *philosophia perennis*- that there is something eternal and absolute in thought. But this does not at all mean there is an ‘eternalisation’ of one specific philosophical ‘system’. To state it more correctly – Christian dogmatics itself is the only true philosophical ‘system’. One recalls that dogmas are expressed in philosophical language – indeed, in a specific philosophical language – but not at all in the language of a specific philosophical school...’²⁰¹

The Church does not need to translate her heritage into different philosophical and cultural languages, as she has her own, as it were, ‘Christian language’ which has been forged and sanctified in the course of Church history and cannot be replaced.

²⁰⁰ Zaviyskiy (2011) *Shaping modern Russian Orthodox Trinitarian theology: a critical study of Sergii Bulgakov with reference to Vladimir Lossky and Georgii Florovsky*, 258.

²⁰¹ Florovsky (1976) ‘Revelation, Philosophy and Theology’, 33. Cf. Ibid: ‘...Hellenism, forged in the fire of a new experience and a new faith, is renewed; Hellenic thought is transformed. Usually we do not sufficiently perceive the entire significance of this transformation which Christianity introduced into the realm of thought. This is so, partially because we too often remain ancient Greeks philosophically, not yet having experienced the baptism of thought by fire’.

Bulgakov, by contrast, maintains that one has to distinguish not only between canonical but also between dogmatic definitions, deciding which of them have only relative historical significance for a particular moment and which are universally important for all times. Bulgakov does not speak about the transformation or sanctification of words or concepts. He recognizes the divinely inspired dogmas of the Church as some very important milestones, as ‘pure crystals of thought’, but he differentiates them from theology, which is ‘the atmosphere of thought’ where the crystals are formed.²⁰² Furthermore, he calls theologians, not only the fathers of the Church, but the heretics who were condemned by the Councils. Theology becomes a dialogue or engagement with some important topical questions, which inevitably had to be raised, as to raise questions is the distinctive feature of human reason and it is therefore ‘almost imperative to reinterpret the dogmas according to the philosophy of the day.’²⁰³

We can see that Bulgakov gives a much broader meaning to theology than Florovsky. If Bulgakov would call theologians the fathers and the heretics as well as philosophers, Florovsky did not even call Bulgakov himself a theologian. However, it would be wrong not to mention some similarity in the thought of Bulgakov and Florovsky. Both tend to merge philosophy and theology to some extent. However, whereas Bulgakov is eager to embrace any philosophy by theology, Florovsky recognises the only true philosophy – Christian theology, which is a rather limited area of Church dogma and patristic thought.

Many of the authors, who see Bulgakov from as it were Florovsky’s perspective, criticise him for trying to introduce a ‘new’ and ‘incorrect’ doctrine into Orthodox theology.²⁰⁴ Most of these authors refer to Lossky’s criticisms as coherent and still relevant today. The latter accuses Bulgakov of Gnosticism and lack of apophatism in methodology, of the distortion of the

²⁰² Bulgakov (1933) ‘Na putyah dogmy’, 3-36.

²⁰³ Bulgakov (2003) ‘Dogma and Dogmatic theology’, 79; cf. Zaviyskiy (2011) *Shaping modern Russian Orthodox Trinitarian theology: a critical study of Sergii Bulgakov with reference to Vladimir Lossky and Georgii Florovsky*, 258-260.

²⁰⁴ To name just a few: V. Lossky (1936) *Spor o Sofii: “Dokladnaia Zapiska” prot. S. Bulgakova i smysl ukaza Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*; Bibikhin (2003) ‘Sophiologia otsa Sergia Bulgakova’, 80; Bonetskaya (2003) ‘Russkiy Faust i russkiy Vagner’, 869; Khoruzhii (1994) ‘Sofija – kosmos – materija: ustoi filosofskoj mysli otsa Sergia Bulgakova’, 84; Berd (2003) ‘Bogoslovie o. Sergiia Bulgakova: eres’ ili eresologiiia’; Antonov, Vaganova (2013) *Sofiologia i neopatristschesky sintez. Bogoslovskie itogi filosofskogo razvitiya*, 276-284 (Round table discussion).

Trinitarian dogma, of (new) Apollinarianism in Christology, of defective anthropology and cosmism. One needs to say that some of Lossky's arguments have been critically reassessed in recent research.²⁰⁵ It has to be mentioned, that some modern scholars have approached Bulgakov from a purely philosophical stance.²⁰⁶ These authors emphasise the particular contribution of Bulgakov to the philosophy of subject, which can be another argument against those who accuse Bulgakov of being overly cosmocentrist and even of impersonalism.²⁰⁷ However, to talk of Bulgakov simply as a philosopher seems to be reductionist and not to be doing justice to him in the ultimate sense.

Among other things, Lossky charges Bulgakov's system with a sort of methodological defectiveness. He calls it a 'sophianic mythology' which, according to Lossky, could not have any other sources than Bulgakov's 'creative imagination' and 'fantasies'. In fact, this criticism puts the argument on an entirely different level. One might recall in this respect the idea of the theological imagination of C.S. Lewis.²⁰⁸ Lewis speaks about imagination as 'the organ of meaning':

'It must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of truth. We are not talking of truth, but of meaning; meaning which is the antecedent condition of both truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense. I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition'.²⁰⁹

This is precisely what has been largely overlooked by Lossky and his adherents – a possibility of new meanings which is opened up by Bulgakov's metaphor of Sophia or 'holy wisdom'. For someone this can be an inspiration to write about a 'Bulgakovian theology of

²⁰⁵ Gallaher (2010) *There is freedom: the dialectic of freedom and necessity in the Trinitarian theologies of Sergii Bulgakov, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 84, 126; Vaganova (2011) *Sophiologia Protoiereya Sergiya Bulgakova*, 342; Nichols (2017) *Mystical theologian: the work of Vladimir Lossky*, 250-3.

²⁰⁶ Gagraeva (2000) *Ontognoseologicheskaya suschnost' sofiologii i eyo mesto v russkoy filosofii: Soloviev V.S., Florenskii P.A., Bulgakov S.N.*; Reznichenko (2003) "'Ya". K metafizike subiekta S.N. Bulgakova v rabotakh 20-h godov'; Upravitelev (2001) *Konstruirovaniye sub'ektnosti v antropologii S.N. Bulgakova*.

²⁰⁷ Peev (2011) *Biblejsko-patristichnata traektorii na simbolana Khokhma/Sofii v neosofologiitena sveshch. P. Florenski I prot. S. Bulgakov: ekzegetiko-teologicheski analiz*, 346; V. Lossky (2006) 'Spor o Sofii', 57.

²⁰⁸ Ward (2008) *Planet Narnia: the seven heavens in the imagination of C.S. Lewis*, 185.

²⁰⁹ Lewis (2013) 'Bluspels and Flalansferes: A Semantic Nightmare', Paragraph 23.32.

poetry'.²¹⁰ Or even broader, this can be a starting point for a theology of human creativity, as R.

Williams pointed out in one of his papers on Bulgakov:

'To me the value and virtue of language about holy wisdom, the 'sophiological' vision of Father Bulgakov and others, is that there are actually very few models or metaphors that really hold these three things together – creation, creativity, creatureliness'.²¹¹

Nevertheless, one of the modern critics of Bulgakov has picked up and vigorously developed Lossky's 'mythological' argument. P. Saprionov notes that Bulgakov's sophiology is built on nothing but approximations, likenings, and identifications which can be paralleled with Orphic myth. He writes that Sophia is not that far from the Orphic Zeus:

'Bulgakov's God appears to be the primogenitor of everything which makes him very similar to Zeus because of 'making sophianic' (*ософиение*), in other words, almost complete amalgamation in Sophia, ... This 'making sophianic' is not that far as it seems to be from the devourment of Protagon by Zeus. In Bulgakov, Sophia 'devours' her creator and the whole world afterwards. All Orthodox splendour and pompousness, as well as the philosophical terminology of Bulgakov's sophiology cannot save her from the intrinsic mythology of this concept. It is always present in the soul of the thinker as well as in his sophiological constructions'.²¹²

Saprionov refuses to recognise philosophical value (or any value at all) in Bulgakov's sophiology. That is why he rejects calling it either philosophy or theology, applying to Bulgakov's works as well as to other Russian sophiological constructions in a rather modest term 'religious-philosophical thought'.

However, N. Vaganova dismisses Saprionov's critique of Russian thinkers due to its one-sidedness. At the same time she accepts Bulgakov's use of myth and, in an attempt to be systematic, introduces a wider definition of sophiology in its three main fields of concern: Sophia as a myth, Sophia as a philosophical concept, and Sophia as a theological concept.²¹³ A. Volkova writes along similar lines about 'the integrative function of Bulgakov's theological method'.²¹⁴ S. Mazhuko maintains that Bulgakov created a new genre of theological prose. He notes that, in

²¹⁰ McDermott (2009) 'Poetry Against Evil: A Bulgakovian Theology of Poetry'.

²¹¹ Williams (2005) *Creation, Creativity and Creatureliness: the Wisdom of Finite Existence*.

²¹² Saprionov (2008) *Russkaya filosofija. Problema svoeobrazija i osnovnye linii razvitija*, 360.

²¹³ Vaganova (2011) *Sophiologia Protoiereya Sergiya Bulgakova*, 12.

²¹⁴ Volkova (2015) "'How is Religion Possible?'" The Features and Contemporary Importance of Sergey Bulgakov's Theological Method', 148.

Bulgakov's 'Little trilogy', each book begins and ends with a fervent prayer. In particular, *The Burning Bush* can be called 'the first theological akathistos to the Mother of God'.²¹⁵

2.3.2. Sources of thought, points of reference

In this section I will turn to those aspects of Bulgakov's method which can be described as the sources of his thought, or his constant points of reference. In other words, what are the basic concepts or the axioms of Bulgakov's theology? A. Riches observed that 'the sophiology of Bulgakov is best understood, not as a doctrine, but as a mode of feeling and seeing the deepest mystery of reality'.²¹⁶ What can that 'feeling and seeing' mean and what sort of 'reality' can that be?

One of the possible answers to this question can be found in the paper of P. Mikhailov.²¹⁷ This author argues that the essence of Bulgakov's theological method should be formulated as intuitivism. He calls it 'the basic principle of theological reference' for Bulgakov. Mikhailov admits that Bulgakov draws from a variety of different sources: patristic theology, German philosophy, Russian philosophical tradition (Soloviev and Florenskii), as well as Platonic philosophy and medieval mystic tradition (Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme). However, his main source for the teaching on Sophia should be defined as 'the primary mystic and religious experience of the divine presence in the world and in the human soul, the experience of the numinous and sacred which is common to every human being'.²¹⁸ However, this definition sounds rather too general and all-embracing, without specifying what actually lies at the foundation of Bulgakov's sophiology. One might wonder what kind of intuition led Bulgakov to develop his teaching in that particular way as we know it. What made him defend it in front of the theological commissions despite all invectives and accusations, as something which was

²¹⁵ Akathistos - a genre of Byzantine hymnography, originating from the 7th Century hymn to the Mother of God, composed in Constantinople, now widespread in the Russian Church; Mazhuko (2016) 'Svidetel Sofii. Sudba otsa Sergia Bulgakova', 265.

²¹⁶ Riches (2015) '*Eleusa: Secularism, Post-Secularism and Russian Sophiology*', 9.

²¹⁷ Mikhailov (2013) 'Bogoslovsky metod v spore of Sofii', 251-262.

²¹⁸ Mikhailov (2013) 'Bogoslovsky metod v spore of Sofii', 256.

‘given from God and desired by Him’, which was taken by Bulgakov with ‘all responsibility, humility and boldness’ as ‘his life-long task’?²¹⁹

Modern scholarly research provides us with two answers to this question.

Let us first look at the hypothesis of A. Upravitelev. According to him, Bulgakov’s most fundamental intuition is that of all-unity (*всеединство*). The intuition of the unity of the world leads to a monistic vision of reality with Sophia as the universal methodological principle. Upravitelev gives the definition of ‘the mystic world-view’ (*мистическое мироотношение*) which he sees as the synthesis of the holistic functions of consciousness, namely the intuition of the unity of the world, the pragmatics of continuity (*прагматика сплошности*), and the methodology of all-unity, shaped and authorised by dogmatics. Bulgakov’s worldview developed as the logical synthesis of the above-mentioned holistic methods. The initial intuition of the unity of the world was expressed first in the economic-materialistic and then in the Christian-ideological pragmatics of continuity. The latter is rationalised in the methodology of all-unity, sophiology as a theory, and many different ‘sophiological understandings’ (*софиологических уразумениях*) as a discursive practice. Dogmatics shapes and culturally substantiates the mystical world-view.²²⁰

A. Louth suggests that liturgical prayer can be seen as the point of reference for Bulgakov’s theology and that Bulgakov is therefore ‘essentially a liturgical theologian’.²²¹ Bulgakov’s ordination as a priest and his – at times daily – celebrations of the Divine Liturgy undoubtedly had a significant impact on his personality as well as on his theology. Liturgical themes are reflected even in such external things as the titles of his main theological books. *‘The Unfading Light’* (1917) (*Свет Невечерний*) associates, especially in original Russian, with the central hymn of the Orthodox vespers *‘O Joyful Light’* (*Свете тихий*). His trilogy *‘The Friend of the Bridegroom’* (1927), *‘The Unburning Bush’* (1927) and *‘Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels’*

²¹⁹ Kazimirčak-Polonskaja (1986) ‘Professor protoierej Sergij Bulgakov (1871-1944)’, 180-194.

²²⁰ Upravitelev (2001) *Konstruirovanie sub’ektnosti v antropologii S.N. Bulgakova*, 36.

²²¹ Louth (2009) ‘Sergii Bulgakov and the Task of Theology’, 255; cf. Grabar (2003) ‘Tserkovno-mystichesky opyt otsa Sergia Bulgakova kak vozmozhny koren’ ego religioznoy filosofii’, 266-272.

(1929) has the composition of the deisis – the widespread liturgical image in the Orthodox Church with the Mother of God, John the Baptist and angels surrounding the Lord in prayerful postures. It is noteworthy that this composition is also found in the oldest Russian icon of Sophia The Wisdom of God (see Picture 1). ‘*The Lamb of God*’ (1933) (*Агнец Божий*) is the liturgical term for the Eucharistic bread symbolising Christ.

The way of the celebration of the Liturgy by Father Bulgakov left a deep impression in the hearts and minds of his contemporaries. Below are remarks by Schmemmann, whose harsh critique of Bulgakov marked the opening of this chapter, offering quite a different, and positive, assessment of Bulgakov’s celebration of the liturgy:

‘He was not accomplishing a well-established rite, traditional in all its details. He delved down to the very depths, and one had the impression that the liturgy was being celebrated for the first time, that it had fallen down from heaven and been set up on the earth at the dawn of time. The Bread and the Chalice on the altar, the flame of the candles, the smoke of the incense, the hands raised to the heavens: all this was not simply an ‘office.’ There was accomplished here something involving the whole created world, something of the pre-eternal, the cosmic—the ‘terrible and the glorious,’ in the sense these liturgical words have in Slavonic. It seemed to me that it is not by chance that the writings of Fr Sergii are very often laden—so it seems— with liturgical Slavisms, that they themselves so often resonate with liturgical praise. It is not just a matter of style. For the theology of Fr Sergii, at its most profound, is precisely and above all liturgical— it is the revelation of an experience received in divine worship, the transmission of this mysterious ‘glory,’ which penetrates the entire service, of this ‘mystery,’ in which it is rooted and of which it is the ‘epiphany.’ The manifestation of God, and also of the world as God created it, of the divine roots of creation, destined to be filled with God, as that in which God is ‘all in all.’²²²

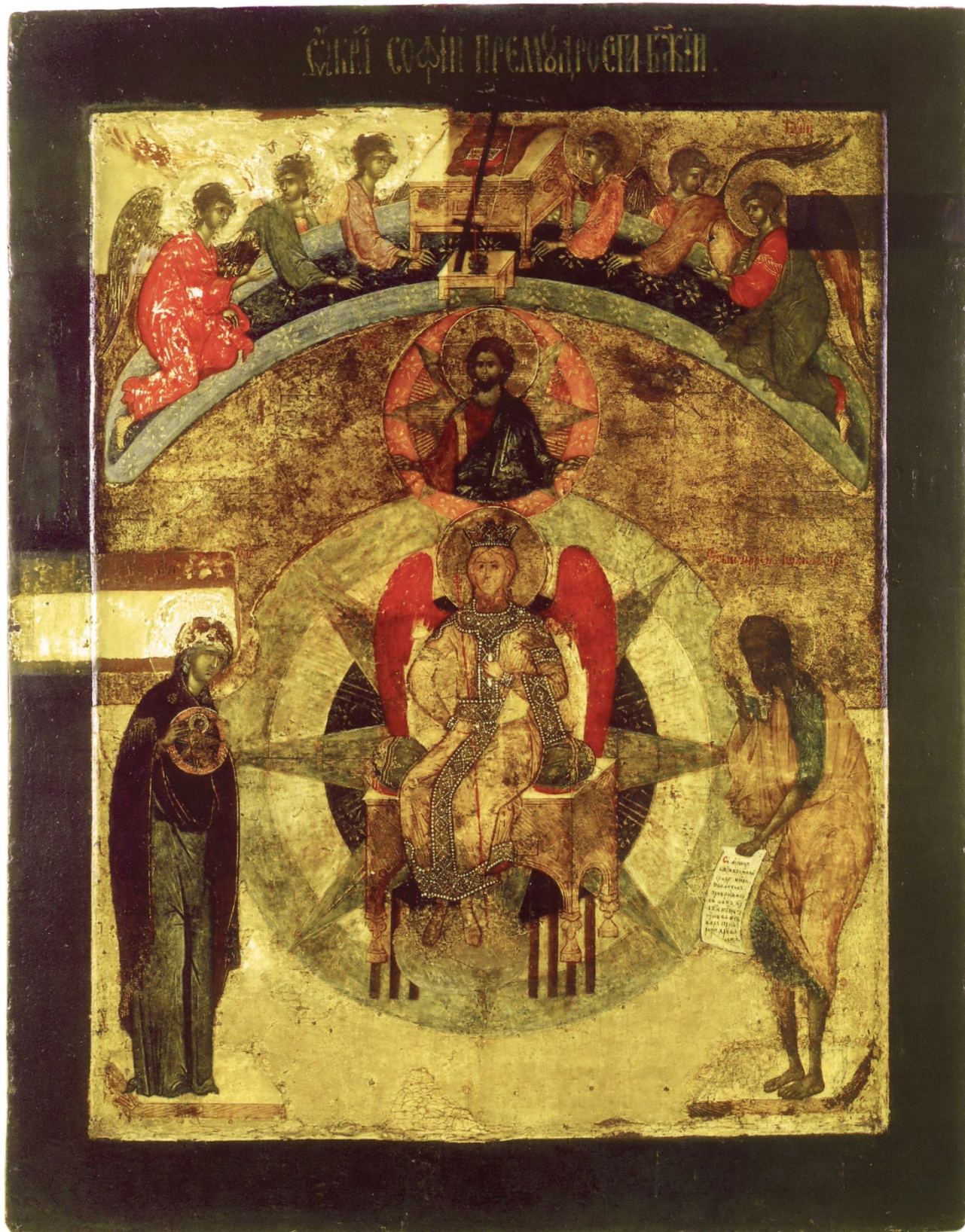
The idea of the deep connection between the Liturgy and theology is supported by Bulgakov’s own metaphorical words:

‘One should drink theology from the bottom of the Eucharistic chalice’.²²³

These words were initially addressed by Bulgakov to one of his friends but can be applied to Bulgakov himself without reservation.

²²² The quotation is taken from : Louth (2009) ‘Sergii Bulgakov and the Task of Theology’, 249.

²²³ Struve (2003) ‘Ob evcharisticheskom bogoslovii o. Sergija Bulgakova’, 44.



Picture 1. Sophia, The Wisdom of God, 15th century

The idea of liturgical prayer as the source of Bulgakov's theology does not prevent the understanding of the intuition of all-unity as essential for his sophiology. On the contrary, the two conceptions can be seen as being complementary to each other, in the way that the initial intuition of all-unity is supported and enhanced by liturgical practice and experience of prayer. It also means that theology for Bulgakov is not a purely intellectual enterprise. As Louth put it:

‘Above all, theology, for Bulgakov, is not a collection of doctrines that you could list and run through, rather it is way of thinking, rooted in a way of praying: it is a vision, not a collection of truths, however accurate’.²²⁴

Louth argues that sophiology is a sort of dynamic theology with its own emphasis which is different compared to our usual understanding of theological doctrine:

‘It may well be true that Sophia can be dispensed with, if one understands doctrine as a string of theological positions. It is rather as one tries to understand their coherence and mutual entailments that Sophia comes into its own for Bulgakov, and that sense of coherence is also conveyed by the fundamentally liturgical inspiration of his theology. That might suggest that there is a link between Sophia and the liturgy’.²²⁵

2.3.3. Logical foundations of thought

It is impossible to make sense of Bulgakov's theology without understanding what kind of logic lies behind it. In a classical text of 20th century philosophy we read:

‘In logic, there are no morals. Everyone is at liberty to build up his own logic, i.e. his own form of language, as he wishes. All that is required of him is that, if he wishes to discuss it, he must state his methods and clearly, and give syntactical rules instead of philosophical arguments’.²²⁶

In this section, we will concentrate on four different aspects of Bulgakov's logic:

First, we will analyse Bulgakov's antinomism, which is of key importance for the understanding of his sophiological project as a whole;

Second, we will look at the particularities of his hermeneutical method or the logic of interpretation of the Biblical and liturgical texts;

Third, we will turn to the ‘performative’ function of his texts;

²²⁴ Louth (2009) ‘Sergii Bulgakov and the Task of Theology’, 247.

²²⁵ Louth (2009) ‘Sergii Bulgakov and the Task of Theology’, 255.

²²⁶ Carnap (2000) *Logical syntax of language*, 52.

Finally, we will discuss different logical levels in Bulgakov's writings and will try to demonstrate that the language of Sophia is in fact a metalanguage in relation to the languages of philosophy and theology.

2.3.3.1. Antinomism

Bulgakov makes use of antinomies in his earliest theological book *The Unfading Light* (1917). The book's very structure demonstrates an antinomy between apophatic and cataphatic approaches to theology.²²⁷ Bulgakov's critique of German philosophy, which can be found there, implies his 'antinomical' method but there is no methodological exposition or explanation of this method in *The Unfading Light*. He offers detailed analysis and philosophical justification of the principle of antinomy in *The Tragedy of Philosophy* (1927).

Bulgakov generally draws on a different kind of source. First, he refers extensively to the liturgical texts and patristic sources. Antinomies are widely used in patristic thought and became the foundational principle of the formulation of the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas; this is reflected not only in theological treatises but also in liturgical texts. It could be one of the reasons why, as a number of scholars have argued, antinomism appeared to be deeply rooted in Russian culture.²²⁸

Although philosophers have employed contradictions and antinomies from the very beginning of philosophy,²²⁹ antinomies were dealt with by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) in a methodological way. It is now generally agreed that Bulgakov appropriated antinomism through the mediation of Florenskii.²³⁰ Antinomism can be said to be the point of

²²⁷ Gallaher (2010) *There is freedom: the dialectic of freedom and necessity in the Trinitarian theologies of Sergii Bulgakov, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 67-69.

²²⁸ Gallaher (2010) *There is freedom*, 69; Cf.: Blank (2007) 'The Rabbit and The Duck: Antinomic unity in Dostoevskij, the Russian religious tradition, and Mikhail Bakhtin', 21-37; Bakhtin (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, 34-36.

²²⁹ Notably Heraclides.

²³⁰ Gallaher (2010) *There is freedom*, 69-75; Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology: Modern Russian Religious Consciousness and Sergei Bulgakov's Critical Appropriation of German Idealism*, 222-225.

divergence between Bulgakov and Florenskii, on the one hand, and their predecessor Vladimir Soloviev, on the other.

Before looking at Bulgakov's critical engagement with Soloviev, allow me firstly to give an example of Florenskii's criticisms of Soloviev. The sophiological doctrine of Vladimir Soloviev becomes the target for Florenskii's criticisms in his fundamental *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*. Florenskii questions Solovievian understanding of Sophia, which is based on his interpretation of the Trinitarian dogma:

'According to the doctrine of V. Soloviev, Sophia is not only the ideal person of Creation but also the "Substance of the Holy Trinity" (Did Soloviev not mean to say "general energy" or "general grace"?). There is no need to clarify how far this doctrine of a Substance of God that is separate from the Hypostases stands from the orthodox doctrine of Athanasius the Great, firmly resting on the formula: *ek Patros, ek ousias tou Patros*. Soloviev's rationalism betrays itself precisely in the fact that, for him, the principle and foundation of the all is not a living Person, not Hypostasis, and not a self-grounding Living Trinity, but the substance from which the Hypostases are then formed. But in this case, this substance must necessarily be recognised as impersonal, and therefore "thinglike". Soloviev's philosophy, subtly rationalistic in its form, is inevitably a philosophy of things in its content. What Soloviev teaches is unquestionably related to Sabellianism, to Spinozism, and to Schellingianism, at least in its first phase'.²³¹

Florenskii develops his argument through postulating an opposition between Solovievian formulations and St Athanasius' doctrine, then proceeding to charge Soloviev with impersonalism and excessive rationality. Moreover, for Florenskii, 'rationalism' is a kind of offensive word. For him rationality in theology is unacceptable in principle.

Bulgakov picks up Florenskii's critique and notes that though Soloviev, engaging in polemics with Hegel and Schelling, was attempting to construct his own system, seemingly on the basis of theology and Christianity, he 'unexpectedly draws near them [Hegel and Schelling], and in general sins by the excessive rationalism in his theology'.²³² It is still a system, and it is 'sinful'.

Indeed, in *The Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*, 1877, Soloviev speaks in a very Hegelian way about 'integral knowledge' and its philosophical stages – or rather he refers to it as 'free theosophy':

'Obeying the general law of historical development, philosophy passes through three main stages... *The first stage* is characterised by the exclusive predominance of mysticism, which retains in a

²³¹ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 559-560.

²³² Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading light: contemplations and speculations*, 152.

latent form or a state of fusion rational and empirical elements (which corresponds with the general predominance of theology). *In the second stage* these elements become isolated, and philosophy disintegrates into three separate currents or types that strive for absolute self-affirmation and consequently mutual negation; here, according to the general disintegration of the theoretical sphere into three branches hostile to each other – theology, abstract philosophy, and positive science – we have one-sided mysticism, one-sided rationalism, and one-sided empiricism. *In the third stage* they arrive at an internal *free synthesis*, which forms the basis of the general synthesis of the three levels of knowledge, and consequently also the universal synthesis of human life'.²³³

One can see in this quotation three Hegelian stages: thesis, antithesis and synthesis. By contrast, the idea of antinomy supposes embracing thesis and antithesis without their sublation in synthesis.

Florenskii and Bulgakov oppose the rational theology of Soloviev in their theology of antinomies. Florenskii thoroughly examines Kant's four cosmological antinomies in his talk given at the General Meeting of the Council of Moscow Theological Academy in 1908 and substantiates his own vision in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth* published in 1914.²³⁴ He argues that Kant's antinomies are not really 'the antinomies of pure reason', but demonstrate only the contradictions between different functions of reason. He concludes that Kant's idea of the possibility of antinomies is 'the deepest and most fruitful', but his arguments appear to be insufficiently substantiated.²³⁵ For Florenskii 'truth is an antinomy'.²³⁶ He expounds his own understanding of the antinomic structure of human reason and offers 'a formal logical theory of antinomy'.²³⁷ The antinomical approach is especially appropriate when it comes to religion. He writes:

'The mysteries of religion are not secrets that one must not reveal. They are not the passwords of conspirators, but inexpressible, unutterable, indescribable experiences, which cannot be put into words except in the form of contradictions, which are "yes" and "no" at the same time. They are mysteries that transcend meaning. That is why, when it is expressed in church hymns, the rapture of the soul is inevitably enveloped in the shell of a distinctive play of concepts. The whole liturgy, especially the canons and stichera, is full of this ceaselessly exuberant wit of antithetic juxtapositions and antinomic affirmations'.²³⁸

²³³ Soloviev (2008) *The philosophical principles of integral knowledge*, 72.

²³⁴ Florenskii (1909) 'Kosmologicheskie antinomii I. Kanta', 596-625; Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 106-123; 411-414.

²³⁵ Cf. Schelling, 'Immanuel Kant', 7: 'The old cheerful Parmenides, as he was described by Plato, and the dialectician Zeno, would have gladly recognised him [Kant] as their friend, had they seen his beautifully elaborated antinomies, these permanent triumphs over dogmatism and the eternal propylaea of true philosophy'. In German. Translation ours.

²³⁶ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 114.

²³⁷ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 110 -114.

²³⁸ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 110 -114.

Although Florenskii collocates together, via a comma, Hegel and Schelling, without highlighting any difference in the role of contradictions in their respective philosophies, one can argue that there is a significant difference between the two.²³⁹ Whereas for Hegel contradictions seem to be merely part of the movement of logic in the thinking of life, or thinking of being, for Schelling contradiction is at the heart of all life, and indeed the language of contradiction is appropriate for speaking about God:

‘And the law of contradiction, which says that opposites cannot be in one and the same thing and at the same time be that which has being, here, at last, finds its application. God, in accordance with the necessity of its nature, is an eternal No...But the same God, with equal necessity of its nature, although not in accord with the same principle, but in accord with a principle that is completely different from the first principle, is the eternal Yes, an eternal outstretching, giving, and communicating of its being. Each of these principles, in an entirely equal fashion, is the being, that is, each has the same claim to be God or that which has being. Yet they reciprocally exclude each other. If one is that which has being, then the opposed can only be that which does not have being. But, in an equally eternal manner, God is the third term or the unity of the Yes and the No.’²⁴⁰

For Schelling, as is also true for Florenskii, contradiction can never be reduced to a dialectic of concepts. Life is contradiction, it is a play of forces, which can never be logically resolved.

‘Since each of the three principles has an equal claim to be that which has being, the contradiction cannot be resolved through one of the principles somehow becoming that which has being at the cost of the others. But since the contradiction can also not remain, and since it does so because each of the principles wants to be that which has being for itself: thus no other solution is thinkable other than that they all communally and voluntarily ...sacrifice being that which has being and hence, debase themselves into simple Being... Space opens up and that blind necessity of reciprocal inexistence metamorphosizes into the relationship of a free belonging together’.²⁴¹

One can see from the above citations that Schelling and Florenskii sometimes employ similar expressions to speak about contradictions in life and thought. However, there are also significant differences in their respective approaches, which P. Gaidenko has pointed out in her article ‘*The Antinomic dialectic of P.A. Florenskii versus the Law of Identity*’²⁴².

Bulgakov echoes Florenskii in accentuating the significance of Kant’s philosophy:

‘When translated into religious language, i.e. the language of negative theology, the Kantian doctrine of the thing in itself, which establishes the laws of faith (practical reason) and opens the doors to mysticism, receives an entirely special significance. It places Kant a head above rationalistic theology

²³⁹ Bensussan (2007) ‘La vie comme contradiction’, 134.

²⁴⁰ Schelling (2000) *Ages of the World*, 11.

²⁴¹ Schelling (2000) *Ages of the World*, 22.

²⁴² Gaidenko (1988) ‘Antinomicheskaya dialektika Florenskogo’, 175-178.

with the fundamental criticism of which he advances...And in this respect Kant stands even higher than his great continuators, not only Fichte, but also Schelling and Hegel'.²⁴³

Bulgakov also appropriates Florenskii's understanding of antinomies and their role in the structure of reason. He writes in the *Tragedy of Philosophy*:

'Reason necessarily comes up against antinomies, determining its structure and objectives... The antinomies which tear apart reason – they themselves build it up and determine it.'²⁴⁴

Thus, having presented the main themes in the teaching about antinomies in Florenskii and in his follower Bulgakov, we now turn to its critique suggested by Prince Evgenii Trubetskoy in his article *The Light of Tabor and the Transfiguration of Mind*, which is a published response to Florenskii's book *The Pillar and the Ground of Truth*.

After pointing out many good points in Florenskii's book, Trubetskoy concentrates on the critique of his antinomism. One can say that antinomism is not just one of the ideas in Florenskii's book, but it is one of its central ideas. Trubetskoy notes that for Florenskii 'the church is veracity, it is the spiritual law of identity.'²⁴⁵ But what happened to the normal law of identity, which is at the foundation of formal logic and which makes possible coherent thinking? Trubetskoy asks his main question: 'Does Florenskii believe in the transfiguration of the human mind, or he simply thinks that the reason must be cut off as a tempting "right eye"?'²⁴⁶ He rebukes Florenskii for not really 'understanding what the transfiguration of the mind is.' Trubetskoy maintains that the transfiguration of the mind consists in the healing of the sinful disintegration, not in the acceptance of this disintegration, but in the restoration of integrity.

According to Trubetskoy, Florenskii is caught between two opposite understandings of antinomism:

- 1) Antinomism as a characteristic of a sinful state of the fallen reason, or

²⁴³ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading light: contemplations and speculations*, 151; cf. Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 242.

²⁴⁴ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 327-328.

²⁴⁵ Trubetskoy (1914) *Svet Favorskii i preobrazhenie uma. Po povodu knigi sviashchennika P. A. Florenskogo*, 8.

²⁴⁶ Trubetskoy (1914) *Svet Favorskii i preobrazhenie uma*, 10.

2) Antinomism of the truth itself. If truth is an antinomy, then the true religious dogma is also antinomic.²⁴⁷

Trubetskoy then points to the over-generalization of Florenskii's statement that the mysteries of religion "cannot be put in words but in contradiction, which is both *yes* and *no*." Otherwise we could not give a straightforward answer to the question as to whether Christ is risen, and to many other questions which require unequivocal answers. Florenskii might perhaps reply that if one speaks about the Resurrection of Christ in the context of the above-mentioned quotation, then it is not about answering the question "whether Christ is risen," but about the verbal description of the mystery of Christ's Resurrection. The quotation from Florenskii, which is mentioned here by Trubetskoy is, in fact, Father Pavel's extended commentary on the liturgical text: *Resurrectional Dismissal Theotokion* of the second tone: 'Beyond the power of thought, exceeding glorious are all thy mysteries, O Birth-giver of God. . .!').²⁴⁸ One can see that the idea that *all mysteries* are beyond the mind is found not only in Florenskii, but in the hymn of the Church, which invalidates Trubetskoy's argument.

Trubetskoy further suggests that Florenskii uses the terms 'antinomy' and 'being antinomic' in two different meanings:

1) as the sin of the soul, where the terms mean 'contradiction';

2) in relation to the dogma, where it means in fact the union of the opposites, which, according to Trubetskoy, should not be confused with the idea of antinomy.

It is worth saying that later authors often do not make this distinction, applying the term 'antinomy' to the dogma without hesitation. In his *Mystical Theology*, Lossky makes use of antinomies. For example, he writes about the dogma of the Holy Trinity, that it is 'the highest point of revelation' and 'an antinomy.'²⁴⁹ But we cannot agree, as some authors argue that Lossky uses the terms 'apophatic' and 'antinomic' as synonyms.²⁵⁰ In fact, there is some inconsistency

²⁴⁷ Trubetskoy (1914) *Svet Favorskii i preobrazhenie uma*, 11.

²⁴⁸ Hapgood (1906) *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic, Greco-Russian, Church*, 580.

²⁴⁹ Lossky (1991) *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 46, 65–66.

²⁵⁰ See Gallaher (2013) 'The "Sophiological" Origins of Vladimir Lossky's Apophaticism'.

in Lossky's own works, which might cause such an understanding. In his earlier works (*The Debate on Sophia, Mystical Theology*), methodologically, the concept of antinomy is subordinate to the concept of apophaticism. However, in his later collection of essays *In the Image and Likeness of God*, he writes very much like Bulgakov, about 'the antinomy of two theological ways, the positive and the negative, established by Dionysius the Areopagite.'²⁵¹ This is what he now calls 'an antinomic theology,' not just the way of negations, but both ways together. It is interesting, that here the apophatic way becomes subordinate to the concept of antinomy, as it is found in Bulgakov, and what previously Lossky criticized in him.

A more recent scholar, Piama Gaidenko who wrote about antinomies in Florenskii, also did not make the distinction between antinomy as sin and antinomy as the union of the opposites. According to her, antinomy is, in fact, the union of the opposites.²⁵²

Father Sophrony Sakharov, one of the latest theologians related to the Silver Age, as well as to our time, and named 'Срапей' (Elder), is to be canonized in the near future. He wrote about the dogmas of the Church:

'The dogmas of the Church represent an utterly concentrated synthesis. They are expressed in short formulations, which are of an absolutely exceptional nature, as they have *antinomy* at their core through the positing of two seemingly contradictory affirmations or denials. For the critical reason (or fallen, natural reason) they appear to be an absurd, or logical impossibility.'²⁵³

Father Sophrony gives the following examples of the antinomies:

'We cannot think of such a Personal Being, Which, being absolutely free in its self-positing . . . does not exclude absolute objectiveness of its nature, or existence . . . It is inconceivable for us how it is possible that nature or essence, being an absolutely objective reality, does not pre-exist and predetermine absolute completeness of subjective self-positing of the Persons of the Holy Trinity . . . We cannot imagine such a Being in Which three Persons are different from one Essence or Nature, and Essence from Energy, and Which is at the same time absolutely simple.'²⁵⁴

These words of Father Sophrony demonstrate that Trubetskoy's approach to the logical content of the dogma, as well as his critique of Florenskii in this regard can be seen as somewhat simplistic.

²⁵¹ Lossky (1974) *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 52.

²⁵² See Gaidenko (1988) 'Antinomicheskaya dialektika Florenskogo'.

²⁵³ Sophrony (2000) *Rozhdenie v Tsarstvo Nepokolebimoe*, 63–64.

²⁵⁴ Sophrony (2000) *Rozhdenie v Tsarstvo Nepokolebimoe*, 55.

Trubetskoy also points out ‘the right understanding’ of the antinomies. First of all, antinomies are said to be rooted in the rational (*рассудочное*) understanding of the world. Second, according to him, the antinomies constitute a certain hierarchy, which is based on a person’s spiritual development. They can be resolved with the power of the human mind. Trubetskoy illustrates how antinomies can be resolved in the second chapter of his *The Meaning of Life* (1918). The denial of monism in thinking is therefore Florenskii’s gravest mistake, according to Trubetskoy. To deny this monism is not equal to rejecting the sin of thought, but rather it deprives thought from its norm, which is the ideal of all-unity and all-wholeness, and which constitutes the formal state of being godlike in our reason. Trubetskoy summarises that antinomism understood in this way is not coherent with the religious point of view of Florenskii himself. Florenskii should get rid of ‘decadent alogism’ to enable him to put his foot onto the ground of genuine churchliness.²⁵⁵

Why did Trubetskoy choose the antinomism of Florenskii as his major target? Could it be that he wanted to defend his friend and teacher Soloviev from Florenskii’s attacks? This explanation cannot be altogether dismissed.

Nevertheless, Bulgakov continued elaborating on the principle of antinomism in his later works. He opposed the idea of antinomism to the principle of logical monism and argued that antinomies are indispensable to human reason. Their presence points to the damage and illness of human nature which originates from the Fall and hereditary sin.²⁵⁶ And human reason alone without support from faith is unable to overcome its existing impairment. Moreover, reason often does not even perceive its limits and does not know where one should put a stop to its systematising activity. Antinomies are therefore, on the one hand, the punishment and the ill fate of reason. On the other hand, they are its medicine and an effective means to make reason realise its own state and come to terms with reality. Although antinomies make impossible the

²⁵⁵ C. Schneider argues that a careful analysis of how antinomism functions in the thought of Florenskii excludes its fideist reading. See Schneider (2013) ‘Will the Truth not Demand a Sacrifice from Us? Reflections on Pavel A. Florenskii’s Idea of Truth as Antinomy in the *Pillar and Ground of the Truth* (1914)’, 37–51.

²⁵⁶ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 316.

construction of an absolute philosophical system, they not only allow but encourage philosophising:

‘Philosophising is the tragedy of reason which has its catharsis’.²⁵⁷

One must accept all contradictions, not annihilate them. Bulgakov states that the resolution of antinomism can be neither in eclecticism, when all contradictions are fused and lose their own identity, nor in dialectics when contradictions are sublated and ‘explained’, but in the philosophical turn to religion and theology.²⁵⁸

The history of philosophy is a tragedy. On the one hand, human reason never ceases in trying to embrace the world, to explain everything logically – somehow appropriating everything. This activity is natural and wholesome, for reason. On the other hand, the world is not reasonable in its ultimate sense, since reason is neither the source of itself nor the only architect of the world, and there is a place for mystery in its origin. Bulgakov introduces the notion of wisdom which ‘demands self-consciousness from reason’ in order to perceive its real boundaries.²⁵⁹ In Bulgakov’s above-mentioned ideas one can note the influence of Schelling, either directly or mediated through Florenskii.

In conclusion, one can say that Trubetskoy’s critique of Florenskii influenced some later authors who analysed the problem of antinomies in Florenskii; among these are Father George Florovsky, Piama Gaidenko, and Pawel Rojek. It may be said that Trubetskoy’s critique caused Florenskii to correct if not his views then his formulations. As for Bulgakov, despite the fact that he assumed and developed the ideas of Father Pavel regarding the antinomies, we cannot find in his works formulations such as ‘truth is an antinomy’, which is typical of Florenskii’s *The Pillar and the Ground of Truth*. Neither do we find in Bulgakov any praises of contradictions and antinomies. For him, antinomy is the tragedy and ill fate of reason. Nevertheless, Bulgakov made

²⁵⁷ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 354.

²⁵⁸ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 387-388; Cf. *Ibid.*, 426: ‘The dogma is the substantial way out for reason, salvation from its antinomies and aporias’.

²⁵⁹ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 316.

a serious attempt to polemicize against the so-called ‘logic of monism’ trying to construct his own ‘logic of Threeness.’²⁶⁰

2.3.3.2. The logic of interpretation – a new hermeneutical approach

A Bulgarian theologian, V. Peev, applies the methods of modern Bible studies to the works of Bulgakov and argues that his theology should be seen as offering a new hermeneutical approach, rather than a system of doctrines. For example, the controversial term ‘the fourth hypostasis’ must be understood as an exegetic rather than a dogmatic category.²⁶¹ Peev introduces several key terms which play a decisive role in his argument. The term ‘exegetical trajectory’ was taken from the Old and New Testament studies.²⁶² Peev argues that the Russian ‘neo-sophiologies’ of V. Soloviev, P. Florenskii and S. Bulgakov are included in the common Christian sophiological ‘trajectory’, creating their own ‘streams’ of theological and philosophical interpretation of *Hochma/Sophia*. He refers to their interpretations as ‘neo-sophiologies’ in order to distinguish them from traditional Christian sophiologies and to underline the significance of their modern historical, cultural and apologetic aspects. To emphasise the same idea, he also uses the term ‘horizons’ in exegetics and theology. The term comes from H-G. Gadamer and concerns the importance of the two horizons – linguistic, literary and philosophical – the one of the text and the other of the interpreter. These horizons are supposed to merge in the process of interpretation.²⁶³

According to Peev, Sophia is neither the result of the apodictic method nor the product of logically substantiated research. Sophia is to be understood as a symbol, or ‘linguistic-ontological metaphor’. Bulgakov was trying to define it in traditional terminology, which has

²⁶⁰ See in this thesis Chapter 6.2.2.2.

²⁶¹ Peev (2011) *Bibleiško-patrističnata traektorii na simbolana Khokhma/Sofii v neosofologii te na sveshch. P. Florenskii prot. S. Bulgakov: ekzegetiko-teologičeski analiz*, 351.

²⁶² Brueggemann (1979) ‘Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel’, 161 ff; Robinson, Koester (1971) *Trajectories through early Christianity*.

²⁶³ Peev (2011) *Bibleiško-patrističnata traektorii*, 22; Gadamer (1965) *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 286-290.

largely become a cliché. And this resulted in an unfortunate misunderstanding of Bulgakov's sophiology by such theologians as, for instance, Lossky and Horuzhy.²⁶⁴ N. Sakharov writes on this problem along similar lines:

‘Bulgakov has been much misunderstood by those who tend to attribute to Sophiology a status of some complete, consistent, logically polished theological system: Bulgakov never intended it to be such: he consistently denied that his Sophiology is a dogma or should be viewed as such. Instead he always maintained that it is his personal *theologoumenon*, a verbal expression of his dogmatic vision, or perhaps only an attempt to express it. Thereby it is never entirely consistent, nor static in its definition, ever changing according to the nuanced context or subject to which it relates on each occasion.’²⁶⁵

Bulgakov's hermeneutical approach is characterised by two distinctive features: its ecclesiasticism (*церковность*) and its creative attitude.²⁶⁶ Within the concept of ecclesiasticism, he emphasises the importance of faithfulness to the authority of the Holy Tradition in all its aspects, including the specially highlighted liturgical one.

I should explain why I started speaking about this exegetical approach to Bulgakov's sophiology in the context of the logical foundations of his thought. In my opinion, it can be argued that if a theological or philosophical text is considered to be an interpretation of some original text, its logic is to be found not only within the text-interpretation but also within the original one, which is the constant point of reference for the interpreter. Finally, it has to be mentioned that the stance of a theologian as interpreter is considered by some modern authors to be of high importance in modern cultural and scientific debates.²⁶⁷

2.3.3.3. The performative function of Bulgakov's texts

The terms ‘performance’ and ‘performative’ come from analytic philosophy or to be more precise from J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts. A. Upravitelev applies them to analysis of the works of Bulgakov. Performative utterance (for instance, ‘this meeting is now adjourned’) does not describe reality as do other utterances, but is an action or a speech act. Performative

²⁶⁴ Peev (2011) *Bibleïsko-patristichnata traektoriiia*, 107.

²⁶⁵ Sakharov (2011) ‘Essential Bulgakov: His Ideas about Sophia, the Trinity, and Christ’, 176.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 7-9.

²⁶⁷ Clingerman (2015) ‘Theologians as Interpreters – Not Prophets – in a Changing Climate’, 336-355.

utterances are not truth-evaluable. These terms are well established in modern philosophy where they mean such a situation in the construction of a text, where it is not the description but the creation of reality. The performative utterance enforces the recipient; it causes him or her enter the reality created by the utterance. It forms the subject of its existence.

Upravitelev argues that the deliberations of Bulgakov on economy or religion become the method of construction of the subject of economy or religious action.²⁶⁸ Bulgakov's texts are not descriptive or explanatory. They give an ideal; they set a goal and call for change and action. In fact, Sophia can be seen as a goal for the creature. The task of the creature is to become sophianic. The reality described in Bulgakov's texts is being created through the reading of those texts, which are both prescriptive and performative.

2.3.3.4. Metalanguage

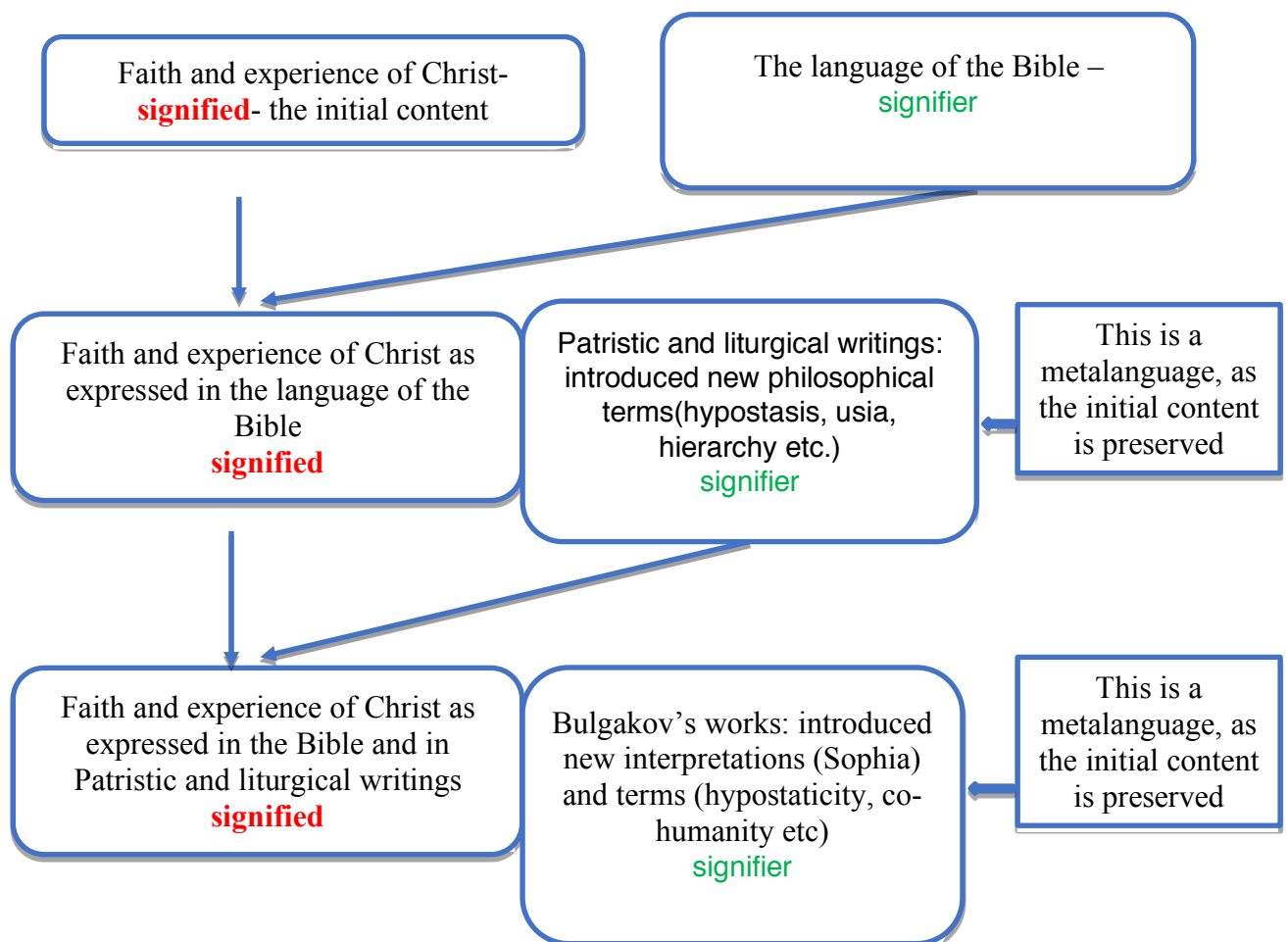
Having looked at the logical foundations of the thought of Bulgakov, we are in a position to put forward our own argument concerning the understanding of Sophia as a metalanguage in Bulgakov's theology. This is conditioned by our understanding of Bulgakov's sophiology as an interpretation. Every interpretation supposes the existence of the two horizons - what is interpreted and the interpretation itself – which are merged in the actual text of interpretation. What is interpreted has its own language, which can be called 'the object language'. It also has its own logic, which can be called 'the author's logic'. At the same time, the interpreter has his/her own logic, which is called 'the interpreter's logic' or 'metalogic'; and their own language, which is called 'metalanguage'.

However, not every interpretation can be called a metalanguage. As was mentioned in the Introduction to Part 1, if the signified of the old system becomes the signifier in the new one, this is not a metalanguage. For example, in the Quran one can find the names of Jesus Christ and His Mother Mary, but its content is clearly non-Christian, despite the presence of Christian elements.

²⁶⁸ Upravitelev (2001) *Konstruirovanie sub'ektnosti v antropologii S.N. Bulgakova*, 46.

In contrast, C.S. Lewis mentions neither Jesus nor the Virgin Mary by name in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, though their content, without doubt, is fully Christian. Thus, the new terms, which are found in the Quran, cannot be called a metalanguage from the Christian point of view; however, we can say that C.S. Lewis employed a metalanguage in his works to express his Christian faith. We can represent schematically how the initial content of Christian faith is preserved in Bulgakov's works, which allows us to speak of his interpretation as a metalanguage (see Table 5).

Table 5



It has to be emphasised that the only logic applicable to Sophiology is the logic of the interpreter. The principle of antinomism can be characterised as the fundamental logical principle, which is applicable both to the object language of dogmatic theology and to the

metalanguage of Sophia. The performative function of Sophiology can be seen as the distinctive feature of the logic of the interpreter and the metalanguage of Sophia.

Indeed, we are coming back to the quotation from Bulgakov concerning the essence of Sophiology, which was the starting point for our discussion of his method. Now we can see here the clear statement of the performative function of Sophiology:

‘The real point at issue [that is, of Sophiology] is that of the Christian vocation as it is related to the very nature of Christianity; it is the problem of a dogmatic *metanoia*, nothing less than a change and a renewal of human hearts.’²⁶⁹

Chapter 2: Conclusion

In this chapter we have shown why the theme of Sophia was seen by Bulgakov as absolutely necessary and indispensable to his thought. He was convinced that the universal Christian message was not articulated enough to be heard by the most educated members of Russian and European society. That is why new interpretations were needed, and Bulgakov picked up the theme of Sophia from his predecessors Soloviev and Florenskii, who had developed sophiology in their writings and brought this concept to the fore. We then analysed the main stages of Bulgakov’s thought, as well as pointing out some criticisms of his sophiology.

Let us now sum up the discussions related to Bulgakov’s method.

First of all, there is no agreement among authors concerning the style of Bulgakov’s thought. Those of them who try to apply the logic of dogmatic theology or philosophy to sophiology, inevitably conclude that Sophia is a myth, as the logic of sophiology is inconceivable to them. Apparently, such authors either do not believe Bulgakov or do not take his words seriously, whereas he repeatedly maintains that his sophiology is not a dogma, but only an interpretation of the dogma. Some authors, who see some positive outcomes of sophiology, tend to speak of its integrative function.

²⁶⁹ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, the Wisdom of God*, 13.

Secondly, concerning the sources of Bulgakov's thought. Those critics, who denounced Sophia as a myth, insisted that the main source of Bulgakov's sophiology had to be his creative imagination. Although we have seen that imagination can be justified in theology as well, it appears that the intuition of all-unity was the most fundamental to Bulgakov's inspiration. It can be argued that this intuition was mediated and enhanced through the experience of prayer and, especially, liturgical prayer. The liturgy and liturgical experience became the constant point of reference for Bulgakov. However, there are a number of other themes (cultural, philosophical, and theological) which can be said to mediate the intuition of all-unity. Sophia in this respect becomes the universal methodological principle. It has to be mentioned here that, when it comes to thought, any mediation appears to be an interpretation.

Thirdly, and finally, I argued that it is possible to distinguish in Bulgakov's writings the terms which belong to the languages of theology and philosophy – from his metalanguage of Sophiology. Bulgakov introduced this metalanguage in his writings as his personal theologoumenon, without intention to replace the language of traditional theology. There is an example where he published a book on theology without employing his sophiological language.²⁷⁰ Bulgakov maintains: 'I admit and consider obligatory for my theology all the doctrines of the Church'²⁷¹. And elsewhere: 'My Sophiology is a theological doctrine, which has been only mine so far... I have never had an idea to charge anyone who opposes Sophiology with heresy or unfaithfulness to Orthodoxy.' Bulgakov speaks of a 'sophianic interpretation of the doctrines of the Church'²⁷² and claims to be fully Orthodox: 'I confess all the true doctrines of the Orthodoxy. My sophiology by no means relates to the content of those doctrines, but only to their theological interpretation'.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Bulgakov (1988) *The Orthodox Church*.

²⁷¹ Bulgakov (1935) 'Dokladnaya zapiska predstavlenaya v oktubre 1935 Ego Vysokopeosviaschenstvu Mitropolitu Evlogiyu professorom prot. Sergiem Bulgakovym', 30.

²⁷² Bulgakov (1935) 'Dokladnaya zapiska', 50.

²⁷³ Bulgakov (1935) 'Dokladnaya zapiska', 51; N. Vaganova's observations confirm our conjecture. She writes that Bulgakov at first tried to define what Sophia is - in '*Unfading light*' (1917) and in the works from the beginning of the 1920s. However, in '*The Burning Bush*' (1927) and in other later works '*everything is defined through Sophia*: "man is created Sophia", "the revelation of the Holy Trinity in the world is Sophia", "the world is created Wisdom", "hypostasis is a noetic ray of Sophia" etc.' (Vaganova (2011) *Sophiology of Archpriest Sergiy Bulgakov*, 328)

In the light of the theme of our thesis the question arises: how can this interpretation of Bulgakov be necessary for us and what does he try to achieve through the application of his metalanguage to the traditional Christian angelology? In the following chapter we will analyse what it means to speak of angels in the language of sophiology.

Chapter 3. Angels and Bulgakov's Sophia

In this chapter I will turn to Bulgakov's angelology with particular reference to its dependence on his sophiology. Bulgakov's thoughts on angels are scattered throughout his works, and can be found in his earlier theological publications such as *Philosophy of Economy* (1912) and *Unfading Light* (1917) as well as in his latest and posthumously published *The Bride of the Lamb* (1945). The Russian theologian systematised his angelology in a separate book *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels* (1929). After pointing out the main themes in the angelology of Bulgakov and its particular connection with sophiology, I will analyse Bulgakov's immediate sources as well as the possible influences on him.

3.1. Angels and Sophia: angelology within sophiology

Using Sophia as a metalanguage allows Bulgakov to change the most fundamental axiom in his system from the dogma of creation to the intuition of all-unity. The dogma of creation is preserved and has not changed in its content, but its epistemological status has changed. Bulgakov argues that the strong opposition between the uncreated and created— between God and the world – results in a dualistic world-view when in ‘choosing God, humans are constrained to turn away from the world, to despise its works and values, and to leave the world to itself and to its own creativity in a state of alienation from God’.²⁷⁴ Such an outlook can be found in Orthodoxy, especially among monastics; it is, therefore, referred to as ‘pseudo-monastic’ by Bulgakov. It can also be encountered in orthodox Protestantism with its insistence on God's transcendence to the world. The tendency towards the secularisation of life indicates ‘the general spiritual paralysis of modern Christianity’.²⁷⁵ According to Bulgakov, the way out of this dead

²⁷⁴ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God*, 15.

²⁷⁵ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God*, 15.

end ‘can only be found in the synthesis of Divine-humanity’.²⁷⁶ Epistemologically, it means that before any deliberation it is assumed that God and the world are united in some way in Sophia. This union is very problematic indeed and constantly needs to be reinterpreted and reaffirmed. On the other hand, it appears to open new horizons in the dialogue between Christianity and modern culture through the reinterpretation of dogma and the renewed engagement with the world.

Let us now turn to angelology and see what the introduction of the metalanguage of sophiology means for it.

In Dionysius the dogma of creation is a foundational axiom. It is assumed in the first place that the angels were created. Angelology is dealt with therefore as a part of the created world: Dionysius defines the place of angels within the created reality and provides a description. The definition of hierarchy is applied to created reality. Dionysius sees his task of the interpretation of Scripture in providing the description of the angelic hierarchies and orders, as it were, as a ‘topography’ of the angelic world.²⁷⁷

Although Bulgakov without doubt accepts that the angels were created, the dogma of creation becomes somewhat problematic in his system. It is assumed in the first place that the angels partake in the divine Sophia.

‘The holy angels are the hypostatic plan of creation; they are its ideas,’ Bulgakov avers in *The Lamb of God*.²⁷⁸ He offers a more developed deliberation in his *Jacob’s Ladder*:

‘The Lord initially realises the creative form of His Wisdom in the making of the bodiless angelic world, and he summons to being creaturely hypostatic figures in which are imprinted all the forms of being, its ‘ideas’. The Wisdom of God receives a personal, multi-hypostatic reflection in ‘the second lights’ of the angelic world which are found in immediate proximity to the Godhead in their hierarchic assembly. Present in its own way to the angelic world is the whole fullness (*pleroma*) of creation; this is not *a part* of the world but the *entire* world, only in its particular hypostatic-spiritual form of being. The Lord has the Wisdom of God as the Beginning of His paths in which He created heaven and earth. Of course, it is reflected in all its fullness in the angelic world as the sum total of ideas, themes, and paradigms of the world in the hypostatic form of being. In this sense the angelic world participates in *all* that is created by the Word and contains in itself this *all*.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God*, 17.

²⁷⁷ CH, 2, 1, PG 3, 136D-137A, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 146.

²⁷⁸ Bulgakov (2008) *The Lamb of God*, 127.

²⁷⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 32.

This kind of epistemology makes Bulgakov's angelology not just another extended and embellished description of the hierarchies, but an instrument helping to construct the desired anthropological subject as an ideal personality through the concepts of love and personhood. The angelic and human worlds are 'one in Sophia ... but they are distinguished in the form of their being'.²⁸⁰ The angelic world serves as a 'heavenly mirror' to the human world. The guardian angel 'is our heavenly I – the Sophianic foundation in the heavens of our being on earth'.²⁸¹ Bulgakov describes the relation between the human being and his angel as a "syzygy". This implies an understanding of the self, the 'I' as 'having its own double... It knows and possesses itself only in connection with its double, in a duality'.²⁸²

According to Bulgakov, the task of this syzygy 'guardian angel' is to 'make ready the realization of his own Sophianic idea in the world, the coming of a human into the world with whom he stands in a personal relation as with his own other'.²⁸³ This relation is not something mechanical or natural but personal, which means that it is based on mutual love, freedom, and creativity. Bulgakov calls this relationship a 'heavenly pedagogy'.²⁸⁴ With the help of their guardian angels, human beings are called 'to become themselves, to rise to the plenitude of those creative tasks which they are called to accomplish in their self-creativity'.²⁸⁵ Bulgakov introduces the idea of the 'co-humanity of angels and humankind's corresponding co-angelicity' as the foundation and condition of personal relationships between them.²⁸⁶

In his earlier work *Philosophy of Economy* (1912) Bulgakov refers to the guardian angels as 'our ideal images' given to us by God. The angels correspond to God's ideas about created reality. The totality of all possible ideas constitutes the created intelligible world which partakes in the life of God through the divine Sophia.

²⁸⁰ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 42.

²⁸¹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 43.

²⁸² Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 6.

²⁸³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 67.

²⁸⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 13.

²⁸⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 97.

²⁸⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 38; cf. Corbin (1981) 'Necessité de l'angélogologie', 84.

‘Man is a creation in the sense that he realises in himself God’s idea of him. As a qualitatively defined individual, he embodies in himself the creative idea, contains a given ideal task, exists before time as God’s conception. Our ideal images (the guardian angels we all have) exist before time in the spiritual world while we realise their likeness through our life and thus— by virtue of our freedom— come to resemble them or recede from them. These ideas about us are given and, as such, they constitute the principle of metaphysical necessity within us, as our basis and nature. We did not define ourselves but have been conceived and wished thus by God, who called us out of nonbeing... The realisation of an idea through freedom allows for different possibilities or modes. As the elements of divine plenitude, the intelligible world (κόσμος νοητός) all human ideas or individualities, qualitatively defined and therefore distinct from each other, partake of their eternal self-identity in the synthetic unity of the divine Sophia.’²⁸⁷

Let us look at this quotation more closely. It can be argued that there could be different interpretations of the above-mentioned text depending on the kind of logic one relies on. If we approach this text seeing it as an account of a peculiar doctrine of Bulgakov operating with established theological terms, we should admit that this is a descriptive text without any metalanguage. According to this rather straightforward logic, Bulgakov teaches the pre-existence of human souls or even that a part of human nature is uncreated. Indeed, he speaks about man as ‘a creation’ with some reservations, only ‘in the sense that’. This uncreated part is called ‘God’s idea’, ‘the creative idea’, ‘human idea’, ‘eternal self-identity’ which exists ‘before time as God’s conception’. Apparently, the angelic world as existing before time belongs to eternity too. It seems also evident from the text that God’s eternal ideas are connected to human nature in such a way that they almost become a part of it: ‘These ideas about us are given and, as such, they constitute the principle of metaphysical necessity within us, as our basis and nature’.

One can observe that the key theological concept mentioned in the excerpt above is that of creation. An understanding of the whole passage depends on the proper interpretation of this concept. However, one might argue that this concept acquires a different significance in the light of our understanding of Bulgakov’s Sophia as a metalanguage. The crucial point here is that the concept of creation is given a different methodological status in Bulgakov’s system compared to a dogmatic system where the dogma of creation is the most foundational and backbone tenet. To be sure, the Bible begins with the assertion of creation: ‘In the beginning God created the

²⁸⁷ Bulgakov (2000) *Philosophy of economy: the world as household*, 203.

heavens and the earth' (Gen 1:1)²⁸⁸ as well as does the Nicene Creed: 'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible', whereas the most foundational intuition of sophiology is that of all-unity (*всеединство*). This does not mean that the dogma of creation is denied or its content changed. What it does mean is that creation is no longer at the root of any deliberation, it is not the initial and basic axiom. Its place is taken over by the concept of all-unity. Within this kind of logic, it becomes possible to speak of creation in a relative way, as is found in the quotation above: 'Man is a creation in the sense that...' Again, this does not mean that man is perceived as uncreated to some extent, it appears to be only a methodological reference to some sort of reality which is thought beyond creation. All seemingly abundant terms such as 'given task', 'creative idea' or 'eternal self-identity' add to the idea of creation the flavour of potentiality and eschatology. The idea of this text cannot be a mere description, but rather an edification and a calling for transfiguration which manifests the performative function of the text.

There is no doubt that Bulgakov holds angels as created by God. Indeed, we can find a place where he says this directly: 'Angels are created in the image of God'.²⁸⁹ [a] It is clear that this phrase, if taken on its own, belongs to the traditional language of theology, which for Bulgakov becomes an object-language. Elsewhere Bulgakov affirms the creation of angels in a less direct way: 'creaturely Sophia lives in the angelic polyhypostaseity of her rays'.²⁹⁰ [b] Here he employs his metalanguage and the idea of creation is shaded by the concept of Sophia. Bulgakov does not deny the creation of angels in principle, but the emphasis of his thought has changed. The concept of creation might seem even more compromised when one comes across the following text: 'One and the same Sophia is revealed in God and in creation'.²⁹¹ [c] When reading this, and similar Bulgakov's formulations, one has to bear in mind that 'the metaphysical

²⁸⁸ New International Version, 1991.

²⁸⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 79.

²⁹⁰ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 95.

²⁹¹ Bulgakov (2008) *Lamb of God*, 126.

nature of Sophia is not covered at all by the usual philosophical categories: absolute and relative, eternal and temporal, divine and creaturely.²⁹²

When one does not distinguish between the object-language [a] and the metalanguage [b and c], one tries to combine them all, as it were, under the same roof, and the concept of Sophia naturally becomes excessive and unnecessary. Let us imagine that there is an anthology of original German texts with commentaries in English, which were collected and published for English speakers studying German. In this case German is an object-language, and English, a metalanguage. If some German speakers, who are not aware of or do not care about the purpose of this textbook, start reading the texts in German, all the commentaries in English will be seen by them as excessive and unnecessary. In a similar way, the concept of Sophia is needed only when one sees its purpose as an interpretation, which is used to ascertain links both within created reality and between creation and its Creator.

3.2. The general review of Bulgakov's angelology – main themes and works

I will approach Bulgakov's texts containing references to angels in chronological order. This will enable us to trace the development of his thought and to see his initial interest in angels, as well as what inspired him to write a separate book on this topic.

One of the earliest comments on angels can be found in *Philosophy of economy* (1912) in the context of his reflection on freedom and necessity. We looked at this in the previous subsection. In his first proper theological work *Unfading Light* (1917) Bulgakov dedicated an entire section to an analysis of the differences between angels and humans. One has to say that this section is a part of the longer chapter on anthropology. It does not mean that Bulgakov openly declares angelology to be a part of anthropology but apparently, in his understanding, the two are closely interrelated. He very briefly touches upon such themes as the nature and the life

²⁹² Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 221.

of angels, angelic hierarchies, the questions of the image of God in angels and humans, the incorporeality of angels, and the problem of time in the human and angelic worlds. Within the section Bulgakov makes reference to the CH by Dionysius and provides an extended quotation from Gregory Palamas concerning the radical difference between humans and angels.

One can find hardly anything concerning angels in Bulgakov's philosophical works of the Crimean period. There is however an important remark in *The Tragedy of Philosophy* (1920-1921) concerning the fullness of the image of God in humans and angels and their hypostatic existence.²⁹³

'God-Love was pleased to kindle from His Light in His inexpressible love innumerable myriads of spiritual suns or stars, i.e. hypostases, not only in the human world, but also in the angelic, "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth". The angels do not have the fullness of the trihypostatic image of God as humans do, but they also have the image of Divine hypostaticity, they are hypostases.'²⁹⁴

The terms 'hypostasis' and 'hypostaticity' belong to Bulgakov's metalanguage, the latter was coined by him to express the personal character of Sophia.²⁹⁵ Although Bulgakov calls angels 'pure hypostases' in some later publications, apparently he does not mean that angels exist without nature at all. There is a difference between the human and angelic mode of being. Whereas all humans possess one and the same nature revealed in many hypostases, every angel is a hypostatic revelation of their own particular and unique nature.

In January 1926 Bulgakov survived an extremely serious disease in the course of which he had a near-death experience, accompanied by a very acute feeling of the presence of the guardian angel. He describes that experience in his late work *Sophiology of Death* (1939):

'At that time the voice of a companion sounded within – I was not alone but together with my own other I; it was my guardian angel. He told me that we had gone too far ahead and it was necessary to return... to life. I understood and heard with my inner hearing that the Lord was bringing me back to life, and I was recovering. One and the same call which released me from this world and from life, simultaneously and with the same word returned me to it. Interiorly I already knew that I would recover although I was still not any better. I returned to life from death. And I knew all this time that I was not

²⁹³ *The Tragedy of Philosophy* was written in 1920-1921, published in German in 1927, and in Russian in 1993.

²⁹⁴ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 444. The original Russian text reads: 'Богу-Любви угодно было в неизреченной Своей любви и милости зажечь от Своего Света неисчислимые мириады духовных солнц или звезд, т. е. ипостасей, и притом не только в человеческом мире, но и в ангельском, - "в начале сотворил Бог небо и землю". Ангелы не имеют в себе той полноты триипостасного образа Божия, какую имеет человек, но и они имеют на себе образ Божественной ипостасности, суть ипостаси'.

²⁹⁵ See Chapters 1 and 6 of this thesis.

alone, that with me was a friend, the most near, tender and quiet. I did not see him with my eyes, he hid himself from them, but I sensed and was aware of his presence...²⁹⁶

It is thought that it was this mystic and spiritual experience which prompted Bulgakov to write a book on angels.²⁹⁷ However, Bulgakov mentions the guardian angels many times in his *Spiritual diaries* written in 1923-1925, just before the above-mentioned disease. One can find in the diaries his thoughts on the guardian angel as being a friend; these were later developed in his *Little Trilogy* (1929) and particularly in *Jacob's Ladder* (1929). He writes:

29 October/11 November 1924. We pray and call upon the guardian angel. He is our friend, who is given to us by God. But how pale are our feelings, how weak is our heart to feel him, how little we thank and how little we love him! Were our eyes open, we would incessantly see him, who is 'the guardian of our souls and bodies'. We would understand that in some situations when we were saved unexpectedly, due to some coincidence, from bitter calamities and misfortunes, it was our blessed guardian who saved us. And when any good word or kind thought would come to our heart, it was he, our friend, who put it in us. We would perceive all our life in a different way – not lonely and gloomy, as we see it now, but as a life together with a loving and caring friend. Yes, the guardian angel was given to us by God, but he is not a supervisor, but a friend, he *loves* us, we are loved by him. That is why, according to the pious belief of the Church, the angel is "weeping" when we sin or perish, and he is fighting for us and with us against the tempting spirits, but only in the spiritual world...

18/31 January 1925. O Holy guardian angel, pray to God for us! It is such a joy, such cheerfulness, such a consolation to know that we have the guardian angel, our faithful and watchful and kind friend, and to call upon him in prayers. Now, after the prayerful canon to the guardian angel, I feel such freshness and clarity in soul as if he, our faithful counselor and friend, touched me with his wing, as if my soul took part from the chalice of heavenly beings. And my soul somehow joyfully knows and believes that it is he, yes it is he who is with me and with everyone...

13/26 March 1925. The appearance of angels! We are unworthy and almost incapable of seeing the angelic world which is around us. They pray with us, they concelebrate with us. But by the will of God, the eyes of our soul become open and it hears the angelic flight, it sees their wings. And then the soul is lifted up with them! The world becomes too small for the soul and its blessedness becomes unbearable... The pure souls have this knowledge of angels; they depict it on the icons, they show us the visions which make our soul to tremble.²⁹⁸

It is clear from these diary entries that Bulgakov drew his inspiration to write about angels mainly from the hymnography of the Orthodox Church, from his priestly rule of prayer.²⁹⁹ The range of his topics is also very much conditioned by the content of those hymns and prayers.

The theme of angels becomes more prominent in Bulgakov's *Little Trilogy*. Some thoughts on angels can be found both in *The Friend of the Bridegroom* (1927) and in *The Burning Bush*

²⁹⁶ Bulgakov (1996) 'Sophiologia smerti', 363.

²⁹⁷ Smith (2010) 'Translator's Introduction' in Bulgakov, S. *Jacob's Ladder*, x-xi.

²⁹⁸ 'Dnevnik duhovnyy' <http://predanie.ru/bulgakov-sergey-nikolaevich-protoierey/book/84452-dnevnik-duhovnyy/#description> [English translation is mine].

²⁹⁹ Bulgakov had already had a mystical experience of angels at the funeral of his son, see. *Unfading Light* (2012), 16.

(1927).³⁰⁰ However, the deepest elaboration of the topic can be found in *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels* (1929).³⁰¹

Love is the starting and the final point of the book. Through an analysis of the category of love, Bulgakov approaches the idea of the guardian angel. The relationship between the human person and the guardian angel appears to be not just intimate but also ontological, with an existing likeness between the human hypostases and their guardian angels.³⁰² According to Bulgakov, one and the same individuality lives in the two worlds. He calls the guardian angel 'our heavenly I' and introduces here the terms 'co-humanity of angels' and 'co-angelicity of humans'.³⁰³

This close relationship between angels and humans is conditioned by their common ontological ground in the Created Wisdom.³⁰⁴ The angels serve the world and it is their ontological necessity to serve.

The angelic world is that of pure hypostases and has a hierarchical structure. It is the prototype of the whole created world, but there is no repetition. Although each human person has been associated with a particular guardian angel, 'in the human family none can be singled out or isolated. Therefore, in serving their proper purpose, the guardian angels unavoidably extend it to the limits of pan-humanity'. This means that human history is made both by angels and humans.

Interpreting in this light some places from the Old and New Testament, Bulgakov concludes that the angels are no less active than humans, that they bear responsibility for their actions and therefore have true freedom, and finally they have inspiration and creativity. Taking part in human history, the angels grow in perfectness and acquire new self-revelation.

A separate chapter is dedicated to the problem of the nature of angels. Their definitive feature in this respect is the ontological individuality of being, which means that the angels do

³⁰⁰ See EXCURSUS 1: 'On the Interrelationship of the Angelic and Human Worlds'.

³⁰¹ More detailed description and analysis of the book *Jacob's Ladder* is given lower, in Chapter 8.1.

³⁰² Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 62.

³⁰³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 38.

³⁰⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 46.

not have their common nature in the sense that humans do. Bulgakov refers to the Church hymnography and points to the difference between the ideas of ‘the angelic assembly’ and ‘the human race’.

‘The assembly of angels, having love for God and life in God as its foundation, is fastened together by their mutual personal love, which is nourished by reciprocal loving contemplation of individuals, of the personal properties of each angel. In the collectivity of the angelic world, in angelic love, creaturely Sophia lives in the angelic polyhypostaseity of her rays, combined into plenitude by love.’³⁰⁵

The idea of assembly supposes ‘the union of plurality which is preserved but not absorbed by it’.³⁰⁶ Such a union is only possible when there is a hierarchy. Dionysius’ CH is mentioned and referred to. Hierarchical distinctions are ontological and are conditioned by the difference of sophianic ideas.³⁰⁷

Bulgakov argues that there are angels of the First, the Second, and the Third Hypostasis. Furthermore, he discusses the problem of gender and introduces the idea of male and female in the angelic world and in the sphere of spirit.

Speaking of the life of angels, he points out that the main ontological difference of angels from humankind is their incorporeality. At the same time, Bulgakov introduces the idea of spiritual corporeality which is associated with Sophia:

‘God, as absolute Spirit, is free of a body, but He possesses perfect spiritual corporeality in Divine Sophia as the organism of ideas’.³⁰⁸

The idea of the reunion of the angelic and human worlds is also present in Bulgakov’s works.

The Icon and Its Veneration was written in 1930 and published in 1931, between the *Little Trilogy* (completed in 1929) and the *Great Trilogy*, begun in 1933. In this work, Bulgakov closely scrutinises the question of the depiction of angels. He argues that the portrayability of the angels is rooted not in their ‘pseudo-corporeality’ but in their co-humanity. ‘These icons are not portrayals of their nonexistent bodies but symbolic images of their spiritual essence’.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 95.

³⁰⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 77.

³⁰⁷ See Chapter 1.3.3.

³⁰⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 148.

³⁰⁹ Bulgakov (2012) *Icons and the Name of God*, 96.

The distinction between ‘angelic time’ and ‘human time’ is found in *The Bride of the Lamb* (1945).³¹⁰

Overall, we can see that, already in his earliest theological works, Bulgakov insisted on the intrinsic and substantial connection between the angelic and human worlds and that he linked angelology with the idea of Sophia. More decisively, angels are indispensable for Bulgakov’s understanding of anthropology. They can be seen as our heavenly alter ego giving an impulse, setting a goal and measure for human spiritual development.

3.3. Sources for Bulgakov’s angelology

In this subsection we will focus on Bulgakov’s sources. Most can be identified in the text due to more or less detailed references provided by Bulgakov. In his works concerning angels Bulgakov often gives his own interpretations of the relevant Biblical texts. Where possible, he substantiates his opinion with liturgical and patristic material. There are also a number of references to medieval and modern authors: both Eastern Orthodox and Western. I divide all of Bulgakov’s explicit sources into five groups:

1. Biblical texts. The Bible – both the Old and New Testaments – is the constant and the ultimate point of reference for Bulgakov.
2. Liturgical sources. I include in this group Bulgakov’s references to hymnography and prayers.
3. Patristic sources. Besides Patristic references, I also include here Plato and apocrypha.
4. Modern authors. My focus is on Schelling, Soloviev and Florenskii.
5. Iconography. The depiction of Sophia as a fiery angel and its interpretation by Bulgakov is particularly important for the understanding of the link between angels and Sophia.

³¹⁰ See Chapter 5.4.

3.3.1. Biblical texts

It is not accidental that Bulgakov's works abound in references to the Biblical texts. He considered Holy Scripture to be the primary and universal source of faith above any sort of tradition. In his book *The Orthodox Church*, Bulgakov (1988:18) writes:

‘... The Word of God is above all other sources of faith, especially of all tradition in all its forms. Tradition adapts itself to the different needs of different epochs; Holy Scripture, that is the voice of God addressed to man, has absolute value, though revealed under a conditioned historical form... Holy Scripture and tradition are not equal in value. First place belongs to the Word of God; the criterion of the truth of Scripture is not tradition (although tradition testifies to Scripture) but on the contrary, tradition is recognised when founded on Scripture. Tradition cannot be in disagreement with Scripture.’³¹¹

One has to mention that the most frequently referred book in *Jacob's Ladder* is the Book of Genesis.³¹² Bulgakov found there a wide variety of topics, starting from the theme of creation of heaven and earth and the idea of the angelic world as a medium between God and human beings, to conjecture about male and female in the angelic world³¹³. Bulgakov also pointed to the Book of Genesis substantiating the idea of the oneness of the human nature and highlighting the differences between the image of God in humans and angels.³¹⁴ Among other topics where the Book of Genesis is mentioned is the life of angels in love and by love and the question of their incorporeality. Numerous angelophanies described in the first book of the Bible are discussed at length in the light of sophiology.³¹⁵ Finally, the ideas of the bond between angels and humans and the reunion of the angelic and human world in the incarnation are to be mentioned in connection with the book of Genesis.³¹⁶

³¹¹ Bulgakov (1988) *The Orthodox Church*, 18.

³¹² Genesis (Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 27,34, 36, 52, 58, 76, 81, 84, 87, 90, 91, 93, 98, 111, 129, 132, 133, 136, 137, 142, 152, 153, 156, 158)

³¹³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 27, 34, 87-98.

³¹⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 76, 81, 84.

³¹⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 129-137.

³¹⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 156

From the other books of the Pentateuch, along with some of the themes already mentioned, Bulgakov borrows the ideas of the guardian angels of nations and individuals, and the participation and collaboration of angels in the history of humankind.³¹⁷

Bulgakov mentions most of the historical books of the Old Testament.³¹⁸ The most prominent themes touched in them are: the angel's participation in human history; theophanies and angelophanies; and the incorporeality of angels. He also makes references to the Book of Job and the Psalms, as well as to some of the Prophets, especially Daniel, Isaiah, and Ezekiel.³¹⁹ The Books of Tobit and Judith are mentioned in the course of the discussion of the nature of angels and their appearances.³²⁰

Although Bulgakov very often refers to the Gospels and the Epistles, from the New Testament, the Book of Revelation is the one most frequently mentioned.³²¹ Some verses there are particularly important for Bulgakov, and he mentions them on more than one occasion. For instance, the words 'human measurement which is also the angel's measurement' (Rev 21:17) are used to substantiate the ontological correlation of both worlds. Also, the Book of Revelation is a major reference for Bulgakov's discussion on angelic participation in human history.³²² He draws on the Book of Revelation as well for the idea of self-renunciation and sacrificial love for humans (Rev 12:11), discussing the problem of freedom and evil in the angelic world, and emphasising the union of angels and humans in the eschatological perspective.

³¹⁷ Exodus (Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 59, 129 – 134) ; Leviticus (JL, 109) ; Numbers, (JL, 130, 131, 138, 153) ; Deuteronomy (JL, 130, 132)

³¹⁸ Joshua (JL, 61, 142) ; Judges (JL, 131, 138, 152); 2 Samuel (JL, 59); 1, 2Kings (JL, 59, 60, 82, 132); 2 Chronicles (JL, 59, 60, 82); Nehemiah (JL, 22, 130)

³¹⁹ Job (JL, 60, 83, 102, 112); Psalms (JL, 25, 27, 39, 60, 85, 106, 120, 141); *Prophets* : Isaiah (JL, 59, 60, 110, 117, 119, 134) ; Jeremiah (JL, 133) ; Ezekiel (JL, 37, 119, 133, 139, 142) ; Daniel (JL, 36, 40, 52, 59, 60, 63, 120, 127) ; Zechariah (JL, 61)

³²⁰ *Old Testament Apocrypha*: Tobit (JL, 105, 106, 144, 149, 150); Judith 9 (JL, 51)

³²¹ Matt (JL, 39, 44, 49, 64, 66, 69, 70, 89, 91-95, 108, 113, 118, 151, 160); Mark (JL, 69, 94, 113, 118, 142); Luke (JL, 44, 50, 51, 64, 69, 70, 78, 89, 94, 98, 99, 113, 117, 119, 142); John (JL, 51, 52, 82, 102, 106, 114, 117, 131, 158); Acts (JL, 39, 130, 157); Romans (JL, 77, 85, 128); 1 Corinthians (JL, 10, 44, 64, 68, 90, 116, 140); 2 Corinthians (JL, 68, 69); 1 Peter (JL, 62); 2 Peter (JL, 110); 1 John (JL, 132); Jude (JL, 110); Colossians (JL, 77, 114, 159); Ephesians (JL, 62, 65, 77, 88, 97); Galatians (JL, 88, 130) ; 1, 2 Thessalonians (JL, 59, 114, 151) ; 1 Timothy (JL, 131) ; Hebrews (JL, 52, 55, 103, 130, 140, 141, 158); Rev (JL, 36, 48-50, 53-58, 63, 64, 93, 111 -114, 120, 123, 141, 159, 161)

³²² Bulgakov mentions two commentaries which he used: Andrew, Archbishop of Caesarea (2011) *Commentary on the Apocalypse*; Zahn (1924-1926) *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*.

3.3.2. Liturgical sources

One might argue that, whereas the Holy Scripture is the primary source of faith for Bulgakov, his primary source of experience and theological inspiration is the liturgical tradition of the Church. The importance of the liturgy and prayer for Bulgakov's theology, and his sophiology in particular, was discussed in the previous chapter. The angelological entries in his spiritual diary reveal the dependence of Bulgakov's angelology on his experience of prayer.³²³ Apart from this, he gives a number of references to different liturgical texts in his *Jacob's Ladder* (1929). These references include prayers and canons to the guardian angel, hymns from the weekly service book of eight tones (*Octoechos*), various prayers and hymns from the monthly service book (*Festal Menaion*), and from the euchologion (*Priest's Prayer Book*), as well as general references to Church hymnography.³²⁴

Generally, the themes related to the liturgical texts are more specific and detailed than those referring to the Biblical texts. For example, when Bulgakov refers to the Bible he speaks of the bond between humans and angels, whereas referring to *The Canon to the Guardian Angel* he points to the participation of guardian angels in all creative aspects of human life, and argues that guardian angels never leave humans even beyond their death.³²⁵ Which means that angelic participation in human history and the angels' influence on it is not limited to different kind of supernatural appearances and angelophanies, but is conditioned by their constant presence in human life.³²⁶ This appears possible because of invisible immediate communion and interaction with angels.³²⁷ According to Bulgakov, all angels – regardless of their hierarchy – take part in the work and care of guardian angels.³²⁸

³²³ See section 3.2 in this chapter

³²⁴ *Octoechos (Book of eight tones)* <https://www.archdiocese.ca/content/complete-octoechos-book-eight-tones> (accessed 1.04.2019); *Festal Menaion*, translated by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, Faber and Faber, 1969; Hapgood (1906) *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic, Greco-Russian, Church*.

³²⁵ *The Unabbreviated Horologion or Book of the Hours* (1997), 347-376; Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 17, 71.

³²⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 25.

³²⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 150.

³²⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 44.

Bulgakov elaborates on the question of the angelic nature, referring to angels as ‘second lights and partakers of the divine nature’.³²⁹ He argues that they do not have their own nature, being ‘the mirrors of Divine light’.³³⁰ Angels and their hierarchies were created in the image of the Holy Trinity.³³¹ They are divinised and immovable in their stance against evil.³³²

Among other prominent topics of Bulgakov’s angelology one must mention that angels are the foundation of the visible world, and that the guardian angel is one’s own idea of the human personality.³³³ God’s providence is accomplished through angels and unites them with humans in one Church.³³⁴

It is difficult to determine whether these themes were inspired or supported by liturgical texts, but in any case, the liturgical tradition of the Church is an important and authoritative source for Bulgakov’s theology.

3.3.3. *Ancient Philosophers, Fathers and Apocrypha*

It must be emphasised that the Biblical and liturgical sources influenced Bulgakov in an unsystematic way, providing him with a supply of a variety of insights and ideas. Yet he looked elsewhere for a systematisation of these thoughts, drawing on a proliferation of ancient and modern thinkers. His views on guardian angels and on God as Sophia are instances of this approach. Thus, in his *Philosophy of Economy* (1912) he avers:

‘Our ideal images (the guardian angels we all have) exist before time in the spiritual world while we realise their likeness through our life and thus—by virtue of our freedom—come to resemble them or recede from them...

The theory of man’s ideal preexistence in God as Sophia and of his creation on the basis of freedom... begins to assert itself already in the ancient world—in Plato ... and with complete philosophical clarity in Plotinus. In the Christian mind it finds clear expression in the works of Origen, in St. Gregory of Nyssa and Maximos the Confessor, in Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, in J. Scotus Erigena, and in the mystical theology of Jakob Böhme and Franz Baader; contemporary philosophy owes a particular debt for developing this idea to Schelling’s profundity... and he is joined here by Vladimir Soloviev. Curiously, all his rationalism notwithstanding, Kant, too, comes very close to this theory...’³³⁵

³²⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 23, 155.

³³⁰ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 101.

³³¹ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 80.

³³² Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 113.

³³³ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 42.

³³⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 25, 94, 157.

³³⁵ Bulgakov (2000) *Philosophy of economy: the world as household*, 205.

This lengthy citation is an example of Bulgakov's method, whereby he draws on Christian material while also bringing in modern philosophical ideas in a manner that suited his own philosophising at this point of his philosophical thinking. Building on the Biblical idea of the ministering angel, Bulgakov then ascribes to ancient and modern Christian theologians the development of the philosophical and theological foundations of the concept of Sophia. Moreover, as the above-mentioned quotation demonstrates, Bulgakov provides us with the names of those who apparently most influenced his systematic thought and his understanding of Sophia in particular. Plato is found at the head of the list. Bulgakov accepts his system on his own terms, giving it a Christian sense by means of angelology:

'The Christian sense and truth of Platonism is disclosed only in angelology as the doctrine *about heaven and earth* in their interrelations. Platonic ideas encompass everything themselves, and this is the ontology of the world. But these ideas exist not as logical abstractions and schemes of things, but as hypostatic essences, as angels of the Word'.³³⁶

This passage demonstrates how fundamental is platonic idealism for Bulgakov. Apart from this crucial influence, Bulgakov also mentions Plato in respect to a particular idea, that guardian angels accompany souls after death.³³⁷

St Augustine is the most frequently mentioned Patristic writer in *Jacob's Ladder*. From the range of Augustinian topics, it is obvious that Bulgakov was well acquainted with Augustine's works.³³⁸ Moreover, one can argue that his influence on Bulgakov is not limited to particular theological themes. Bulgakov's definitive personal stance, and especially his extensive deliberation on love at the beginning of the book on angels, can be seen as inspired by Augustine.³³⁹ In fact, one of Augustine's works, *De doctrina Christiana* (397), has a similar hermeneutical structure, where love is seen as the key idea to properly understand both the

³³⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 83.

³³⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 71. Cf. 'And so it is said that after death, the tutelary genius of each person, to whom he had been allotted in life, leads him to a place where the dead are gathered together' (Phaedo, 107D, 371)

λέγεται δὲ οὕτως, ὡς ἄρα τελευτήσαντα ἕκαστον ἕκαστου δαίμων, ὅσπερ ζῶν ταιιλήχει, οὗτος ἄγειν ἐπιχειρεῖ εἰς δῆτινα τόπον

³³⁸ Tataryn (2000) *Augustine and Russian Orthodoxy. Russian Orthodox Theologians and Augustine of Hippo, a Twentieth Century Dialogue*, 74-84, 90-95.

³³⁹ Smith (2010) 'Translator's Introduction to *Jacob's Ladder*', X -XI.

Scripture and the Christian teaching.³⁴⁰ Besides the idea of love, Bulgakov mentions Augustine in a discussion of the creation of angels.³⁴¹ It must be said that Bulgakov never uncritically accepts Augustine's views. For instance, while welcoming his opinion on angels as the keepers and watchers of the world and its elements, he disagrees with Augustine concerning his understanding of the angelic nature.³⁴² He also points out the beginnings of sophiology in Augustine's thought: 'the angelic and human worlds have a common foundation in Divine Wisdom'. Noting that teaching on Divine Wisdom is undeveloped in Augustine's writings.³⁴³

One has to say that Bulgakov is not as much directly influenced by Patristic thought as he is in a constant dialogue with the Fathers. Indeed, Bulgakov engages in a discussion on the time of the creation of the angelic world such authorities as Ambrose of Milan, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Jerome, and John of Damascus.³⁴⁴ In the course of discussing the incorporeality of angels, he makes references to Augustine, Makary of Egypt, Gregory Palamas, and supplies quotations from the Acts of the 7th Ecumenical Council (787).³⁴⁵

Where possible, he draws on such sources as ancient apocrypha, both Christian and Jewish. For example, discussing the role of angels in the visible creation, Bulgakov refers to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Assumptio Moysis*, and *The Book of Enoch* along with Basil the Great, John

³⁴⁰ Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, 106-126 (JL, xi)

³⁴¹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, Book 11, Chapter 9.

³⁴² Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 38, 139. Augustine, *In Psalmum CIII Enarratio* 1.15, in PL 37. 1348.

³⁴³ Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram, libri IV, 31; V, 18*; Augustine, & Taylor, John Hammond. (1982). *The literal meaning of Genesis* (Ancient Christian writers ; no. 41). New York: Paulist Press, 138; 168-9.

³⁴⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 23; cf. 'The Angels, Dominations, and Powers, although they began to exist at some time, were already in existence when the world was created.' (Ambrose. *Hexameron, Paradise, Cain and Abel*. ProQuest ebrary. Accessed 12 December 2015.); Basil, *Homiliae in Hexaemeron*, Homily 1, 8-9; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 38*, 9-10 (P. Gallay, SCh 358, Paris 1990, 120); John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesim*, PG 53.29, Hill (1986) *Homilies on Genesis*, 33; cf. *Sermones in Genesim*, PG 54.582 (L. Brottier, SCh 433, Paris 1998, 150-151); Jerome, *Commentariorum In Epistolam ad Titum*, PL 26, 560A; Scheck (2010) *St. Jerome's commentaries on Galatians, Titus, and Philemon*, 284; John Damascene, *Expositio fidei*, 2.3. PG 94, 865.

³⁴⁵ Augustine, *In psalmis Enarratio* 1:15, PL 37, 1348; cf. 'The infinite, inaccessible, and uncreated God has assumed a body, and on account of his immense and ineffable kindness, if I may so say it, he diminished himself (Phil 2:6), lessening his inaccessible glory so as to be able to be united with his visible creatures, as with the souls of the saints and angels, so they can be made participators of divine life (2 Pt 1:4). For each of these is a body, each according to his own nature, namely, an angel, a human soul, and a demon. Although they are subtle in substance, form, and figure according to the subtlety of their nature, so too are their bodies subtle'. Pseudo-Macarius, *The fifty spiritual homilies; and, The great letter*, 54. [Hom. 4, 9]; Gregory Palamas, *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 155 [Cap. 61, col. 1164 D. cf. Homil. 19. PG 151, 257D]; 134 [Cap. 44, – col. 1152 C]; Labbe et al., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova*, volume XIII, 164-165.

Chrysostom, Jerome, Origen, and Epiphanius.³⁴⁶ In making references to the Fathers, Bulgakov's goal is not to impose their authority on readers, but to engage the latter in a thinking and ongoing dialogue.

One can argue that *Ascetical Sayings* by Isaac the Syrian (7 cent.) is an important patristic source for Bulgakov. Although there are only two references to St Isaac in the text of *Jacob's Ladder*, they concern the essence of Bulgakov's angelology. The first agrees with his idea that the guardian angel is so much linked with the core of the human personality that he becomes almost indiscernible within the human soul, its ideal second ego, as it were, its nature intended by God:

‘When the senses, however, are confined by stillness and not permitted to sally forth, and by its aid the soul's memories grow old, then you will see what the soul's natural thoughts are, what is the nature of the soul, and what treasures she has hidden within herself. These treasures are *incorporeal intuitions* [another translation: *knowledge of the bodiless powers*] that are inspired in the soul by themselves, without the exercise of forethought and toil in their behalf. A man, however, does not even know that such thoughts could arise in human nature. For who taught him these things? Or how did he comprehend that which, even when understood, is impossible to make plain to others? Or who was his guide to that which he had never learned from another?’³⁴⁷

This passage from St Isaac gives a description, from personal experience, how the human soul is able to perceive its own nature, and to find deeply inside itself the treasure of ‘incorporeal intuitions’ inspired by its close and mysterious guide and guardian. Apparently, Bulgakov was so moved by St Isaac, that he not only uses his thoughts but reshapes his words and presents them in a poetical form. This is the highest point of his *Introduction to Jacob's Ladder*:

‘When the noise of life subsides and its dissonant voices fall silent,
When the soul is washed in quiet and filled with silence,
When its childhood element is laid bare and removed are the shrouds weighing it down,
When the soul is freed from the captivity of this world and strays one on one with God,
When the fetters of earthly nature are dissolved, and the soul finds its own self,
When it is separated from the earthly shell and finds itself in a new world,
When it is filled with light and washed with the rays of immortality,
Then does it feel bending over it with inexpressible love a being,

³⁴⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 38; Vision IV, II, 4 – the angel of animals ‘angels in charge of beasts and cosmic powers is a traditional motif’ in Osiek, Koester (c1999) *Shepherd of Hermas: a commentary*, 94; Ascensio Moysis = Assumptio Moysis (*JL*, 73); see *The Assumption of Moses* (1993); *The Book of Enoch: or, I Enoch*, Chapter 20, 36-37 (angels watching over different things), Chapter 40: 45; Chapter 60: 56-57; Basil, *Adversum Eunomium*, 3,1; Letter 2, in *The Letters*, 12; *De Spiritu Sancto*, 13, 29; John Chrysostom, *In synaxim archangelorum*, PG 59, 755-756; Jerome, *Commentariorum in Evangelium Matthaei*, XVIII, lib.3, PL 26. 130; Origen, *Homiliae in Jeremiam* 10. 6, PG 13. 364-365 (Nautin, SCh; no 232, Paris 1976, 408-410).

³⁴⁷ Isaac the Syrian (1984) *The ascetical homilies*, 16; cf. *JL*, 12.

so near, so similar, so tender, so calm, so loving, so faithful, so mild, so affectionate, so bright – that joy, peace, blessedness, things unknown on earth, bubble up in the soul. It feels then its non-solitude, and rushes to meet the unknown and near friend.³⁴⁸

The second important thought which is shared between St Isaac and Bulgakov is the idea of angels' participation in human woes. According to Bulgakov, this is possible due to the free self-limitation of the angels, which is designated 'the kenosis of the angelic nature'.³⁴⁹ Indeed, St Isaac writes:

'The holy angels are partakers of the sufferings and the tribulations of the saints through their nearness to them'.³⁵⁰

The reference to St Isaac the Syrian Bulgakov may have found in Florenskii, who gave it in *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*.³⁵¹

Bulgakov had a deep and genuine interest in the theology of Maximus the Confessor. It has been shown in modern research that Bulgakov points to Maximus as representing a positive duality, which is a basis for Sophiology.³⁵² Angels' participation in theosis is another prominent *locus* in Maximus, who is possibly one of Bulgakov's key theological sources for the idea of deification.

Finally, Bulgakov is influenced by Dionysius in a number of respects.³⁵³ In particular, in making use of the concept of hierarchy, he opts for the Dionysian ontological approach.³⁵⁴ Bulgakov finds the idea of hierarchy especially fruitful in his development of the sophiological constructions, which are intricately fused with his angelology. Here, the concept of personhood can be seen as complementary to the concept of hierarchy in Bulgakov's angelology. In order to exist, any hierarchy must of necessity be based on free personal relationships – on the relations of love and faithfulness, creative activity, illuminating development and growth in knowledge.

³⁴⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 11.

³⁴⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 16.

³⁵⁰ Isaac the Syrian (1984) *The ascetical homilies*, 60; cf.: 'For lo, angels and archangels, who are the King's great officials, are gazing steadfastly upon you at the time of your prayer to see what petition you will make of their Master'. (Ibid., Hom.3, p.23) 'Pray that the angel (Syriac 'witness') of your chastity may not withdraw from you, that you be not warred upon by the fiery war of sin and be separated from him'. (Ibid., Hom.3, p.25-26)

³⁵¹ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 255-256.

³⁵² Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 225-233.

³⁵³ Bulgakov (2008) *The Lamb of God*, 73; 80-6.

³⁵⁴ See Chapter 1 for details.

3.3.4. Schelling, Soloviev, and Florenskii

The establishment and early development of universities in Russia is associated with the significant presence of German academics, who contributed enormously to the formation and further development of a number of scientific branches. This is also true for philosophy as an academic discipline. This fact explains the immediate and enduring influence of the German philosophical tradition on Russian philosophical thought. This influence can be traced not only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also in the twentieth century, when it became less immediate and complicated on account of the rich Russian literary heritage of the previous decades.

Schelling's influence on Russian philosophical and theological thought was considerable in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially on its Sophiological strand, developed mainly by Soloviev, Florenskii and Bulgakov.³⁵⁵ Bulgakov probably experienced the most profound and enduring influence from Schelling, above other Russian thinkers in the twentieth century. In the above-mentioned quotation, where Bulgakov lists those thinkers who shaped his understanding of sophiology, the significance of Schelling is greatly emphasised.³⁵⁶ The entire work *Philosophy of Economy* (1912) can be seen as a continuation of Schelling's

Naturphilosophie.³⁵⁷ Bulgakov avers:

‘The philosophy of economy, as a philosophy of objective action, must necessarily be a conscious continuation of Schelling's enterprise. Naturally, it must be free of any Schellingian dogmatism; it merely takes Schelling's basic idea as a theme or task for contemporary philosophy. We cannot, however, neglect the fact that it was Schelling who, with his philosophy of identity, laid the foundation for the philosophy of economy, although we must add that he himself not only did not investigate this aspect of his own problem but apparently was not even conscious of it.’³⁵⁸

The Philosophy of Economy (1912) is the work where Schelling's influence is obvious and undeniable.³⁵⁹ *The Unfading Light*, which was published five years later in 1917, is another work

³⁵⁵ Cf. Williams (1999) *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology*, 19; Valliere (2000) *Modern Russian Theology*, 9, 125, 260; Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 30, 31, 35; Vasilyev (2019) ‘Aspects of Schelling's influence on Sergius Bulgakov and other thinkers of the Russian religious Renaissance of the twentieth century’, 143-159.

³⁵⁶ See Section 3.2. of this thesis.

³⁵⁷ Evtuhov (2000) ‘Introduction’, 16.

³⁵⁸ Bulgakov (2000) *Philosophy of Economy*, 93.

³⁵⁹ See section 2.2. *The development of the concept of Sophia in Bulgakov's theological works* for more details.

where Schelling's presence is very significant. In this Bulgakov's work Schelling is the most frequently referred to modern author. The influence of Schelling in *The Tragedy of Philosophy* (1927) is less obvious. Hadot, however, argues that Bulgakov inherited from Schelling both the definition of heresy and more broadly his 'heresiological approach'.³⁶⁰ Seiling notes that Bulgakov's aesthetics is very close to that of Schelling.³⁶¹

Though it was not our goal to trace all possible places where Bulgakov was, or could be, influenced by Schelling, numerous instances of Schelling's influence are discussed in different sections of this thesis. In particular, in section 1.3.3. *The Holy Trinity, Sophia, and hierarchy* Schelling is shown as a possible source for Bulgakov's nomenclature for the celestial hierarchy.³⁶²

In his young years, Bulgakov was a materialist and a Marxist. In Schelling, he found an inspiration and sufficiently intellectual resource for overcoming his past. His holistic approach was manifested in the teaching of Wisdom, which was mainly articulated in his late *Philosophy of Revelation* (1831-1844). Schelling argues in this work: 'The etymology of the word 'sophia' can come from 'σοφία' - whole, unharmed, undamaged. Therefore true philosophy deals with the whole, and aspires to restore consciousness in its wholeness and integrity'.³⁶³ Through Schelling, Bulgakov transforms Marx's non-personal philosophy of economics into a mystical metaphysical personalised cosmology. In the article *Marx as a Religious Type* (1906), Bulgakov criticised Marx and Feuerbach for their lack of the dimension of the person and of any Christocentric principle as the principle of unity of humankind.

Although in *Jacob's Ladder* Bulgakov mentions Soloviev only once and Florenskii and Schelling not at all, one can argue that these authors influenced to a certain degree Bulgakov's

³⁶⁰ See section 2.3.1. of this thesis. Cf. Hadot (1957) 'La philosophie comme hérésie trinitaire – A propos du livre de Serge Boulgakov : «La tragédie de la philosophie», 247-249.

³⁶¹ Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology: Modern Russian Religious Consciousness and Sergey Bulgakov's Critical Appropriation of German Idealism*, 262.

³⁶² Schelling's influence on Bulgakov is also discussed in the following sections of this thesis: 2.3.3.1. Antinomism; 6.2.2.1. Bulgakov's engagement with Hegel concerning personalism; 8.2.1. The role of experience in Bulgakov. Bulgakov about religious experience.

³⁶³ Schelling (2013) *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 364.

angelology. First of all, the identification of the angels with platonic ideas is already found in Soloviev.

‘The content of all consists of living and acting beings, eternal and abiding, which by their interaction form all reality, all that exists’.³⁶⁴ ‘...The fundamental beings, in the first place, are not only indivisible units or atoms; secondly they are not only living, acting forces, or monads: they are (in addition), beings defined by the unconditional quality of being, or ideas’.³⁶⁵

Bulgakov uses Soloviev’s terminology, adding his own thoughts and themes. He equals angels to platonic ideas, as we have seen in *The Philosophy of Economy*. Almost 20 years later, in *Jacob’s Ladder*, the theme of angels as ideas is presented by Bulgakov in the following way:

‘This whole world was placed under the protection and service of the angelic ranks which for this purpose must have had in themselves correlatively all the fullness of the universe. In this general sense it must be said that the angelic world contains in itself the ideal analogue of the universe in *all* its parts: all ideas or creative themes of this world are present in the angelic world and are realised only when it is present. In this the angelic world is really the intermediary between God and the world, the ladder from earth to the heavens without which our world could not endure the immediate proximity of God. It both unites and separates the creature from God. Such is the first ontological meaning of the vision of Jacob’s ladder: the angelic world as a medium between God and human beings...’³⁶⁶

Furthermore, the idea about particular ontological connection between the angels and Sophia is also found in Soloviev:

‘The second or produced unity, as opposed to the original oneness of the divine Logos, is, as we know, the soul of the world or the ideal mankind (Sophia), which contains in itself and binds with itself all the particular living beings or souls.’³⁶⁷

It is true perhaps that Soloviev does not speak here about angels, mentioning only ‘the ideal mankind’. Nevertheless, from the quotation above one can observe the intermediary role of Sophia, which is also pointed out by Bulgakov:

‘Divine prototypes, the ideas of the world, are realised in creation in two ways: in heaven – spiritually, non-incarnately, and on earth in incarnation. The one divine Wisdom gives being to both worlds and connects them’.³⁶⁸

Finally, Soloviev’s *Chteniia o Bogochelovechestve* is the immediate contemporary source for Bulgakov’s nomenclature for the celestial hierarchy.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁴ Soloviev (1944) *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 124.

³⁶⁵ Soloviev (1944) *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 125.

³⁶⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 34.

³⁶⁷ Soloviev (1944) *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 190.

³⁶⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 31.

³⁶⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 80-86; Soloviev (1944) *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 170; see Chapter 1.3.3.

The idea of the strong link between Sophia and angelology with particular emphasis on the role of the guardian angel is a prominent theme in Bulgakov's theology. It is very likely that he had found this theme first in Florenskii, and then decided to elaborate on the topic. Florenskii writes:

‘With regard to creation, Sophia is the Guardian Angel of creation, the Ideal person of the world.’³⁷⁰

And several pages later Florenskii reiterates the thought:

‘One in God, she is multiple in creation and is perceived in creation in her concrete appearances as *the ideal person of man, as his Guardian Angel*, i.e. as the spark of the eternal dignity of the person and as the image of God in man’.³⁷¹

To conclude, our brief analysis has demonstrated that Schelling's ideas can be traced in Bulgakov's works written at different stages of his life. Both Bulgakov's philosophical and theological views are considerably influenced by the German philosopher. Bulgakov's appropriation of Schelling's themes is always creative, and sometimes mediated through his Russian predecessors V. Soloviev and P. Florenskii.

3.3.5. Sophia as Fiery Angel – the depiction of Sophia

Bulgakov substantiates the portrayability of angels by their co-humanity with humankind. Another aspect of the depiction of angels is connected with the fact that many theophanies in the Old Testament are described in terms of angelophanies. In some places it is said that God speaks through an angel as an ambassador. In others, it is impossible to distinguish between the person of God and that of an angel, because the angel is called the Lord.³⁷² In this case, God appears to people in the form of an angel. In other words, God's will and God's wisdom is revealed in the form of an angel.

³⁷⁰ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 237.

³⁷¹ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 239.

³⁷² Mart-Jan (2007) ‘The Identity of the Angel of the LORD’.

One can find a longstanding tradition of the depiction of the Wisdom of God in the Orthodox Church.³⁷³ Scholars describe different iconographic types of such depictions, and Wisdom in the image of an angel belongs to the most ancient ones. For instance, N. Vaganova refers to an image with an inscription Σοφία ΙΣΧΥΣ over a winged figure in the catacombs of Carmusa in Alexandria (6th century).³⁷⁴

The most remarkable example of the icon of the Wisdom of God in Russia is that of Novgorod. Both Florenskii and Bulgakov pointed out the importance of its iconography and used it as proof that their interpretation of Sophia was rooted in the Orthodox tradition. Florenskii argued that the Novgorod icon of Sophia is also the most ancient in Russia. He was one of the first authors who offered the description of the Novgorod iconographical type and its sophiological explanation.³⁷⁵

On the icon, one sees the figure of an angel wearing the Byzantine imperial garment. The angel is seated on a throne, holding a rolled-up scroll and a staff, and is surrounded by the figures of Mary, the Mother of God and St John the Baptist, who reverently bow their heads in prayerful posture. The blessing figure of Christ is depicted above the angel's head. And above Christ there is the firmament, or heaven, with an altar, the *Etimasia*, surrounded by six angels. The central winged figure wears an *omophorion*. Her long hair does not curl but falls onto her shoulders; her face and hands are of fiery colour; on her back are two large fiery wings; she wears a golden crenellated crown; around her head is a golden nimbus; above her ears is a ribbon holding back her hair and freeing her ears for clearer hearing. Florenskii is absolutely convinced

³⁷³ Filimonov (1874) 'Ocherki russkoi khristianskoi ikonografii: Sofia Premudrost Bozhia', 1–20; Nikolsky (1906) 'Sofia Premudrost Bozhia', 69–81; Meyendorff (1959) 'L'icographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la tradition Byzantine', 250–277; Meyendorff (1988) 'Tema "Premudrosti" v vostochnoevropeskoi srednevekovoi culture i ee nasledie', 244–252; Ammann (1938) 'Darstellung und Deutung der Sophia im vorpetrinischen Russland', 120–156; Der Nersessian (1962) 'Note sur quelques images se rattachant au thème du Christ-Ange', 209–216; Sidorova (1971) 'Volotova fresca "Premudrost sozda sebe dom" i ee otnoshenie k novgorodskoi eresi strigolnikov v XIV v.', 212–231; Averintsev (1972) 'K ujasneniju smysla nadpisi nad konkhoi centralnoi apsidi Sofii Kievskoi', 25–49; Evseeva (1982) 'Dve simbolicheskie kompozitsii v rospisi XIV v. monastiria Zarzma', 134–146; Iakovleva (1977) "'Obraz mira' v ikone 'Sofia Premudrost' Bozhiia", 388–404; Gavrilovic (1980) 'Divine Wisdom as Part of Byzantine Imperial Ideology', 44–52; Lifshitz (2000) 'Sofia Premudrost Bozhia v russkoi ikonografii'; Vaganova (2011) *Sophiologia Protoiereya Sergiya Bulgakova*, 114–144.

³⁷⁴ Vaganova (2011) *Sophiologia Protoiereya Sergiya Bulgakova*, 123.

³⁷⁵ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 268–272.

that ‘this is Sophia. She is represented as sitting on a double cushion which lies on a magnificent golden throne that has four legs and is supported by seven flamelike pillars.’³⁷⁶

Bulgakov accepts Florenskii’s argumentation and builds on his analysis. Discussing the general principles of Orthodox iconography, Bulgakov distinguishes between allegories and the symbolic reality depicted on icons. Allegories do not express deep dogmatic ideas, they are merely descriptive, whereas a symbolic realism features ‘the intergrowth or concretion of image and idea’. Bulgakov refers to the icons of St. Sophia of the Yaroslavl and of the Novgorod types as an illustration of this idea:

‘This type of icon, first of all, is not a theological schema or allegory but a noetic vision, a revelation in artistic and mystical contemplation. Secondly, the fiery angel is therefore not an allegorical but a symbolic image of the pre-eternal Spiritual Humanity in Divinity which is disclosed in the creaturely world in man: in Christ as the God-Man, in the Mother of God and the Forerunner as realising and representing the peak of humanity, and finally in the angelic world. And the whole composition is the icon of the Wisdom of God, noncreaturely and creaturely, of pre-eternal and created humanity in their unity and connectedness.’³⁷⁷

It must be mentioned that Bulgakov’s interpretation of who was actually depicted in this icon changed in the course of his life from the almost Solovievian ‘eternal feminine’ in *The Unfading Light* (1917) to ‘hypostaticity’ in *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity* (1925), the Mother of God in *The Burning Bush* (1927), and finally to ‘pre-eternal Spiritual Humanity’ in *The Icon and Its Veneration* (1931). One can see how Bulgakov’s interpretation of the icon is connected with the evolution of his understanding of Sophia.³⁷⁸

Since then, various scholars have published a number of works with their own interpretations of the icon opposed to the ones suggested by Florenskii and Bulgakov. Florovsky in his article published in 1932, argued that the person depicted on the icon could only be the Second Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God.³⁷⁹ He supported this thesis with numerous patristic opinions and iconographic data. The iconography of the Sophia of Novgorod,

³⁷⁶ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 269.

³⁷⁷ Bulgakov (2012) *Icons and the Name of God*, 98.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 218 (see Note 38); also ‘The angels serve the holy Mother of God, recognizing in her the full expression of created Wisdom’. (Bulgakov (1993) *Sophia, The Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, 130).

³⁷⁹ Florovsky (1932) ‘O pochitanii Sofii Premudrosti Bozhiei v Vizantii i na Rusi’, 485–500; cf. Florovsky (1962) ‘The problem of Old Russian Culture’, 11-12.

however, required particular examination and explanation. First of all, Florovsky pointed out that the Novgorod icon of the Holy Sophia is mentioned in Chronicles in the 16th century for the first time, and that there were no known icons or frescoes of the Holy Sophia of Novgorod which could be dated earlier than that. This fact allowed him to speak about later Western influences which allegedly contributed to the iconography of the Holy Sophia in Novgorod. He also spoke about the decline in Russian art and culture from the end of the 15th century and through the whole of the 16th. His general conclusion was that the icon of the Holy Sophia of Novgorod could not be said to belong to the genuine Orthodox tradition found in Byzantium and Old Rus. Although Florovsky did not mention either Bulgakov or Florenskii in his article, some of their later critics, influenced by Florovsky, picked up on his ideas and developed arguments along similar lines.³⁸⁰

However, in the 1980s some Russian researchers came to realise that the iconography of the Holy Sophia of Novgorod dated further back than the 16th century. In particular, the icon, which Florenskii described in *The Pillar* and dated to the 16th century, most probably goes back to the beginning of the 15th.³⁸¹ This new dating devalues Florovsky's argument concerning the decline in Russian culture at the time of the appearance of the icon, as the first quarter of the 15th century was the age when St Andrey Rublev and his circle were creating their masterpieces. P. Hunt argues that the Novgorod icon of Sophia does not manifest the decline but on the contrary, is one of the finest achievements of Russian iconography, masterfully expressing the subtleties of the Orthodox theology. She suggests influence of the hesychast movement on the

³⁸⁰ Gavrushin (1998) *Po sledam rytsarey Sofii*, 69-114; Zolotarev (2005) 'Ikona Sofii-Premudrosti Bozhiey novgorodskogo izvoda. Obzor bogoslovskoi i iskusstvovedcheskoi polemiki', 5-9; Brusova (2006) *Sofia Premudrost Bozhia v drevnerusskoi literature i iskusstve*.

³⁸¹ I. Iakovleva thinks the icon was painted in 1560s; nevertheless she points out features typical of the iconography of the 14th century (Iakovleva (1977) "Obraz mira" v ikone "Sofia Premudrost" Bozhia', 388-404). L. Livshits points out that similar icons were painted outside Novgorod between the 12th and 15th centuries, and that there might be a link with numerous Byzantine frescoes of the same age. He considers the icon from the Moscow Annunciation Cathedral to be from the early 15th century. (Lifshiz (1999) 'Die Ikone „Sophia — Weisheit Gottes“ aus der Moskauer Kreml', 29-42); Russian art historians Kachalova, Mayasova and Schennikova agree on the dating of the 15th century. (Kachalova, Mayasova, Schennikova (1990) *The Annunciation Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin: 500 years of the unique monument of Russian culture* 67).

iconography of the Holy Sophia of Novgorod, as well as pointing out the Trinitarian symbolism of the icon.³⁸²

More recent research and the newest archeological data confirm earlier suggestions that the iconography of the Sophia of Novgorod goes back to at least the beginning of the 15th century, and perhaps even to the second part of the 14th.³⁸³ In 2006 the fresco of the Holy Sophia was discovered in Novgorod. The earliest layer of this wall painting dates between 1434 and 1441, which confirms the earlier origin of this type of iconography.³⁸⁴



Frescoes from The Archbishop's Palace in the Novgorod Kremlin, 15th century. *Picture 2*

³⁸² Hunt (2001) 'The Novgorod Sophia Icon', 25-33.

³⁸³ Lifshitz (2000) 'Sophia the Wisdom of God in Russian iconography, in *Sophia the Wisdom of God*'; Hunt (2001) 'The Novgorod Sophia Icon', 21; Musin (2013) *The Secrets of the House of Holy Wisdom. The Church of Novgorod the Great in 10TH-16TH Centuries*.

³⁸⁴ The restorators decided to restore one of the later layers, which is better preserved, and which can now be seen in the illustration (*Picture 2*). See Sarabianov (2009) 'Rospisi Vladychnoy Palaty Novgorodskogo Kremliya: Keliya Ioanna. Predvaritelnye zametki po rezul'tatam restavracionnykh rabot v 2006-2007 godakh'.

A. Musin refers to the numismatic data and points out that the image of the Sophia angel is found on the Novgorod coins issued in 1421. He further argues that, before being put on coins, the image of the Holy Sophia had to be relatively widespread and easily recognisable, which takes back its appearance to the 14th century. Musin rejects the idea that the fiery angel on the Novgorod icon represents the Second Hypostasis of the Trinity, the Son of God. He suggests that the people of Novgorod worshipped the icon of the Holy Sophia as the symbolic representation of their Local Orthodox Church, the Church of Novgorod.



Picture 3 Novgorod coins with depictions of the Holy Sophia. Source: Musin (2013) The Secrets of the House of Holy Wisdom.

Indeed, in 1216 Prince Mstislav of Novgorod declared: ‘where the Holy Sophia is, there is Novgorod’. Since that time the ‘Holy Sophia’ has become the constant point of reference in the Novgorod Chronicles. Sophia ‘defends’ Novgorod from the Mongols in 1237; intrigues against the Novgorod people are seen as the ‘malice against the Holy Sophia’ in 1229. With the help of the Holy Sophia, the Lithuanians (1226, 1234), the Swedes and the Catholic crusaders (1240, 1242, 1262, 1268, 1301, 1348) were defeated. At the same time, Sophia warns the people of Novgorod against civil war and bloodshed (1219, 1220, 1384). Musin believes that the fact that the Holy Sophia for the Novgorodians is neither Christ nor the personification of the main cathedral of Novgorod, but the Church of the Creed, is expressed in the following words of the

chronicler. He says that the city had been delivered from the Tatar invasion by the defence of ‘God and the Holy and Great Catholic and Apostolic Church of the Holy Sophia’.³⁸⁵

Musin further suggests that the creation of the Novgorod icon of the Holy Sophia may have been linked to the creation and formalisation of the particular system of the Church administration in Novgorod: the so-called *semisobornaya* [‘seven cathedrals’] administration, which was created in the second half of the 14th century.³⁸⁶ He also points out the eschatological expectations of the Russian people at the end of each century, as well as a possible connection of the angelic representation of a local church with the Book of Revelation of St John.³⁸⁷ Indeed, many of the Fathers of the Church understand the angels of the churches from the Book of Revelation (Chapters 2 and 3) to be the guardian angels of those churches.³⁸⁸

A fresco in the Znamensky Cathedral in Novgorod, though relatively late (1702), better conveys the idea of the Sophia-angel as the guardian angel of the local Church. It shows the fiery angel – a female figure with wings raised and covering the hierarchs of Novgorod and other members of the Church beneath her robe.

³⁸⁵ Musin (2013) *The Secrets of the House of Holy Wisdom*, 79-80.

³⁸⁶ Nikolsky (1898) ‘Opisanie semi novgorodskikh soborov po spisku XVI v. Sankt-Peterburgskoi biblioteki Sv. Synoda’; Yanin (1976) ‘“Semisobornaya rospis” Novgoroda’; Andreev (1989) ‘Noviy spisok “Semisobornoi rospisi” Novgoroda’; Musin (2009) ‘Semisobornaya rospis Velikogo Novgoroda kak istoricheskii istochnik’.

³⁸⁷ Musin (2013) *The Secrets of the House of Holy Wisdom*, 80-81.

³⁸⁸ Origen, *In Numeros homiliae*, 11.4, *De Principiis*, 1.8.1 (PG 11, 176); Eusebius, *Commentaria in Psalmos*, 47: 13–15 (PG 23, 428C); 50:21 (PG 23, 441B); Basil, *Ennaratio in Prophetam Isaiam* 1.46 (PG 30, 208 B; Lipatov (2001) *St. Basil the Great : Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, 61); Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 42.9* (J. Bernardi, SCh 384, Paris 1992, 71); Sickenberger (1927) ‘Die Deutung der Engel der sieben apokalyptisch Gemeinden,’ 137–43, collects the patristic evidence.



Picture 4 Frescoes in the Znamensky Cathedral, Novgorod, 1702.

Although Bulgakov does not suggest this particular interpretation of the Holy Sophia of Novgorod, we can find in his works a strong connection between Sophia and the Church. Following Florenskii, he links the idea of Sophia and the idea of the Church.³⁸⁹ Bearing in mind this interpretation of the icon, it is possible to accept Bulgakov's resistance to understanding the Sophia-angel as the representation of the Son of God.

³⁸⁹'Sophia is the Church which takes into herself the gifts of the revelation of the trihypostatic Divinity, the idea of God; she is according to the word of revelation the "body" of Christ, the "body of God." Consequently, God as Creator has a body in creation.' (Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 259);
'The Sophia of the cross (to which corresponds the Yarsolavl type of Sophia icon) is also the Church, which is one, but heavenly and earthly...' (Bulgakov (2012) *Icons and the Name of God*, 113);
'The cross is the sacred hieroglyph of the Divine Sophia-Church, in which the image of the Holy Trinity is imprinted' (Bulgakov (2012) *Icons and the Name of God*, 113);
'This is the Divine Sophia: the "invisible" Church (that is, the Church that transcends direct knowledge), whose action, nevertheless, is manifested visibly as a mystery that is in the process of being revealed'. (Bulgakov (2002) *The Bride of the Lamb*, 292).

One can draw two important conclusions from the discussion in this sub-chapter.

First, the authority of the Novgorod icon of the Holy Wisdom, which was questioned by some of the scholars in the 20th century, has been confirmed by the most recent research. The icon appears to be from the time when other great masterpieces of Russian iconography were created and reflects the creative daring and theological deepness of the epoch.

And second, its interpretations suggested by Russian sophiologists can be reconciled with the Orthodox tradition, if we see in the Sophia-angel not the depiction of the Second Hypostasis of the Trinity, but the symbolic representation of the Church, which is the mystic body of Christ.

Chapter 3: Conclusion

In the current chapter we have shown how Bulgakov's metalanguage of sophiology works when it is applied to one particular aspect of the teaching of the Church. The teaching on angels is found in the Bible, in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, as well as in liturgical sources. Apart from the Biblical and patristic sources, Bulgakov draws on the thought of ancient and modern philosophers, especially when he feels their insights to resonate with his own. However, the Bible as well Church tradition remains the highest authority for Bulgakov. This is why Orthodox iconography and, in particular, the Russian tradition of the depiction of the Holy Sophia of Novgorod, when the Wisdom of God is symbolically represented by the composition with a fiery angel, is extremely important for Bulgakov. To be rooted in the Church tradition was crucially important for Bulgakov. One has to mention that the angelic reality is also part of his personal spiritual and mystic experience. All these sources inform his comprehensive angelology.

We have demonstrated that angelology is absolutely indispensable in Bulgakov's sophiology. The main reason is that one should not seek this in the construction of a cosmological system, as do some authors, but in the needs of anthropology. The role of the

guardian angels is greatly emphasised; they become more than simply guards. Through the prism of sophiology they are seen as hypostatic spirits leading their human counterparts to the fullest realisation of their sophianic ideas. The possibility of the union between the angelic and the human worlds is based on their essential compatibility and relationality, which is expressed by Bulgakov in the terms the ‘co-humanity of angels’ and the ‘co-angelicity of human beings’. The realisation of this potential unity within the created Sophia is the first step before one can become fully human, and ‘come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ’ (Ephesians 4:13), and of ‘Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Corinth 1:24).

Part 1: Conclusion

In the first part of the thesis we identified the key concepts in the theology of Dionysius and Bulgakov, which will allow us, as it were, to open the door and enter the inner chamber of their theology. The key concept, which did not exist before being introduced by the author, and either was coined (as the term ‘hierarchy’ by Dionysius) or was developed in a particular way (as the concept of Sophia by Bulgakov), becomes the crucial constructive element of their theological metalanguage. In order to properly read Dionysius and Bulgakov, one must understand and substantiate their respective metalanguages. In the course of three chapters we analysed the concepts of hierarchy and Sophia in Dionysius and Bulgakov. It was shown that the concept of hierarchy can be seen as a metalanguage in the writings of Dionysius, and the concept of Sophia as a metalanguage in the theology of Sergey Bulgakov.

The idea of a metalanguage is associated with bringing new terms and interpretations into the theological discourse. We also established a performative function of the metalanguage. There is always a certain purpose in the introduction of a metalanguage. In this first part of the thesis we have attempted to answer the fundamental question: ‘What is the purpose of the introduction of their metalanguages by our two respective authors?’

In Chapter 1 we analysed different approaches to answering this question applied to Dionysius. A probable monastic origin of the text of the CD caused us to suggest that the purpose of the introduction of the idea of hierarchy was the spiritual upbringing of the monks. In light of this purpose, we have reformulated the notion of hierarchy from CH3 in the following way: ‘A hierarchy is a mode of life and activity (ἐνέργεια) based on the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of Divine Providence (τάξις) as far as it is given from God in accordance with one’s own measure (ἀναλόγως) and leading to likeness with God as much as possible’. What the desirable effect of the CD is, what Dionysius expects from his readers, can be only one thing – to bring them into belonging to the hierarchy, which is the only way for union with God both for angels and humans.

In Chapters 2 and 3 we saw that, for Bulgakov, the main goal of the introduction of Sophia was to demonstrate the close relationship between the human and the divine, the visible and the invisible. The long-standing goal for human beings is expressed by the sophiological terms ‘co-angelicity’ and ‘co-humanity’.

In Part 2 of the thesis, which comprises the following three chapters, we will analyse the language of ontology in Bulgakov and Dionysius. The guiding question of Part 2 can be the following: ‘What does it mean to have that goal, which was identified in Part 1?’ In other words, we will discuss what it could mean to belong to the human or the angelic hierarchy, and what it could mean to be ‘co-humans’ or ‘co-angels’.

Part II. Angelology and ontological questions: who are angels in terms of nature and hypostasis?

In Part 1 we saw that the object language both for Bulgakov and for Dionysius was also a metalanguage in relation to the initial language of Scripture, which is the language of experience.³⁹⁰ These object languages can be called the metalanguages of the first level. Obviously, they are different in Dionysius and in Bulgakov.

The metalanguages of hierarchy and Sophia are both languages of desire, longing for an ideal.³⁹¹ They appeal to our will, setting the goals and the trajectory of spiritual development. They are synthetic languages, operating with both philosophical terms and poetic metaphors. The language of ontology, being an object language for the above-mentioned metalanguages, is a metalanguage in relation to the initial object language of Scripture. It is a philosophical language, appealing to our mind and our reason. It is used when one needs to convey certain ideas as precisely as possible, operating with abstract philosophical terms, such as being, hypostasis, and nature. The language of anthropology is poetical. It is descriptive and is not always precise. It speaks to our feelings and emotions. It operates with metaphors and symbols. Whereas the use of the metalanguages in Bulgakov and in Dionysius is conditioned by cultural and social circumstances, the language of philosophy is used for purely intellectual reasons.³⁹² The philosopher is not eager to acquire any political, or ideological influence in society; his primary concern is not so much to be understood or accepted by others, but to provide an account of reality as a whole in established terms.

In Part 1 we have identified the metalanguages of Sophia and hierarchy as setting certain relationships between human and angelic realities. In Bulgakov's Sophianic understanding,

³⁹⁰ See Table 5 in Chapter 2.

³⁹¹ Cf. the role of beauty both in hierarchy (CH, 3, 2; PG 3, 165B) and in Sophia (for instance, 'Beauty is Sophianic; it is the obvious, tangible revelation of Divine Sophia as the pre-eternal foundation of the world', Bulgakov (2010) *JL*, 86)

³⁹² Cf. Ep. 8; Chapter 2 of this thesis.

angels become co-humans, representing the ideal task for their human counterparts. In Dionysius it is crucial that human beings be part of a hierarchy, and in this way to be engaged in a relationship with the angels. In both cases, the metalanguage of the second level establishes the goal; it urges spiritual development through the recognition of certain links between angels and human beings.

In Part 2 we will pursue the following guiding question: what does it mean to have this goal? In other words, what does it mean for humans to be co-angels and for angels to be co-humans? What does it mean for them to belong to hierarchy? These questions may be answered through an analysis of ontological terms, such as nature and person, which relate both to angels and humans. Chapter 4 deals with the understanding of the angelic nature in Dionysius and its relation to the divine and human nature. Chapter 5 will focus on Bulgakov's understanding of the angelic nature. Finally, in Chapter 6, before looking into the idea of personhood in Bulgakov, we will try to identify the corresponding ideas in the theology of the CD.

In the course of our analysis we will outline terms, which could belong to the metalanguages of the first level, and analyse whether their meaning was changed by Dionysius and Bulgakov and thereby become 'new terms' for the metalanguages of the second level. For Dionysius, this can be done by comparison of his usage of the terms with that of Gregory of Nyssa, who is one of his significant predecessors, and with other fathers.³⁹³ Such an analysis will allow us to refine the terminology of the metalanguages of the second level, and clarify the limitations of the metalanguages of the first level.

³⁹³ On the importance of Gregory of Nyssa for Dionysius see Bouyer (2004) *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*, 180; Golitzin (1994) *Et introibo ad altare Dei: the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with special reference to its predecessors in the Eastern Christian tradition*, 304-317.

Chapter 4. The nature of angels in Dionysius

One may point to similar features in Bulgakov's and Dionysius' understanding of the angelic nature. In this chapter, I will analyse what is said in the CD on the nature of angels, which terms are employed by the author, and what is their philosophical and theological context. I divided the terms into two categories. The first one includes the term φύσις (nature) and its derivatives. We will also look at how Dionysius applies the term φύσις in relation to God, human beings and angels. The second grouping deals with the terms and expressions employed to designate as it were the angelic nature: οἱ θεῖοι νόες (the divine minds), αἱ οὐράνια οὐσίαι (the celestial beings), τὰ θεῖα φῶτα (the divine lights) etc. Although Dionysius does not elaborate extensively on the nature of angels, it is also possible to make a judgement on this from his vocabulary.

4.1. Dionysius's use of the term φύσις

The term φύσις was adopted in Christian theology and has played a crucial role in the development of Christian doctrine. It first appeared as early as in pre-Socratic philosophy, and was later elaborated in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. The term was important for Stoics, who linked the concept of φύσις with the idea of corporeality, and for the Neo-Platonic authors. The word φύσις can be found in the Septuagint and in Philo, as well as in the New Testament. The concept was used by the Apologists and further developed by Origen and his successors. In the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, the term φύσις received its most prominent

position.³⁹⁴ Undoubtedly, Dionysius's use of it must be analysed against the background of its development in Christian and Neo-Platonic thought, especially in Proclus.³⁹⁵

4.1.1. Divine nature

By the time of Dionysius, the word φύσις was extensively used by Christian authors to designate the divine nature. In various contexts it can be found in Origen, Cyril, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa.³⁹⁶

Although, being faithful to the formulations of the negative theology, Dionysius tends to speak about God as transcendent and beyond nature (ὕπερφύσιν), there are a few places where he directly applies φύσις to the Divinity. In the MT he mentions θεία καὶ ἀγαθὴ φύσις (divine and good nature). It is possible to speak about the nature of God within an affirmative or cataphatic theology.

Ἐν μὲν οὖν ταῖς Θεολογικαῖς Ὑποτυπώσειςι τὰ κυριώτατα τῆς καταφατικῆς θεολογίας ὑμνήσαμεν, πῶς ἡ θεία καὶ ἀγαθὴ φύσις ἐνικῆ λέγεται, πῶς τριαδική· τίς ἢ κατ' αὐτὴν λεγομένη πατρότης τε καὶ υἰότης· τί βούλεται δηλοῦν ἢ τοῦ πνεύματος θεολογία· πῶς ἐκ τοῦ ἀύλου καὶ ἀμεροῦς ἀγαθοῦ τὰ ἐγκάρδια τῆς ἀγαθότητος ἐξέφυ φῶτα καὶ τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἐν ἀλλήλοις συναϊδίου τῆ ἀναβλαστήσει μονῆς ἀπομεμένηκεν ἀνεκφοίτητα· πῶς ὀυπερούσιος Ἰησοῦς ἀνθρωποφυικαῖς ἀληθείαις οὐσίωται καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα πρὸς τῶν λογίων ἐκπεφασμένα κατὰ τὰς Θεολογικὰς Ὑποτυπώσειςι ὑμνηται.³⁹⁷

'In my Theological Representations. I have praised the notions which are most appropriate to affirmative theology. I have shown the sense in which the divine and good nature is said to be one and then³⁹⁸ triune, how Fatherhood and Sonship are predicated of it, the meaning of the theology of the Spirit, how these core lights of goodness grew from the incorporeal and indivisible good, and how in this sprouting they have remained inseparable from their co-eternal foundation in it, in themselves, and in each other. I have spoken of how Jesus, who is above individual being, became a being with a true human nature. Other revelations of scripture were also praised in The Theological Representations'.³⁹⁹

The word φύσις means here something more than the divine οὐσία of the Cappadocians, who used the latter to emphasise the oneness of God, the unity of the three divine Persons, whereas in this quotation φύσις is both one and triune. Nevertheless, in one of his articles

³⁹⁴ Zachhuber (2016) φύσις in *Realllexikon*, 765-769.

³⁹⁵ An in-depth analysis of Proclus' understanding of φύσις see in: Martijn (2010) *Proclus on nature: philosophy of nature and its methods in Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, 19-67.

³⁹⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum* IV 38 (PG 11, 1089B; vol.1, 311, 2 Koetschau) ; ET : Chadwick (1953), 214; Cyril of Alexandria, *De Sancta et Consubstantiali Trinitate*, Dialogus 1, 415B; Athanasius of Alexandria, *Epistola de Nicaenis decretis*, 11 (PG 25, 441 D); Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Moysis* GNO 7.1 (PG 44, 376D); *De Deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti* (PG 46, 573D)

³⁹⁷ MT, 3; PG 3, 1033A.

³⁹⁸ This 'then' is absent in the Greek original, which makes the English translation slightly inappropriate.

³⁹⁹ PG 3, 1032D-1033A, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 138.

Vladimir Lossky demonstrates that Dionysius develops his thought along the lines of the Cappadocian trinitarian theology.⁴⁰⁰

There are several places in the DN which can be interpreted as dealing with the divine nature. One can argue that in the following quotation the expression ἀπλῆ καὶ ὑπερφυεῖ τῶν ὄλων καλῶν φύσει can be replaced with just one word ‘God’.

Τῆ γὰρ ἀπλῆ καὶ ὑπερφυεῖ τῶν ὄλων καλῶν φύσει πᾶσα καλλονὴ καὶ πᾶν καλὸν ἐνοειδῶς κατ’ αἰτίαν προῦφέστηκεν.

‘In that simple but transcendent nature of all beautiful things, beauty and the beautiful uniquely preexisted in terms of their source.’⁴⁰¹

In the course of the discussion of the bodily resurrection, Dionysius admits that it would be considered contra nature by the ancient philosophers. According to him, the resurrection of the body is not contra but above nature in Christian understanding. He clarifies this by saying that ‘above nature’ means above the visible order of things. Apparently, this clarification was needed because the term φύσις could be applied to the things invisible as well as to God.

Ὑπὲρ φύσιν δὲ τὴν καθ’ ἡμᾶς φημι τὴν ὀρωμένην, οὐ τὴν πανσθενῆ τῆς θείας ζωῆς, αὐτῆ γὰρ ὡς πασῶν οὔση τῶν ζῶων φύσει καὶ μάλιστα τῶν θειοτέρων οὐδεμία ζωὴ παρὰ φύσιν ἢ ὑπὲρ φύσιν.

‘I call it supernatural because while it rises above the visible order of things, it does not transcend the mighty nature of divine Life. This is the nature of all lives and especially of the more divine lives and so far as it is concerned there is no life which is contrary to nature or supernatural.’⁴⁰²

Elsewhere, Dionysius affirms the unknowability of God. He concedes that God is not absolutely unknowable. One can know God to a certain degree in his creation, where the divine image is reflected. However, the divine nature is absolutely beyond any grasp of human knowledge.⁴⁰³

Μήποτε οὖν ἀληθὲς εἶπεῖν, ὅτι θεὸν γινώσκουμεν οὐκ ἐκ τῆς αὐτοῦ φύσεως, ἄγνωστον γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ πάντα λόγον καὶ νοῦν ὑπεραῖρον, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῆς πάντων τῶν ὄντων διατάξεως ὡς ἐξ αὐτοῦ προβεβλημένης καὶ εἰκόνας τινὰς καὶ ὁμοιώματα τῶν θείων αὐτοῦ παραδειγμάτων ἐχούσης εἰς τὸ ἐπέκεινα πάντων ὁδοῦ καὶ τάξει κατὰ δύναντιν ἄνιμεν ἐν τῇ πάντων ἀφαιρέσει καὶ ὑπεροχῇ καὶ ἐν τῇ πάντων αἰτία.

⁴⁰⁰ See the analysis of the dialectic of the triunity in Dionysius: Lossky (1967) *A l'image et la ressemblance de Dieu*, 7—23. [In Russian: Lossky (1975) ‘Αποφάσις τῆς τριθεότητος’, 95-104].

⁴⁰¹ DN, 4, 7; PG 3, 704A.

⁴⁰² DN, 6, 2; PG 3, 857A.

⁴⁰³ Cf.: DN, 13, 3; PG 3, 981A: Καὶ οὐδὲ αὐτὸ τὸ τῆς ἀγαθότητος ὡς ἐφαρμόζοντες αὐτῆ προσφέρομεν, ἀλλὰ πόθῳ τοῦ νοεῖν τι καὶ λέγειν περὶ τῆς ἀρρήτου φύσεως ἐκείνης τὸ τῶν ὀνομάτων σεπτότατον αὐτῆ πρώτως ἀφιεροῦμεν. We cannot follow it into its inaccessible dwelling place so far above us and we cannot even call it by the name of goodness. In our urge to find some notion and some language appropriate to that ineffable nature, we reserve for it first the name which is most revered.

‘It might be more accurate to say that we cannot know God in his nature, since this is unknowable and is beyond the reach of mind or of reason. But we know him from the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out from him, and this order possesses certain images and semblances of his divine paradigms. We therefore approach that which is beyond all as far as our capacities allow us and we pass by way of the denial and the transcendence of all things and by way of the cause of all things.’⁴⁰⁴

According to the author of DN, we cannot know (γινώσκωμεν) but we can contemplate (θεωρήσωμεν) the divine simple nature.

Μίαν οὖν τινα καὶ ἀπλὴν τῆς εἰρηνικῆς ἐνώσεως θεωρήσωμεν φύσιν ἐνοῦσαν ἅπαντα ἑαυτῇ καὶ ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἀλλήλοις καὶ διασώζουσιν πάντα ἐν ἀσυγχύτῳ πάντων συνοχῇ καὶ ἀμιγῇ καὶ συγκεκριμένῳ.

‘Let us therefore contemplate the one simple nature of that peaceful unity which joins all things to itself and to each other, preserving them in their distinctiveness and yet linking them together in a universal and unconfused alliance’.⁴⁰⁵

There are also several places where Dionysius speaks of the Incarnation, mentioning ‘the supernatural nature of Jesus’. It is worth saying that the first known historical reference to the CD was made at a meeting in Constantinople (532) by a party of moderate Monophysites, in order to support their understanding of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Καὶ τὸ μὲν ἀνδρικῶς αὐτὸν οὐσιωθῆναι μυστικῶς παρελήφραμεν, ἀγνοοῦμεν δέ, ὅπως ἐκ παρθενικῶν αἱμάτων ἐτέρῳ παρὰ τὴν φύσιν θεσμῶ διεπλάττετο καὶ ὅπως ἀβρόχοις ποσὶ σωματικὸν ὄγκον ἔχουσι καὶ ὕλης βάρους ἐπεπόρευτο τὴν ὑγρὰν καὶ ἄστατον οὐσίαν καὶ τὰ ἄλλα, ὅσα τῆς ὑπερφουδοῦς ἐστὶν Ἰησοῦ φυσιολογίας.

‘We have no way of understanding how, in a fashion at variance with nature, he was formed from a virgin's blood. We do not understand how with dry feet and with his body's solid weight he walked on the unstable surface of the water. And we do not understand whatever else has to do with the supernatural nature of Jesus.’⁴⁰⁶

Finally, there are several places in the EH, where Dionysius employs the term φύσις and its derivatives to express his ideas concerning the divine nature. Two of them also deal with the Incarnation, linking it with the idea of theosis or divinization.⁴⁰⁷

Διαγράφει γὰρ ἐν τούτοις αἰσθητῶς ὑπ’ ὄψιν ἄγων Ἰησοῦν τὸν Χριστὸν τὴν νοητὴν ἡμῶν ὡς ἐν εἰκόσι ζωὴν ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ τὸ θεῖον κρυφίου τῆ παντελεῖ καὶ ἀσυγχύτῳ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐνανθρωπήσει φιλανθρώπως ἐξ ἡμῶν εἰδοποιούμενον καὶ πρὸς τὸ μεριστὸν ἡμῶν ἀναλλοιώτως ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν ἐνός

⁴⁰⁴ DN, 7, 3; PG 3, 869D-872A.

⁴⁰⁵ DN, 11, 2; PG 3, 949C.

⁴⁰⁶ DN, 2, 9; PG 3, 648B.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. EH, 2, 1; PG 3, 392C:

Ὁ μὲν ἱεράρχης ἐκάστοτε τῇ πρὸς θεὸν ἀφομοίωσει «πάντας ἀνθρώπους» ἐθέλων «σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν» ἀνακηρύττει πᾶσι τὰ ὄντως εὐαγγέλια• θεὸν ἴλεω τοῖς ἐπὶ γῆς ἐξ οἰκείας ὄντα καὶ φυσικῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτὸν ὡς ἡμᾶς ἀφικέσθαι διὰ φιλανθρωπίαν ἀξιώσαντα καὶ τῇ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐνώσει δίκην πυρὸς ἀφομοιωῦσαι τὰ ἐνωθέντα κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν πρὸς θέωσιν ἐπιτηδειότητα.

‘The hierarch, who "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" by taking on a likeness to God, proclaims the good news to all that God out of his own natural goodness is merciful to the inhabitants of earth, that because of his love for humanity he has digned to come down to us and that, like a fire, he has made one with himself all those capable of being divinized.’

προϊόντα καὶ διὰ τῆς ἀγαθοῦ ταύτης φιλανθρωπίας εἰς μετουσίαν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν οἰκείων ἀγαθῶν καλοῦντα τὸ ἀνθρώπειον φύλον, εἶπερ ἐνωθῶμεν αὐτοῦ τῇ θειοτάτῃ ζωῇ τῇ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἡμῶν κατὰ δύναμιν ἀφομοιώσει καὶ ταύτῃ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν κοινωνοὶ θεοῦ καὶ τῶν θείων ἀποτελεσθῶμεθα.

‘By resorting to the perceptible, to imagery, he makes clear that which gives life to our minds. He offers Jesus Christ to our view. He shows how out of love for humanity Christ emerged from the hiddenness of his divinity to take on human shape, to be utterly incarnate among us while yet remaining unmixed. He shows how he came down to us from his own natural unity to our own fragmented level, yet without change. He shows how, inspired by love for us, his kindly activities called the human race to enter participation with himself and to have a share in his own goodness, if we would make ourselves one with his divine life and imitate it as far as we can, so that we may achieve perfection and truly enter into communion with God and with the divine things.’⁴⁰⁸

The connection between salvation and divinization is a prominent theme in Athanasius.⁴⁰⁹

Origen and Gregory of Nyssa each employed φύσις-terminology in the context of soteriology.⁴¹⁰

We have seen that Dionysius’ use of the term φύσις in respect to God cannot be called a ‘new word’ in the Christian theology of his time. Dionysius already employs established terminology, which therefore belongs to the object language in relation to his metalanguage of hierarchy or, which is the same, to the metalanguage of the first level in relation to the object language of the Scriptures.

4.1.2. Human nature

The designation of human nature composed of soul and body, as well as the life of the visible world in general, is the most frequent connotation for the term φύσις in Dionysius. Human nature is discussed or mentioned in all parts of CD, which shows the importance of anthropology for the author. The theological context of the passages where human nature is mentioned varies. It includes the following themes:

1. The Incarnation – the discussion of the divine and human nature in Jesus Christ.
2. An attempt to approach the reality of angels through symbolic representations taken from the human nature.
3. Human nature as the limitation for divinization.

⁴⁰⁸ EH, 3, 13; PG 3, 444 D; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 221.

⁴⁰⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Incarnatione*, 54, 3.

⁴¹⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum* III 28 (vol. I, 226, 13-18, Koetschau); English text: Chadwick (1953), 146; Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, III/3, 51-2 (GNO II, 125, 28-126, 15)

4. The description and the consequences of the Fall.
5. The theology of creation: human nature in relation to angels.

1. The Incarnation – divine and human nature in Jesus Christ.

The author of the CD twice touches on the theme of the Incarnation in the DN. According to Chapter 1, human nature is understood as ‘what it is we are’ and is associated with complexity and temporality in the first place.⁴¹¹ Further in the text, it is discussed how divinity, which is transcendent and actually supernatural, is joined to our human nature without any change or confusion.

Ὑπερφυῶς ἔχει τὸ ὑπερφυές, ὑπερουσίως τὸ ὑπερούσιον. Ὅθεν ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἕως φύσεως ὑπὲρ φιλανθρωπίας ἐλήλυθε καὶ ἀληθῶς οὐσιώθη καὶ ἀνὴρ ὁ ὑπέρθεος ἐχρημάτισεν, ἴλεω δὲ εἶη πρὸς ἡμῶν τὰ ὑπὲρ νοῦν καὶ λόγον ὑμνούμενα, κἀν τούτοις ἔχει τὸ ὑπερφυές καὶ ὑπερούσιον, οὐ μόνον ἢ ἀναλλοιώτως ἡμῖν καὶ ἀσυγχύτως κεκοινωνήκε μηδὲν πεπονθῶς εἰς τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ πρὸς τῆς ἀφθέγκτου κενώσεως, ἀλλ’ ὅτι καὶ τὸ πάντων καινῶν καινότατον ἐν τοῖς φυσικοῖς ἡμῶν ὑπερφυῆς ἦν ἐν τοῖς κατ’ οὐσίαν ὑπερούσιος πάντα τὰ ἡμῶν ἐξ ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς ὑπερέχων.

‘It is the supernatural possessor of the supernatural. It is the transcendent possessor of transcendence. And out of love he has come down to be at our level of nature and has become a being. He, the transcendent God, has taken on the name of man. (Such things, beyond mind and beyond words, we must praise with all reverence.) In all this he remains what he is – supernatural, transcendent – and he has come to join us in what we are without himself undergoing change or confusion. His fullness was unaffected by that inexpressible emptying of self, and, most novel of all, amid the things of our nature he remained supernatural and amid the things of being he remained beyond being. From us he took what was of us and yet he surpassed us here too.’⁴¹²

Although the precise date of the creation of the CD has not been established, it is now generally admitted that the CD was written at the time of the great Christological controversies at some point between the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th centuries. Its first appearance in the documents goes back to 532 in connection with a public debate between the Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian bishops organised and presided over by the Emperor

⁴¹¹ DN, 1, 4 ; PG 3, 592B: φιλάνθρωπον δὲ διαφερόντως, ὅτι τοῖς καθ’ ἡμᾶς πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὀλικῶς ἐν μιᾷ τῶν αὐτῆς ὑποστάσεων ἐκοινωνήσεν ἀνακαλουμένη πρὸς ἑαυτὴν καὶ ἀνατιθεῖσα τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἐσχατιάν, ἐξ ἧς ἀρρήτως ὁ ἀπλοῦς Ἰησοῦς συνετέθη καὶ παράτασιν εἴληφε χρονικὴν ὁ αἰδιος καὶ εἴσω τῆς καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἐγγόνει φύσεως ὁ πάσης τῆς κατὰ πᾶσαν φύσιν τάξεως ὑπερουσίως ἐκβεβηκῶς μετὰ τῆς ἀμεταβόλου καὶ ἀσυγχύτου τῶν οἰκειῶν ιδρύσεως. ‘But they especially call it loving toward humanity, because in one of its persons it accepted a true share of what it is we are, and thereby issued a call to man's lowly state to rise up to it. In a fashion beyond words, the simplicity of Jesus became something complex, the timeless took on the duration of the temporal, and, with neither change nor confusion of what constitutes him, he came into our human nature, he who totally transcends the natural order of the world.’

⁴¹² DN, 2, 10; PG 3, 648D - 649A; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 65.

Justinian. The latter bishops referred to Ep. 4 to support their understanding of the union between the two natures in Christ. However, one can observe that in Ep. 4 ‘there is no mention of “natures”, either one or two, no mention of either “in” or “from” two natures. Dionysius rather chooses to avoid any of the specific Chalcedonian or anti-Chalcedonian language’.⁴¹³

Πῶς, φῆς, Ἰησοῦς, ὁ πάντων ἐπέκεινα, πᾶσιν ἐστὶν ἀνθρώποις οὐσιωδῶς συντεταγμένος; Οὐ γὰρ ὡς αἴτιος ἀνθρώπων ἐνθάδε λέγεται ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ’ ὡς αὐτὸ κατ’ οὐσίαν ὄλην ἀληθῶς ἄνθρωπος ὢν. Ἡμεῖς δὲ τὸν Ἰησοῦν οὐκ ἀνθρωπικῶς ἀφορίζομεν· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος μόνον—οὐδὲ ὑπερούσιος, εἰ ἄνθρωπος μόνον—, ἀλλ’ ἄνθρωπος ἀληθῶς ὁ διαφερόντως φιλόανθρωπος, ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπους καὶ κατὰ ἀνθρώπους ἐκ τῆς ἀνθρώπων οὐσίας ὁ ὑπερούσιος οὐσιωμένος. Ἔστι δὲ οὐδὲν ἧττον ὑπερουσιότητος ὑπερπλήρης ὁ αἰεὶ ὑπερούσιος, ἀμέλει τῇ ταύτης περιουσία, καὶ εἰς οὐσίαν ἀληθῶς ἐλθὼν ὑπὲρ οὐσίαν οὐσιώθη καὶ ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον ἐνήργει τὰ ἀνθρώπου. Καὶ δηλοῖ παρθένος ὑπερφυῶς κύουσα καὶ ὕδωρ ἄστατον ὑλικῶν καὶ γεηρῶν ποδῶν ἀνέχον βάρος καὶ μὴ ὑπεῖκον, ἀλλ’ ὑπερφυεῖ δυνάμει πρὸς τὸ ἀδιάχυτον συνιστάμενον. Τί ἂν τις τὰ λοιπὰ πάμπολλα ὄντα διέλθοι; Δι’ ὧν ὁ θεῖος ὄρων ὑπὲρ νοῦν γνῶσεται καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῇ φιλανθρωπία τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καταφασκόμενα, δύνάμιν ὑπεροχικῆς ἀποφάσεως ἔχοντα. Καὶ γὰρ, ἵνα συνελόντες εἴπωμεν, οὐδὲ ἄνθρωπος ἦν, οὐχ ὡς μὴ ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀνθρώπων ἐπέκεινα καὶ ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον ἀληθῶς ἄνθρωπος γεγονώς, καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν οὐ κατὰ θεὸν τὰ θεῖα δράσας, οὐ τὰ ἀνθρώπεια κατὰ ἄνθρωπον, ἀλλ’ ἀνδρωθέντος θεοῦ, καινὴν τινα τὴν θεανδρικὴν ἐνέργειαν ἡμῖν πεπολιτευμένος.⁴¹⁴

‘You ask how it could be that Jesus, who transcends all, is placed in the same order in being with all men. He is not called a man here in the context of being the cause of man but rather as being himself quite truly a man in all essential respects. But we do not confine our definition of Jesus to the human domain. For he is not simply a man, nor would he be transcendent if he were only a man. Out of his very great love for humanity, he became quite truly a human, both superhuman and among humans; and, though himself beyond being, he took upon himself the being of humans. Yet he is not less overflowing with transcendence. He is the ever-transcendent, and superabundantly so. He takes on being, and is himself a being beyond being. Superior himself to the human condition he does the work of a man. A proof of this is that a virgin supernaturally bore him and that flowing water, bearing the weight of his corporeal, earthly feet, did not yield, but, rather, held him up with supernatural power.

There is so much else and who could list it all? As one considers it all in a divine manner, one will recognize in a transcending way that every affirmation regarding Jesus' love for humanity has the force of a negation pointing toward transcendence. For, if I may put the matter briefly, he was neither human nor nonhuman; although humanly born he was far superior to man, and being above men he yet truly did become man. Furthermore, it was not by virtue of being God that he did divine things, not by virtue of being a man that he did what was human, but rather, by the fact of being God-made-man he accomplished something new in our midst—the activity of the God-man.’⁴¹⁵

2. To approach the symbolic reality of angels through human nature

In the CH there is a very interesting paragraph describing some natural characteristics of human beings which allowed them to take on the dominant position in the created material world. According to the CD, the power of human intelligence, along with the natural freedom

⁴¹³ Rist (1996) *Man, soul, and body: essays in ancient thought from Plato to Dionysius*, 153.

⁴¹⁴ Ep.4, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 263.

⁴¹⁵ PG 3, 1072A-C, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 264.

and independence of the human spirit, places humans above the irrational animals in a position of ‘natural’ dominance and leadership.⁴¹⁶

Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνθρωπομόρφους αὐτοὺς ἀναγράφουσι διὰ τὸ νοερὸν καὶ τὸ πρὸς τὸ ἄναντες ἔχειν τὰς ὀπτικὰς δυνάμεις καὶ τὸ τοῦ σχήματος εὐθὺ καὶ ὄρθιον καὶ τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ἀρχικὸν καὶ ἡγεμονικὸν καὶ τὸ κατ' αἴσθησιν μὲν ἐλάχιστον ὡς πρὸς τὰς λοιπὰς τῶν ἀλόγων ζώων δυνάμεις, κρατητικὸν δὲ πάντων τῆ τοῦ νοῦ κατὰ περιουσίαν δυνάμει καὶ τῆ κατὰ λογικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἐπικρατεία καὶ κατὰ τὸ φύσει τῆς ψυχῆς ἀδούλωτον καὶ ἀκράτητον.

‘But they also describe them with forms drawn from the realm of the human. For man is, after all, intelligent and capable of looking toward the higher things. Sturdy and upright he is, by nature, a leader and a ruler, and even if by comparison with the irrational animals he is least in the scale of the power of sense perception, still it is he who dominates all with the superior power of his intelligence, with the mastery deriving from rational understanding, and with the natural freedom and independence of his spirit.’⁴¹⁷

3. The human nature as the limitation for divinization is mentioned in the EH. In this treatise the main focus is on the mysteries of the Church, which are perceived as the means of divinization for the human being. It is important that the necessities of human nature are recognised. Humans are called to become divinised, but this does not mean any deprivation of human nature. Humans are not expected to become immaterial angels; their humanity is preserved even in the divinised state.

Εἰ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀληθές, ὡς ὁ καθόλου θεῖος ἀνὴρ ὁ τῶν θείων ἄξιος κοινωνὸς ὁ πρὸς τὸ τοῦ κατ' αὐτὸν θεοειδοῦς ἄκρον ἐν παντελέσει καὶ τελειωτικαῖς θεώσεσιν ἀνηγμένος οὐδὲ τὰ σαρκὸς ἐνεργήσει παρὰ τὰ κατὰ φύσιν ἀναγκαιότατα καὶ τοῦτο εἰ τύχοι παρέργως, ναὸς δὲ ἅμα καὶ ὀπαδὸς ἐν τῇ κατ' αὐτὸν ἀκροτάτῃ θεώσει τοῦ θεαρχικοῦ πνεύματος ἔσται τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον ἐνιδρύων,

‘The man who is indeed divine, who has the right to commune with the divine realities, who, to the greatest possible extent, has been lifted up into conformity with God through complete and perfecting divinization, such a man if he is truly indifferent to the realities of the flesh (apart from the necessities of nature over which he will not delay) will have arrived at the highest possible measure of divinization and will be both the temple and the companion of the Spirit of the Deity.’⁴¹⁸

4. The description and the consequences of the Fall.

One will notice that in the description of the Fall, given in the same Chapter 3 in the EH, the term ‘human nature’ replaces the more common in this context ‘Adam’ or ‘man’. This

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Gen 1:28.

⁴¹⁷ CH, 15, 3, PG 3, 329D, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 184.

⁴¹⁸ EH, 3, 7, PG 3, 433C; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 215.

replacement points to the doctrine of original sin, where Adam's personal sin is believed to have affected the whole human nature.

Τὴν ἀνθρωπεῖαν φύσιν ἀρχῆθεν ἀπὸ τῶν θείων ἀγαθῶν ἀνοήτως ἐξολισθήσασαν ἢ πολυπαθεστάτη ζῶη διαδέχεται καὶ τὸ τοῦ φθοροποιοῦ θανάτου πέρασ. Ἀκολουθῶς γὰρ ἡ τῆς ὄντως ἀγαθότητος ὀλέθριος ἀποστασία καὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐν παραδείσῳ θεσμοθεσίας ὑπερβασία τὸν ἐξοιστρήσαντα τοῦ ζωοποιοῦ ζυγοῦ [...] ταῖς θελκτικαῖς τοῦ ἐναντίου καὶ δυσμενέσιν ἀπάταις, τοῖς ἐναντίοις τῶν θείων ἀγαθῶν, οἰκείαις ὀπαῖς παραδέδωκεν. Ἐνθεν ἐλεεινῶς ἀντὶ μὲν αἰωνίου τὸ θνητὸν ἀντηλλάξατο, τὴν δὲ οἰκείαν ἀρχὴν ἐν φθαρτικαῖς ἐσχηκυῖα γενέσεσιν ἐπὶ τὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς κατάλληλον εἰκότως ἤγετο πέρασ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς θείας καὶ ἀναγωγοῦ ζῶης ἐθελουσίως ἀποπεσοῦσα πρὸς τὴν ἐναντίαν ἐσχατιὰν ἠνέχθη, τὴν πολυπαθεστάτην ἀλλοίωσιν.

‘From the very beginning human nature has stupidly slid away from those good things bestowed on it by God. It turned to the life of the most varied desires and came at the end to the catastrophe of death. There followed the destructive rejection of what was really good, a trampling over the sacred Law laid down in paradise for man. Having evaded the yoke which gave him life, man rebelled against the blessings of God and was left to his own devices, to the temptation and the evil assaults of the devil. And in exchange for eternity he pitifully opted for mortality. Born of corruption it was only right that he should leave the world as he entered it. He freely turned away from the divine and uplifting life and was dragged instead as far as possible in the opposite direction and was plunged into the utter mess of passion.’⁴¹⁹

5. The theology of creation: human nature in relation to angels

In Chapter 5 DN we find discussion of human nature in the context of the origin and status of all visible and invisible creation. In this respect, Dionysius employs such terms as ‘the totality of nature’, ‘individual nature’, ‘the nature of souls’, ‘composite nature’ of men, ‘contrary to nature’, and ‘divinely supernatural’. Some go back to Aristotle and can be found in Proclus.⁴²⁰

‘7. In the totality of nature all the laws governing each individual nature are gathered together in one unity within which there is no confusion, and in the soul the individual powers providing for all the parts of the body are assembled together as one. So there is nothing absurd in rising up, as we do, from obscure images to the single Cause of everything, rising with eyes that see beyond the cosmos to contemplate all things, even the things that are opposites, in a simple unity within the universal Cause. For that Source is the beginning of everything and from it come Being itself and every kind of being, all source and all end, all life and immortality and wisdom, all order and harmony and power, all maintenance and establishment and arrangement, all intelligence and reason and perception, all quality and rest and motion, all unity and intermingling and attraction, all cohesiveness and differentiation, all definition, and indeed every attribute which by the mere fact of being gives a character thereby to every existing thing.

8. From this same universal Cause come those intelligent and intelligible beings, the godlike angels. From it also come the nature of souls, the nature of everything in the cosmos, together with all the qualities said to subsist in other objects or in our thinking processes. And from it too come those all-holy and most venerable powers which have the most real existence and which have their foundation, so to speak, in the anteroom of the transcendent Trinity. They draw being from it. They exist in it. And from it they derive their godlike being. Next come the subordinate beings, and these too [receive their being and godlike being] in subordinate status from the same Cause. Below these again are the lowliest beings whose [being and godlike being] comes from this Cause, but in the lowliest way. If they are the lowliest,

⁴¹⁹ EH, 3, 11; PG 3, 440D-441A; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 219.

⁴²⁰ Martijn (2010) *Proclus on nature: philosophy of nature and its methods in Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, 19-67.

this is in comparison with the other angels since in comparison with us they are above and beyond the world. And then there are the souls, together with all the other creatures. It is in accordance with the same principle that they too possess being and well-being...⁴²¹

‘First, it gives to life itself the capacity to be life, and it gives to everything alive and to every form of life the existence appropriate to it. On the living heavenly lives it bestows their immaterial, divine, and unchangeable immortality, their unswerving, unerring, and continuous motion. So overabundant is its goodness that it reaches down even to demonic life which draws its life and its demonic life from this and from no other cause. To men, with their composite nature, it grants whatever angelic life they are able to absorb and, overflowing with love for mankind, it returns us and calls us back to itself after we have strayed, and, more marvelous still, it has promised us that it will transform what we are—I mean our souls and the bodies yoked to them and will bring us to perfect life and immortality. To antiquity this looked to be contrary to nature, but to me and to you and to the truth it appears divinely supernatural.⁴²²

4.1.3. Angelic nature

One can hardly find a place where Dionysius says something about the nature of angels and employs the term φύσις. In fact, similarly to what is found in Bulgakov, in Chapter 5 DN one can notice the difference between the terms φύσις and οὐσία applied respectively to the realities of the human visible and the angelic invisible world. Both terms can be translated in English as ‘nature’. Whereas φύσις relates to the human world, οὐσία is associated with the realm of angels.

Καὶ ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς πάντων αἰτίας αἱ νοηταὶ καὶ νοεραὶ τῶν θεοειδῶν ἀγγέλων οὐσίαι καὶ αἱ τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τοῦ παντός κόσμου φύσεις καὶ τὰ ὁπωσοῦν ἢ ἐν ἑτέροις ὑπάρχειν ἢ κατ' ἐπίνοιαν εἶναι λεγόμενα.

‘From this same universal Cause come those intelligent and intelligible beings, the godlike angels. From it also come the nature of souls, the nature of everything in the cosmos, together with all the qualities said to subsist in other objects or in our thinking processes.’⁴²³

The following quotation from Chapter 11 DN appears to confirm the above-mentioned difference:

καὶ τὸ ὑπερούσιον καὶ ὑπερφυσὲς πάντη ὑπερέχει τῶν καθ' ὁποίαν ποτὲ οὐσίαν καὶ φύσιν.⁴²⁴

However, in Chapter 4 of DN, where the nature of the fallen angels is discussed, one can see how the term φύσις is applied to the angelic world, albeit indirectly.

Ἄλλ' οὔτε οἱ δαίμονες φύσει κακοί. Καὶ γὰρ εἰ φύσει κακοί, οὔτε ἐκ τὰγαθοῦ οὔτε ἐν τοῖς οὔσιν οὔτε μὴν ἐξ ἀγαθῶν μετέβαλον φύσει καὶ αἰεὶ κακοὶ ὄντες. Ἔπειτα ἑαυτοῖς εἰσι κακοὶ ἢ ἑτέροις;

⁴²¹ DN, Ch.5. PG 3, 821B-D.

⁴²² PG 3, 856D; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 103.

⁴²³ DN, 5, 8; PG 3, 821C.

⁴²⁴ DN, 11, 6; PG 3, 956B.

‘Not even the devils are evil by nature, since if they were, then they would not owe their origin to the Good. Nor would they have a place among the things that are, and they certainly would not have fallen from Goodness if they had always been essentially evil.’⁴²⁵

Εἰ δὲ οὐκ αἰεὶ κακοί, οὐ φύσει κακοί, ἀλλ' ἐνδεία τῶν ἀγγελικῶν ἀγαθῶν. Καὶ οὐ πάντη ἄμοιροι τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, καθ' ὃ καὶ εἰσὶ καὶ ζῶσι καὶ νοοῦσι καὶ ὅλως ἐστὶ τις ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐφέσεως κίνησις.

Κακοὶ δὲ εἶναι λέγονται διὰ τὸ ἀσθενεῖν περὶ τὴν κατὰ φύσιν ἐνέργειαν.

Παρατροπή οὖν ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς τὸ κακὸν καὶ τῶν προσηκόντων αὐτοῖς ἔκβασις καὶ ἀτευξία καὶ ἀτέλεια καὶ ἀδυναμία καὶ τῆς σωζούσης τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς τελειότητα δυνάμεως ἀσθένεια καὶ ἀποφυγὴ καὶ ἀπόπτωσις.

‘Their evil consists in the lack of the angelic virtues! Therefore they do not totally lack a share of the Good, for they certainly exist and live and exercise their intelligence and have within them some stirrings of desire. If they are declared to be evil, the reason lies in their weakness regarding their natural activity. Their deviation is the evil in them, their move away from what befits them. It is a privation in them, an imperfection, a powerlessness. It is a weakness, a lapse, an abandonment of the capacity they have to be perfect.’⁴²⁶

To sum up, Dionysius extensively employs φύσις terminology in his writings. Whereas he applies the term φύσις to the divinity on various occasions, he prefers to avoid the outright Chalcedonian terminology. In the context of the Incarnation he ascribes the superlative characteristics ‘super-natural’ and ‘beyond being’ to the divine reality and emphasises the transcendence of God, who nevertheless became ‘truly a man in all essential respects’. Dionysius uses φύσις as a predicate speaking about divine ‘natural goodness’ and divine ‘natural unity’. At the same time, according to him the divine nature is blessed, simple, and ineffable. The divine nature is also the source of divinization for ‘every being endowed with reason and intelligence’.

Human nature is created and exists among the things of being. The level of being is ontologically inferior compared to the level of the divine nature. God came down to the level of our human nature in the Incarnation. In regard to humans, Dionysius employs the term φύσις in its two original meanings. First, it signifies the essence of humanity, some essential features which are common to all, and in this respect unite all men in one nature. Another aspect of the term φύσις, especially in the expression κατὰ φύσιν, is associated with the idea of origin or source. The concept of nature is applied along with humans to the whole visible creation. In this context Dionysius introduces the terms ‘totality of nature’ and ‘individual nature’. One might argue that this terminology relates to the different types and classes of the visible created beings,

⁴²⁵ DN, 4, 23; PG 3, 724C.

⁴²⁶ DN, 4, 23; PG 3, 725B.

such as animals and plants, rather than signifying individual natures belonging to human individuals. Dionysius does not use the term φύσις to discuss the nature of the invisible created world, apart from a few occasions when he mentions demons.⁴²⁷ The fact that he uses both φύσις and οὐσία in the same phrase to express the plenitude of the created reality points to the possible complementarity of the terms.

4.2. The designation of angels

a) νοῦς

Dionysius makes use of various terms in speaking about angels collectively. Possibly the most frequent is the word νοῦς in its various grammatical forms and connotations. The first meaning of νοῦς given by the Greek-English lexicon is ‘mind’.⁴²⁸ It can also be translated as ‘reason’ or ‘intelligence’. In fact, Luibheid and Rorem use several words and expressions when interpreting Dionysian νοῦς. In particular, in the CH one can find the following translations: ‘intelligent being’, ‘mind’ and ‘intelligence’⁴²⁹.

⁴²⁷ Only in the meaning of the origin!

⁴²⁸ Liddell, Scott, *A Greek-English lexicon*, 1869.

⁴²⁹ ἕκαστος οὐράνιος τε καὶ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς ἰδικῶς ἔχει καὶ πρῶτας καὶ μέσας καὶ τελευταίας τάξεις τε καὶ δυνάμεις (CH, 10, 3, PG 3, 273C).

‘Each intelligent being, heavenly or human, has his own set of primary, middle, and lower orders and powers’ (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 173).

Αὕτη δὲ πρὸς αὐτῆς τῆς θεαρχίας ἐξηρημέναις αἰτίαις εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἱεροὺς νόας ὑπερουσίῳ κρυφίῳ τελετουργουμένη. (CH, 13,4, PG 3, 305B)

‘For reasons out of this world, all the sacred and intelligent beings are given a mysterious and transcendent initiation by the Deity itself into this clarity’ (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 179).

ἱεροὺς νόας (CH, 15, 6, PG 3, 336A).

‘...the holy and intelligent beings’ (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 186); ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ εἰς τρία διήρηνται τῷ κατ’ αὐτοὺς ὑπερκοσμίῳ λόγῳ πάντες οἱ θεοὶ νόες, εἰς οὐσίαν καὶ δύναμιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν (CH, 11, 2, PG 3, 285A).

‘...for reasons beyond this world, there is within all divine minds the threefold distinction between being, power, and activity’ (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 174).

καὶ τούτου χάριν οὐράνια μὲν δυνάμεις ἅπαντες οἱ θεοὶ νόες ὀνομάζονται, σεραφίμ δὲ καὶ θρόνοι καὶ κυριότητες οὐδαμῶς. (CH, 11, 1, PG 3, 284C)

‘Hence the title "heavenly powers" cannot be stretched to include all the divine minds, any more than one could do so in the case of seraphim, thrones, and dominions’ (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 173) οὐρανίους καὶ θεοειδεῖς νόας (CH, 2, 1, PG 3, 137A). ‘Heavenly and godlike intelligences’ (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 146).

Looking briefly at the philosophical background of the term νοῦς can be meaningful for an understanding of Dionysius' thought.

The concept of mind (νοῦς) has undergone many modifications since it became a theme in Greek philosophy. The first philosopher to develop the concept of mind was Anaxagoras of Clazomenae.⁴³⁰ In his writings, mind is the moving principle of the cosmic order and the intrinsic feature of all living entities. He wrote:

‘Mind (νοῦς) is infinite and self-ruling, and is mixed with no Thing, but is alone by itself... For it is the finest of all Things, and the purest, and has complete understanding of everything, and has the greatest power. All things which have life, both the greater and the less, are ruled by Mind.’⁴³¹

This concept of mind as a divine principle with some modification was adopted by a number of the ancient philosophers.

Plato appears to be in agreement with Anaxagoras on this matter:

‘And do you not believe Anaxagoras that the nature of all other things is mind, and that it is soul which arranges and controls them? (cf. *Phaedo* 72 c). 409 A. It looks as though the opinion Anaxagoras recently expressed was a more ancient matter, that the moon has its light from the sun. 413 C. Anaxagoras is right in saying that this is mind, for he says that mind exercising absolute power and mingled with nothing disposes all things, running through all. *Phil.* 28 c. All the wise men agree that mind is king of heaven and earth for us.’ *Kratyl.* 400 A⁴³²

Aristotle also speaks about the mind (νοῦς). He speaks of ‘intelligible matter’ or ‘intelligible objects’ which can be grasped by the intellect (νοῦς) alone. He says that ‘νοῦς is simple and unaffected; it is a substance that cannot perish; it is a different form of soul that can exist separately from its body, in the same way that what is eternal and unchanging can exist separate from what is changing and perishable.’ Unlike perception, memory and phantasy, νόησις can take place in pure θεωρία and does not involve the actualization or fulfilment of any particular part or aspect of the body. Rather is it the whole person that is perfected or actualized by his thoughts (διάνοια). He further argues that there is nothing of which the mind is incapable

Διὸ καὶ πρὸς τῆς ἡμῶν ἱερατικῆς παραδόσεως τελεστικαὶ καὶ φωτουργοὶ καὶ καθαρτικαὶ δυνάμεις οἱ πρῶτοι νόες ὀνομάζονται τῶν ὑφειμένων ὡς δι’ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὴν πάντων ὑπερούσιον ἀρχὴν ἀναγομένων καὶ τῶν τελεταρχικῶν καθάρσεων καὶ φωτισμῶν καὶ τελειώσεων ἐν μετουσίᾳ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῖς θεμιτὸν γινομένων. (CH, 8, 2, PG 3, 240C). ‘Hence—to use the terminology handed down to us—the first intelligences perfect, illuminate, and purify those of inferior status’ (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 167).

⁴³⁰ MacDonald (2003) *History of the concept of mind*, 31.

⁴³¹ Freeman (1948) *Ancilla to the pre-Socratic philosophers: a complete translation of the fragments in Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 84.

⁴³² Fairbanks (1898) *The First Philosophers of Greece*, 247.

of thinking.⁴³³ He describes νοῦς entering the soul as a complete substance (οὐσίατῆςοὐσίας) and says that it is imperishable. The compound of body and soul is perishable, ‘but νοῦς is probably something more divine and impassive’.⁴³⁴

Further development of the concept of mind can be found in Neo-Platonism: ‘Plotinus is apparently the earliest philosopher to make rationality essential to the soul, and therefore to conceive soul through the “first-person” reflection which will be most prominently found, divorced from Platonist vitalism, in Augustine and Descartes.’⁴³⁵ The soul’s reflection on itself is the necessary condition for achieving a higher concept of soul, and through this acquisition to a higher understanding of God as νοῦς. Through his meditative practice Plotinus leads his pupils’ thoughts from their individual souls to the world-soul and then to νοῦς.⁴³⁶

The scholiast notes concerning νοῦς that it is the term which was used by the Greek philosophers, and that it can also be found in Scripture: “” the great mind, the ruler of Assyrians,” that is, the devil’ . [Isa. 10: 12 LXX].⁴³⁷ As far as νοῦς is perceived to be applicable to both the angels and the fallen angels, it definitely points to a specific character of their mutual nature.

On the one hand, it can be argued that the concept of mind as such was adopted in Christianity.⁴³⁸ On the other hand, as Turovtsev notes, ‘Mind as the Divine Principle is the brainchild of Greek philosophy, whereas the perception of Revelation caused the ontological shift from mind to hypostasis and to personhood’.⁴³⁹

⁴³³ *De anima*, 429a17.

⁴³⁴ *De anima*, 408b29.

⁴³⁵ Menn (1998) *Descartes and Augustine*, 112; MacDonald (2003) *History of the Concept of Mind*, 118.

⁴³⁶ MacDonald, (2003) *History of the Concept of Mind*, 118.

⁴³⁷ Rorem, Lamoreaux (1998) *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian corpus: annotating the Areopagite*, 150, 32. 4 on 8. 10 (121A); about the scholiast, John, the sixth-century orthodox bishop of Scythopolis in Palestine, see: Rorem, Lamoreaux (1998) *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian corpus: annotating the Areopagite* [electronic resource].

⁴³⁸ MacDonald (2003) *History of the Concept of Mind*, 123-160.

⁴³⁹ Turovtsev (2008) ‘Angelologia Dionisiya Areopagita: vzglyad s dogmaticheskikh pozitsiy’, 8.

Indeed, mind is always ‘alone by itself’. Self-sufficiency is one of its basic characteristics. In contrast, the idea of personhood presupposes the other. A person needs another person to complete their nature.

In Chapter 7 DN, Dionysius considers νοῦς as one of the Divine names. He begins by pointing out two features of the human mind (νοῦς): a capacity to think or to see intellectually, and some unity which allows it to contemplate divine things. He then turns to the ‘the intelligent and intelligible powers of the angelic minds’ who, being perfectly pure and free from any materiality, reflect ‘the transcendently wise mind and reason of God’. Human beings have a lower capacity for concentration and contemplation compared to the angels. As for the mind of demons, it can be said to be good in virtue of its origin, but is lost, disoriented, and bereft of wisdom due to their wrong desires.

One has to mention that in the CD the word νοῦς is often used with different adjectives. Such expressions as οὐράνιος νοῦς, ἱεροῦς καὶ ἀγίους νόας, οἱ θεῖοι νόες, θεοειδεῖς νόας, τῶν ἀγγελικῶν νοῶν, τῶν ἀσωμάτων νοῶν were all employed to designate angels. Some indicate the difference between angels and demons (οὐράνιος νοῦς, ἱεροῦς καὶ ἀγίους νόας) or between angels and human beings (τῶν ἀσωμάτων νοῶν).⁴⁴⁰ Other phrases point to the creation of angels in the likeness of God (οἱ θεῖοι νόες, θεοειδεῖς νόας).

b) οὐσία

Another term for angels which can also be found in Dionysius’ writings is οὐσία.⁴⁴¹ To be more precise, it is not just οὐσία but αἱ οὐράνια οὐσία, as he mainly uses it in the plural, and together with the adjective οὐράνιος twice in chapter headings, which could well be a later

⁴⁴⁰ CH, 2, 4; PG 3, 144B: ἐπιδὲ τῶν ἀύλων καὶ νοερῶν οὐσιῶν ἀγιοπρεπῶς τὸ ὑπερέχον αὐτῶν ὡς ὑπερκοσμίων ὁμολογοῦμεν τοῦ καθ’ ἡμᾶς μεταβατικοῦ καὶ σωματικοῦ λόγου καὶ τῆς ὑλαίας καὶ ἀλλοτρίας τῶν ἀσωμάτων νοῶν αἰσθήσεως.

‘But when we are talking of immaterial and intelligent beings we say this, as befits holy beings. They, as transcendent beings, far surpass our discursive and bodily reason, just as material perception is something far beneath those entities which are intelligent and disembodied.’

⁴⁴¹ Stead (1977) *Divine substance*; von Ostheim (2008) *Ousia und Substantia. Untersuchungen zum Substanzbegriff bei den vornizänischen Kirchenvätern*; see also a review of this book by Zachhuber (2010).

insertion - and several times elsewhere in the text.⁴⁴² It is usually translated as ‘heavenly beings’.

There are also a couple of places where the angels are called either ‘intelligent and intelligible beings’ or simply ‘angelic beings’.⁴⁴³

Although the translation of οὐσίαις ‘beings’ is more or less precise and clear, it makes sense to look at the terms in greater detail. The scholiast notes the contradiction between the plural form of οὐσία in Dionysius and how the term is understood by the Church. To be sure, by the end of the fourth century in the East οὐσία is primarily referred to as signifying a universal nature manifested in individual hypostases.⁴⁴⁴ Applied to angels it should declare their mutual universal nature, and it is unclear to the scholiast why Dionysius uses the plural there. He attempts to explain such use as being the result of the influence of the Greek philosophers on Dionysius.⁴⁴⁵

In fact, Aristotle begins his *Categories* by speaking about οὐσία, which is also analysed in his *On the Soul*. In *Categories* he employs the expression λόγος τῆς οὐσίας [‘statement of essence’] to designate any definition.⁴⁴⁶ It was the Aristotelean definition of οὐσία as a generic ‘secondary substance’ which was appropriated in their trinitarian theology by the Cappadocians and later fathers.⁴⁴⁷ Deliberating on the definition of the soul, Aristotle equates it to οὐσία and

⁴⁴² CH 5: ‘Διὰ τί πᾶσαι αἱ οὐράνιαι οὐσίαι κατὰ κοινοῦ ἄγγελοι λέγονται’ (‘Why the heavenly beings are all called “angel” in common’). Also, CH 11: ‘Διὰ τί πᾶσαι αἱ οὐράνιαι οὐσίαι κατὰ κοινοῦ δύναιμι οὐράνιαι καλοῦνται’ (‘Why all heavenly beings are called “heavenly powers” in common’); καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ταῖς οὐρανίαις μὲν οὐσίαις ὑπερκοσμίως, ἡμῖν δὲ συμβολικῶς παραδέδοται. (CH, 1, 3, PG 3, 124A); ‘And so it goes for all the gifts transcendentally received by the beings of heaven, gifts which are granted to us in a symbolic mode’ (*Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 146)

Cf. CH, 2, 5; CH, 4, 2; CH, 6, 2; CH, 9, 2; CH, 15, 1; DN, 1, 3 (ὑπερουρανίων οὐσιῶν); EH, 4, 10; EH, 5, 2.

⁴⁴³ DN 5, 8 Καὶ ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς πάντων αἰτίας αἱ νοηταὶ καὶ νοεραὶ τῶν θεοειδῶν ἀγγέλων οὐσίαι καὶ αἱ τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου φύσεις καὶ τὰ ὁπωσοῦν ἢ ἐν ἑτέροις ὑπάρχειν ἢ κατ’ ἐπίνοιαν εἶναι λεγόμενα. 8. From this same universal Cause come those intelligent and intelligible beings, the godlike angels; DN 4, 1 Διὰ ταῦτα ὑπέστησαν αἱ νοηταὶ καὶ νοεραὶ πᾶσαι καὶ οὐσίαι καὶ δυνάμεις καὶ ἐνέργειαι, These rays are responsible for all intelligible and intelligent beings, for every power and every activity; CH 11, 1; PG 3, 284B: Τούτων δὲ διωρισμένων ἐκεῖνο ἄξιον ἐννοῆσαι, δι’ ἣν αἰτίαν ἀπάσας ὁμοῦ τὰς ἀγγελικὰς οὐσίας δυνάμεις οὐρανίας καλεῖν εἰώθαμεν.

‘Having made all these distinctions, it is right that we should now consider why we actually have the habit of giving the name of “heavenly powers” to all of the angelic beings.’

⁴⁴⁴ Zachhuber (2014) ‘Individuality and the Theological Debate about “Hypostasis”’, 97.

⁴⁴⁵ Scholion 1 to CH 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Categ. 1:1

⁴⁴⁷ Categ. 5:1.

the form.⁴⁴⁸ Here the term οὐσία is understood as ‘primary substance’; in other words, something which really exists as an individual.⁴⁴⁹

Some modern authors, including Lossky and Bulgakov, conclude from this – perhaps following Aquinas – that whereas ‘one can say about “humankind”, i.e. about innumerable persons who have the same nature, ... angels do not have the same nature although they are also personalities, unique individuals.⁴⁵⁰ Every angel is a separate nature, a separate reasonable world. Consequently, their unity is not “organic” but “harmonic”’.⁴⁵¹

In the previous section we showed a possible difference in Dionysius’ use of the terms φύσις and οὐσία in relation to angels. Speaking on the general difference between φύσις and οὐσία, Zachhuber refers to this as ‘a long-debated question’, pointing out the authors who argue in favour of a distinction between the two terms and those denying it.⁴⁵² He himself is in support of the idea that there may be a slight distinction in the use of the terms by Gregory of Nyssa.

The term οὐσία in respect to angels was employed by Origen, Eusebius, Chrysostom, Gregory Nazianzen with a close meaning to that which we observed in the CD, and therefore its use by Dionysius does not introduce any novelty to the existing philosophical language.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁸ On the Soul. 2,1.

⁴⁴⁹ See, for instance, Gregory of Nyssa: ὅτι Πέτρον καὶ Παῦλον καὶ Βαρναβαν φαμὲν τρεῖς οὐσίας etc. in *Ex communibus notionibus* (PG 45, 177C).

⁴⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (ST), Ia. 50,4. (Gilby, Blackfriars 1968, vol.9, 20-25); cf. Parente (1994) *The Angels. (The Catholic Teaching on the Angels)*, 48; Origen (*De Principiis*, 9.5-6) said that God’s goodness created all equal. It is free will that caused diversity.

⁴⁵¹ Lossky (1991) *The mystical theology of the Eastern Church. Dogmatics*, 161-162; cf. Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, 473.

⁴⁵² Support the difference: Bethune-Baker (1901) *The Meaning of Homoousios in the ‘Constantinopolitan’ Creed*, 49-59; Prestige, Cross (1936) *God in Patristic Thought*, 234-5; against the difference: Meredith (1972) *Studies in the Contra Eunomium of Gregory of Nyssa*, 244-5; 252-4.

⁴⁵³ Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* VII 37 (PG 11, 1472D ; vol.2, 187, 23 Koetschau) ; ET : Chadwick (1953), 424; Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica*, 4.5 (Dindorf, 220); Ib.5 proem. (Dindorf, 289); John Chrysostom, *Ad Stagirium ascetam*, 2.1; PG 47, 427; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poemata dogmatica*, VII. Περὶ νοερῶν οὐσιῶν (PG 37.438-9).

c) οὐράνιος

However, the angelic nature can be seen in their belonging to the same ‘heavenly community’. This idea is supported by Dionysius’ use of the word οὐράνιος or ‘heavenly’ along with οὐσίαι. The angels may also be referred to as ‘heavenly powers’ (δυνάμεις οὐρανίας), ‘heavenly lights’ (ὑπερουράνια φῶτα), ‘heavenly minds’ (οὐρανίους νόας) and finally a ‘heavenly hierarchy’ as found in the title of one of the four books comprising the CD.⁴⁵⁴

This contraposition of heaven and earth is pervasive and can be found both in Scripture and in many other Christian texts and prayers (for example, in the *Our Father*).⁴⁵⁵

One can argue that this differentiation emphasises the incorporeal nature of the angelic world and is therefore essential to an understanding of the angelic nature.⁴⁵⁶ Bulgakov notes, ‘a certain parallelism is established between the creation of heaven and the creation of earth – a positive correlation expressed by the word *and*.’ And further, ‘Heaven, i.e. the world of noetic powers and bodiless spirits, is created not separately and independently but *together with earth and in relation with earth*.’⁴⁵⁷ Despite the clear distinction between heaven and earth, there is an

⁴⁵⁴ CH, 11,1; PG 3, 284B: Τούτων δὲ διωρισμένων ἐκεῖνο ἄξιον ἐννοῆσαι, δι' ἣν αἰτίαν ἀπάσας ὁμοῦ τὰς ἀγγελικὰς οὐσίας δυνάμεις οὐρανίας καλεῖν εἰώθαμεν.

‘Having made all these distinctions, it is right that we should now consider why we actually have the habit of giving the name of "heavenly powers" to all of the angelic beings.’

DN, 2, 8; PG 3, 645C: Ἄλλ' ἄχρι τούτου πᾶσα τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς νοεῖας ἐνεργείας ἢ δυνάμεις, ὅτι πᾶσα θεία πατριὰ καὶ υἰότης ἐκ τῆς πάντων ἐξηρημένης πατριαρχίας καὶ υἰαρχίας δεδώρηται καὶ ἡμῖν καὶ ταῖς ὑπερουρανίαις δυνάμεσιν, ἐξ ἧς καὶ θεοὶ καὶ θεῶν υἱοὶ καὶ θεῶν πατέρες οἱ θεοειδεῖς γίνονται καὶ ὀνομάζονται νόες πνευματικῶς δηλαδὴ τῆς τοιαύτου πατρότητος καὶ υἰότητος ἐκτελουμένης.

‘The procession of our intellectual activity can at least go this far, that all fatherhood and all sonship are gifts bestowed by that supreme source of Fatherhood and Sonship on us and on the celestial powers. This is why Godlike minds come to be and to be named "Gods" or "Sons of Gods" or "Father of Gods.";

DN, 2, 4; PG 3, 641C: Ὅπου γε τὴν ὑπερούσιον ἔνωσιν ὑπεριδρῦσθαί φαμεν οὐ τῶν ἐν σώμασι μόνων ἐνώσεων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἐν ψυχαῖς αὐταῖς καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς νόοις, ἃς ἔχουσιν ἀμιγῶς καὶ ὑπερκοσμίως δι' ὅλων ὅλα τὰ θεοειδῆ καὶ ὑπερουράνια φῶτα κατὰ μέθεξιν ἀνάλογον τοῖς μετέχουσι τῆς πάντων ὑπερημένης ἐνώσεως.

‘But turn now to that unity above being. I say that it surpasses not only the union of things corporeal, but also the union of souls, and even that of minds themselves. These minds purely, supernaturally, and thoroughly possess the godlike and celestial lights, but they do so in a participation proportionate to their participations in the unity which transcends all things.’

⁴⁵⁵ A. Losev elaborates profoundly on the symbolism of Heaven. He compares it to the sky which is observed in everyday life, reasoning about its dialectical structure, its light and colour symbolism, eventually pointing to the liturgical symbol of the chalice: “the heaven is a Chalice containing God”. (Losev (2005) *Pervozdannaya suschnost*, 519); cf. Daniélou (1963) *Au commencement: Genèse 1-11*, 29-30 ; some examples of contraposition of heaven and earth in Scripture : Gen 1:1, 2:1; Deut 10:14; 32:1; Isaiah 66:1; Apoc. 20 :11 etc.

⁴⁵⁶ Turovtsev (2010) ‘Problema telesnosti angelov’, 4-17.

⁴⁵⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 22-23. (Italics in original)

expectation of their final unity in an eschatological perspective, which is also reflected in Scripture.⁴⁵⁸

According to Lampe's *Patristic Lexicon* the words οὐρανός and οὐράνιος are employed extensively by the fathers in different contexts and in different meanings. (pp.977-980)

The history of the concept of heaven has been well covered in scholarly research. A number of publications dedicated to the development of the idea of heaven in ancient paganism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as in Western art and literature, have appeared in recent years.⁴⁵⁹

The Hebrew term for 'heaven or 'sky' is שָׁמַיִם (Shamayim), which is a noun in plural form. There are several common themes typical of both Jewish and early Christian use of this term. In 'heavenly topography', there exists a language of the multiple heavens. The particular number of heavens varies in different sources. In many Biblical sources, and in later Jewish literature, heaven is referred to as the dwelling place of God. Heaven is also a place for the created heavenly beings. In many of the writings of Christian authors, as well as in later Jewish authors, heaven becomes associated with the place of the repose of the righteous dead.⁴⁶⁰ In some Qumran texts, the living members of the community are called 'the people of heaven', which shows the possibility for humans to join the heavenly beings even before their departure from this life. One fragmentary liturgical work from Qumran refers to heaven as a place of perpetual light, in contrast to earth, where light and darkness are separated.⁴⁶¹ According to Gregory of Nyssa, 'heaven' will not be a static fulfilment, but the definitive freeing from all that still hinders

⁴⁵⁸ Gen 28:12; Is 66:1,22; Mat 22:30; Mark 12:25; Apoc. 21:1-27.

⁴⁵⁹ McDannell, Lang (2001) *Heaven: a history*; Wright (c.2000) *The early history of heaven*; Walls (2002) *Heaven: the logic of eternal joy*; Ellens (2013) *Heaven, hell, and the afterlife: eternity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*; Bockmuehl, Stroumsa (2010) *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views*; McGrath (2003) *A brief history of heaven*; Russell (c1997) *A history of heaven: the singing silence*.

⁴⁶⁰ Wright (c.2000) *The early history of heaven*, 193.

⁴⁶¹ Newsom (2000) 'Heaven', 338.

us from letting ourselves be taken up unreservedly by God into the infinity of his love.⁴⁶² One can point to the Areopagite's discussion of angelic purification in this respect.⁴⁶³

4.3. The incorporeality of angels

The question of the corporeality of angels must be raised in any discussion of the angelic nature. Can it be said of the angels that they have a kind of body – or are they completely incorporeal and nonmaterial?

In fact, the early Church did not have a clear consensus regarding the composition of the angelic being. J. Gavin notes that 'for many of the Church Fathers, angels also possessed some kind of "material" body, though this body consisted of an element that was more subtle than the coarse material of animal and human bodies (e.g. fire, ether, light).'⁴⁶⁴ According to Evagrius, angels have lighter bodies than human beings, and these bodies shine as lights.⁴⁶⁵ I. Ramelli notes that Evagrius 'posits a hierarchy of bodies in different degrees of fineness'.⁴⁶⁶ He refers to angels as consisting predominantly of 'fire'.⁴⁶⁷ Basil the Great believes that angels are 'immaterial fire' (ἡ πῦρ ἄυλος), that they are limited in space, and have their own bodies (τῶν οικείων αὐτῶν σωμάτων).⁴⁶⁸ Although Macarius stated that souls, angels, and demons have bodies that are subtle (λεπτὰ) and, therefore, 'lighter' than man's material body, G. Maloney points out that the word *body* (σῶμα) is used here 'in the semitic sense to apply to the whole person, including good angels,

⁴⁶² Bouyer (1990) *The Christian Mystery: From Pagan Myth to Christian Mysticism*, 278; Ludlow (2000) *Universal salvation: eschatology in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner*, 73-75.

⁴⁶³ Golitzin (1994) *Et introibo ad altare Dei: the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagita, with special reference to its predecessors in the Eastern Christian tradition*, 306; cf. St Ephrem the Syrian's tripartite schema of Paradise, see Brock (1990) 'Introduction' in St Ephrem. *Hymns on Paradise*, 53-57).

⁴⁶⁴ Gavin (2009) "They are like the angels in the heavens": *angelology and anthropology in the thought of Maximus the Confessor*, 79.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica*, S² II, 68; III, 5.

⁴⁶⁶ Ramelli (2015) *Evagrius, Kephalaia gnostika: A new translation of the unreformed text from the Syriac*, 130; cf. Konstantinovsky (2016) *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic*, 125-126.

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica*, S² I, 68.

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* XVI, 38, 45-52. Basil notes that all angels share in 'absolutely the same nature' despite their various ministries. Basil, *Adversum Eunomium* III, 1, 40-44.

demons, and saints in glory'.⁴⁶⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus came very close to stating that angels are free from any corporeal constraints, though he indicated a certain degree of uncertainty: 'Angels are incorporeal, or very near it'.⁴⁷⁰ For much of the patristic tradition, therefore, the 'incorporeity' of the angels meant only their freedom from a human, fleshly body, not freedom from material or corporeal definition altogether.

However, Dionysius, following Gregory of Nyssa, who identified the angels with the incorporeal and intelligible creation,⁴⁷¹ states that angels are spiritual or 'noetic' beings, free from any connection with the material:

'The intelligible/spiritual and intellectual powers of the angelic minds have simple and blessed thoughts from divine Wisdom. Neither in parts, nor from parts, nor from the senses, nor from discursive reason do they gather divine knowledge; nor are they mutually encompassed by something common in regard to these things. Since they are free from all matter and plurality, they understand the thoughts of divine things intelligibly, immaterially, and in a single form'⁴⁷².

Chapter 4: Conclusion

We have seen that the terms relating to the nature of angels were employed in the CD without particular changes in their meaning if compared with such predecessors of Dionysius as Origen, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa. All these terms can therefore be regarded as relating to the metalanguage of the first level in Dionysius. Certain principal ideas can be summarised as Dionysius' understanding of the angelic nature expressed in this philosophical language.

The angels belong to the world of the created beings. They are called οὐσίαι (beings), which is one of the most frequent designations of angels in the CD. Here lies their radical difference with God, who is beyond any being and concept. Dionysius emphasises the transcendence of God in the Chapter dedicated to the divine name 'Being', substantiating the use

⁴⁶⁹ Maloney, Pseudo-Macarius (1992) *The fifty spiritual homilies; and, The great letter*, 274 (note 16); cf. (Pseudo-) Macarius, *Homiliae Spirituales*, Homily IV, 9, PG 34, 480 A (*Die 50 Geistlichen Homilien*, PTS 4, Berlin 1964, 33)

⁴⁷⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 28, 31* (P. Gallay, SCh 250, Paris 1978, 172).

⁴⁷¹ Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *De vita Moysis II* (H. Musurillo, GNO 8, Leyden 1964, 45-46); *In Canticum Canticorum VI* (H. Langerbeck, GNO 6, Leyden 1960, 182).

⁴⁷² DN, 7, 2; PG 3, 868B.

of this name in the Scripture by pointing to God as the source of any being. Nevertheless, the concept of mind (νοῦς) is applied to God, as it were, with fewer reservations. One can assume here some Neo-Platonic influence on Dionysius.⁴⁷³ The word νοῦς is another very frequent term to designate angelic beings. It is also used for humans.

The φύσις language is applied to the angelic world to a very limited degree, although it is used extensively in relation to God and the visible creation, including human beings. It is possible to see the complementarity of the terms οὐσία and φύσις in some places where Dionysius attempts to describe the created reality as a whole.

Dionysius does not introduce any specific term for God's uncreated eternity. Employing the apophatic language, he stresses that God is beyond any time and eternity. In Chapter 10 DN Dionysius links the idea of eternity (αἰὼν) with the things of being (τὰ ὄντα), the idea of time (χρόνος) with the things that come to be (τὰ ἐγγενέσει). He also mentions the third class of things in between, which are both subject to time and partake in eternity. Presumably, the latter relates to human beings, who receive their being in time and are called for eternity. The world of angels is subject to eternity, and the created visible world in its manifold phenomena corresponds to temporality.

According to Dionysius, all angels belong to the same heavenly community and, in this regard, reveal significant unity among one another. The angels are clearly distinct from human beings, because the former are simple and absolutely bodiless.⁴⁷⁴ However, both humans and angels are in need of perfection.⁴⁷⁵ All of the above-mentioned views are either shared or developed by Bulgakov; this will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

⁴⁷³ Corsini (1962) *Il trattato 'De Divinis Nominibus' dello pseudo-Dionigi e i commenti neoplatonici al Parmenidi*, 156ff.

⁴⁷⁴ CH, 15, 1; PG 3, 328A: πάλιν ἀπ' αὐτῶν ὡς ἀπ' εἰκόνων ἐπὶ τὴν ἀπλότητα τῶν οὐρανίων νοῶν ἀναλυτικῶς ἀνακάμπωμεν. 'Then, once more, we will take off from these images, and will, by retracing, rise up again to the simplicity of the heavenly minds.'

Concerning angelic incorporeality see, for instance: CH, 2, 2.

⁴⁷⁵ CH, 10, 3; PG 3, 273C: Ἔστι γὰρ οὐδὲν αὐτοτελὲς ἢ ἀπροσδεὲς καθόλου τελειότητος εἰ μὴ τὸ ὄντως αὐτοτελὲς καὶ προτέλειον. Nothing is completely free of the need for perfection. Nothing, that is, except that Being truly perfect in himself and truly preceding all perfection.

Chapter 5. Bulgakov on the nature of angels

Introduction: Bulgakov's use of the term 'nature'

A measure of uncertainty exists regarding Bulgakov's use of the term 'nature' in respect to angels. On the one hand, he clearly speaks about the absence of nature in the world of angels.

'The idea that angels are created hypostatic energies of God, but *without their own nature* [*prirody*], finds confirmation in the Old Testament'.⁴⁷⁶

However, a few lines later he maintains that

'*their nature* [*ecmcmoo*] is completely *transparent* for Divine life, is this life itself in a hypostatic consciousness. How this can be is a mystery of *the angelic nature* [*npupody*], unfathomable to human beings; but that this is so is attested to by Scripture and the whole of Christian tradition'.⁴⁷⁷

It appears that by 'nature' Bulgakov means two different things in these two passages. The expression 'without their own nature' may mean that angels have nothing that can be described as their shared nature. However, this can appear perplexing, given the presence in language of the expressions 'angels' and 'spirits' employed to designate the angelic world as a whole and *ipso facto* pointing to their shared nature.

The following citations may shed some additional light on Bulgakov's use of the term 'nature' in relation to angels:

'One cannot speak about the angel's oneness of essence or about *angelic nature* [*npupode*] in the same sense as one speaks about human oneness of essence, following the example of the tri-hypostatic Trinity, one in essence and indivisible'.⁴⁷⁸

The words 'in the same sense' are very meaningful in the above citation. In the light of this text it can be said that, whereas there is only one human world and all humans belong to it, there is a great multitude of angelic worlds, which can differ significantly one from another.

⁴⁷⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *The Friend of the Bridegroom*, 164. (Italics mine)

⁴⁷⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *The Friend of the Bridegroom*, 165. (Italics mine)

⁴⁷⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 75; Cf.: Ibid, 74. (Italics mine)

Elsewhere Bulgakov uses the expression ‘a common spiritual form’ to describe his intuition about the angelic assembly:

‘Angels belong to one assembly and consequently have a common spiritual form; at the same time they differentiate among themselves, from which arises the possibility for their mutual relations, their ‘collectivity’. For, entities which are entirely foreign to each other as well as those which are completely identical and mutually repeat themselves are likewise incapable of ‘forming an assembly’.⁴⁷⁹

One may notice that there is also some inconsistency in the English translation of the term ‘nature’ in Bulgakov’s *Jacob’s Ladder* and in *The Friend of the Bridegroom*. Two Russian synonyms are always translated as ‘nature’ in the English translation: ‘природа’ [from ‘род, родить’ - to generate, to give birth; lat. ‘natura’] and ‘естество’ [from ‘есть, быть’ – to be; lat. ‘essentia’]. Although in some cases Bulgakov uses these interchangeably as synonyms, there is a difference in his use of these terms. When he speaks of the inner essence of angels or the angelic world in general, in a positive sense, he uses the word ‘естество’. The most notable example is the title of Chapter 4 in *Jacob’s Ladder* – ‘Естество ангелов’, translated as ‘The Nature of Angels’. In the vast majority of places where ‘angelic nature’ or ‘human nature’ are mentioned in English, the Russian original will be ‘ангельское естество’ or ‘человеческое естество’. However, in all places where there is a negative statement such as ‘the angels do not have their own nature’, Bulgakov uses the word ‘природа’. It is clear from the analysis of his usage of the Russian terms ‘естество’ and ‘природа’, that, while both angels and humans have their own ‘естество’, only humans have their own ‘природа’. Unfortunately, this terminological subtlety is lost in the English translation.⁴⁸⁰

In *The Friend of the Bridegroom* (1927), Bulgakov employs the term ‘angelic nature’ [*естество*] combined with ‘human nature’ [*естество*] to designate the ‘co-angelicity’ of John the Baptist.⁴⁸¹ He argues that, according to Church tradition, St John is believed to possess both a human and an angelic nature, a view which is supported by the iconographical evidence and by

⁴⁷⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, 116.

⁴⁸⁰ See Chapter 4 of this thesis concerning the difference between *phusis* and *ousia*.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Maximovich (1928) ‘Pochitanie Bogoroditsy i Ioanna Krestitelia i novoe napravlenie russkoi religiozno-filosofskoi mysli’.

some liturgical texts.⁴⁸² In using these terms, Bulgakov does not pretend to give any sort of dogmatic formula; he poses questions rather than providing answers to them. There is little philosophical or dogmatic precision in his expressions. In particular, in some passages where Bulgakov speaks of the world of angels, the term ‘angelic nature’ could easily be replaced with the word ‘angels’. What does Bulgakov actually mean when he speaks of the Forerunner acquiring the angelic nature? One can find a possible explanation in the following passage:

‘As *fleshless* spirits, angels are free of fleshly temptations, for they are free of the flesh. For human beings, such freedom is the greatest of achievements, the conquest of their passionate nature; whereas, for angels, it expresses their very nature, in virtue of their fleshlessness.’⁴⁸³

In other words, it is passionlessness which is the manifestation of the angelic nature in the material world. According to Bulgakov, fleshlessness expresses the ‘very nature’ of the angels and is necessarily accompanied by passionlessness. As long as St John is a human being and has flesh, it is only passionlessness which can be identified with the angelic nature in the Forerunner. In light of this deliberation, the term ‘equi-angelic’ nature seems to be more appropriate to convey the idea of the union between the angelic and the human.

In his *Capita de trinitate* (1928), Bulgakov dedicated a couple of chapters to the definition of ‘hypostasis’ and ‘nature’ and to the difference between the created and the uncreated hypostasis and nature. According to Bulgakov, personhood and nature belong properly to any spirit, whether created or uncreated. He links the idea of nature with that of life and points to temporality and givenness (*данность*) as the distinctive features of the created human nature. By contrast, the nature in the Divinity is *Their* everlasting life, self-defining, self-assuring, *actus purissimus*.⁴⁸⁴

I suggest that, in order to further elucidate Bulgakov’s thought on the nature of angels, one has to look in more detail at the following questions:

⁴⁸² Peers notes that ‘the first extant representation of the winged John the Baptist is found at the church of Sv. Ahilije in Arlije from c. 1296. The iconography may very well predate this representation, as Lossky points out instances of seventh-/eighth-century commentary on the angelic nature of John the Baptist. Ouspensky, Lossky (1952) *The Meaning of the Icons*, 108.’ (Footnote 19, in Peers (c.2001) *Subtle bodies: representing angels in Byzantium*, 24)

⁴⁸³ Bulgakov (2010) *The friend of the Bridegroom: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner*, 157.

⁴⁸⁴ Bulgakov (2015) ‘Glavy o troichnosti’, 106-114.

1. Creation of angels and humans after the image of God. According to the traditional Christian doctrine, the act of creation is that border which divides the uncreated divine nature from all created worlds both visible and invisible. At the same time, creation after the image of God intimately links the world of humans with the world of angels and their divine prototype. Bulgakov accepts this traditional Orthodox teaching, but expresses it in his own metalanguage of sophiology.

2. The incorporeality of angels is what distinguishes them from humans. Bulgakov accepts this negative definition of the angelic nature in relation to the human world.

3. The question of space and time deserves our particular attention as it is temporality which, according to Bulgakov, appears as the distinctive feature of human nature compared to divinity. In respect to angels, Bulgakov supports the idea of an angelic time.

4. Divinisation or theosis is thought to be the mutual destiny of both humans and angels in the eschatological perspective. In the final section of this chapter we will look at how the divine nature affects both human nature and the angelic world, and what the role is in all of this of the Incarnation.

In the course of our analysis we will compare Bulgakov's ideas about angelic nature with those of his predecessors, which were significant for the development of his thought. In particular, we will look at the ideas of Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas. This will allow us to answer the guiding question of this chapter: whether Bulgakov appropriated the term 'nature' with its meanings from his predecessors or he filled it with his own 'sophiological' meanings.

5.1. Creation of angels after the image of God

Humans and angels were brought into existence by God out of nothing.⁴⁸⁵ Bulgakov starts his analysis by referring to the first verse of the Bible: 'In the beginning God created the

⁴⁸⁵ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 479.

heavens and the earth.’ (Gen 1:1). According to most exegetes, these words refer to the creation of immaterial angels and the beginnings of our material earthly reality. Bulgakov emphasises the primeval relatedness of the two realities, which is conditioned in the first instance by their having been created together as is expressed by the word ‘and’. The general foundation of the created worlds is common to all created reality including animals and inanimate nature. Apart from this, however, there are closer bonds between the angelic and human worlds in respect to the image of God. Both angels and humans were created after the image of God, though in different ways and to a different degree. Bulgakov claims that ‘each human has the fullness of the image of God’ because human beings are not pure spirits.⁴⁸⁶ They also belong to the material world, having their ‘own proper life’ according to their nature.⁴⁸⁷ Man is a triunity of hypostatic spirit/hypostasis/I-ness (дух), together with its nature of rational/sensitive soul (душа) and flesh (плоть).⁴⁸⁸ This would seem to mean that the image is present throughout the entirety of the human composition, with its seat not only in дух but also in душа and плоть.⁴⁸⁹ In contrast, ‘the image of God in angels about which the holy fathers bear witness is realised for them in hypostatic existence, personal self-consciousness.’⁴⁹⁰

In his analysis Bulgakov points first to the union of the whole created reality, to its common root in creation, by evoking ‘the whole creaturely world’.⁴⁹¹ He continues by distinguishing between the angelic world of bodiless spirits and our own human world. Bulgakov’s thought is very close to that of Maximus the Confessor. Indeed, recent scholarship has demonstrated a significant dependence of Bulgakov on Maximus.⁴⁹² Bulgakov values Maximus’ speculations very highly⁴⁹³, borrowing his terms and ideas.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 75.

⁴⁸⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 74.

⁴⁸⁸ ‘The soul in man is the fullness of his natural, cosmic life, which also contains the higher intellectual faculties of man as a natural creature’ (Bulgakov (2000) *Agnets Bozhii*, 213; 212-214 is untranslated in the English and French translations).

⁴⁸⁹ Bulgakov (2000) *Agnets Bozhii*, 214.

⁴⁹⁰ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 75.

⁴⁹¹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 22.

⁴⁹² Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 225-233.

⁴⁹³ Keidan (1997) *Vzyskuiushchie Grada*, 481 [12 August 1912].

⁴⁹⁴ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 32 (in footnote)

In Maximus, God is the creator of both intelligible (νοητά) and sensible (αἰσθητά) creatures, shaping them by his desire to unite them to himself. He wrote in the opening chapter of the *Mystagogia*:

‘For God, who made and brought into existence all things by his infinite power, contains, gathers and limits them and in his Providence binds both intelligible and sensible beings to himself and to one another. Maintaining about himself as cause, beginning, and end all beings which are by nature distant from one another, he makes them converge in each other by the singular force of their relationship to him as origin’.⁴⁹⁵

He grounds the man-angel distinction upon the *logoi*.

‘We believe that a *logos* of angels preceded their creation, a *logos* preceded the creation of each of the beings and powers that fill the upper world, a *logos* preceded the creation of human beings, a *logos* preceded everything that receives its becoming from God, and so on. It is not necessary to mention them all’.⁴⁹⁶

In Maximus’ theology, unity and difference are essential to created identity.⁴⁹⁷ While all creatures are united in the *Logos*, they are also united in not being God, and in not being one another. However, angels and men have different *logoi* and angels are incorporeal whereas men are corporeal.

The same scheme of theologizing can be found in Gregory Palamas – another patristic writer whose thoughts were significant for Bulgakov, especially in respect to angels.⁴⁹⁸ Palamas too notes in the first place that there is something that unites men and angels and afterwards shows the differences there are between them. However, he does not merely recognize the differences, he also highlights those distinctive characteristics of the human nature which, in his opinion, cause it to surpass the nature of angels.⁴⁹⁹ Palamas speaks of the unity of all creatures in not being God and points out the hierarchical or primordial distinction among creatures, both incorporeal and corporeal, which are, in fact, different *logoi* following Maximus’ system. Gregory introduces here the terms ‘akin to the Godhead’ and ‘nature alien to God’ (ξένη τῆς θείας φύσεως).

⁴⁹⁵ *Myst. I* (PG 91,664D) (*Maximus Confessor: selected writings*, 186)

⁴⁹⁶ *Amb. Io. 7* (PG 91,1080A). (*On the cosmic mystery of Jesus Christ: selected writings from St. Maximus the Confessor*, 55)

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. Törönen (2007) *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor*.

⁴⁹⁸ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 314.

⁴⁹⁹ Gregory Palamas, *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 175. (Cap. 79. – PG 150, 1176 D – 1177 A). In his *Spor o Sofii* (1936) (par. 8), V. Lossky criticizes Bulgakov’s ‘anthropocentrism’. Lossky argues that Bulgakov misinterpreted Palamas but does not mention Maximus at all...

Image and likeness

The Bible says that man was created by God in His image and likeness. We do not have any scriptural data on this matter; however, many theologians (Maximus, Palamas and Bulgakov are among them) hold that the angels were also created in the image of God but in a different way.⁵⁰⁰ Again, we can observe both what unites men and angels and what distinguishes them.

Gavin notes that, according to Maximus, only man is made in the “image and likeness” of God, serving as the mediator between the corporeal and incorporeal creations.

‘...the whole cosmos, consisting of things seen and unseen, is man. And again, man, consisting of body and soul, is a cosmos... intelligible things present the *logos* of the soul; and the soul, the *logoi* of intelligible things. And sensible things present the place of the body; and the body presents the place of sensible things’.⁵⁰¹

Maximus, according to Gavin, never says that angels share in this distinct role of man. ‘Only human beings possess the full “image” of God, and the potential to grow in God’s “likeness” through cooperation with divine grace’.⁵⁰² Thunberg argues that the notion of ‘image’ in Maximus’ works is primarily related to the *voũς*, while ‘likeness’ is, generally, more related to the *λόγος*.⁵⁰³ Considering that man and angels have different *logoi*, one might explain why Maximus does not apply the notion of ‘likeness’ to angels.

Bulgakov considered the fullness of the image in humans to be the key element in distinguishing man from angel.

‘Nevertheless, the fundamental difference between human beings and angels consists in the fact that *only* human beings possess the *fullness* of the image of God. Not only does a human being bear the image of God in a hierarchical union with all other human beings, but every human being has this image in himself. Therefore, humankind is not an “assembly”, i.e. a hierarchical whole, but a “genus”, i.e., a multi-unity, where every member possesses ontological fullness. A clear proof of this is the Incarnation: in His single person the Lord could assume perfect humanity, in which the fullness is present corporeally. And every human being is deified in Him: For ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3, 28)’⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁰ Thunberg (1965) *Microcosm and mediator: the theological anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 121-124.

⁵⁰¹ Maximus the Confessor, *Myst.* VII (PG 91, 684D – 685A). (Gavin (2009) “*They are like the angels in the heavens*”: *angelology and anthropology in the thought of Maximus the Confessor*, 135)

⁵⁰² Gavin (2009) “*They are like the angels in the heavens*”: *angelology and anthropology in the thought of Maximus the Confessor*, 150. cf. ‘While Maximus does affirm that the angels will also be deified, he never refers to them as the bearers of the “image” and “likeness” of God’, 134.

⁵⁰³ Thunberg (1965) *Microcosm and mediator*, 124.

⁵⁰⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *The friend of the Bridegroom: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Forerunner*, 166.

Maximus, however, leans toward a conception of angels as a ‘genus’, where each angel does possess ‘ontological fullness’.⁵⁰⁵

Gregory Palamas, speaking on the same topic, has a slightly different perspective. Whereas Maximus simply draws a distinction between the angelic and human natures, pointing out their different *logoi*, Palamas tries to show the superiority of one nature over the other. He writes of the superiority of humans over angels in their image of God and angels over humans in respect to God’s likeness. However, as we have seen, Gregory first points to what is common between the two.

He begins by contemplating the highest and symbolical realities of the inner life of the Holy Trinity.⁵⁰⁶ The symbolical image of this, first of all, we can find in our mind created in the image of God.⁵⁰⁷ The same can be found in the angelic world.

‘The *intellectual and rational nature of the angels* [ἄσωματός] also possesses mind, and word from the mind, and the love of the mind for the word, which love is also from the mind and ever coexists with the word and the mind, and which could be called spirit since it accompanies the word by nature’.⁵⁰⁸

This is how Palamas sees what is common between angels and humans in relation to God’s image. One should mention, however, that he compares the angels with the human soul, not with the whole human being. Gregory also refers to immateriality which is, in his opinion, a common feature of the angels and the human soul.

‘The angel and the soul, as incorporeal beings, are not located in place but neither are they everywhere, for they do not sustain the universe but rather are dependent upon the one who sustains them. Therefore, they belong in the one who sustains and encompasses the universe in that they are appropriately bounded by him’.⁵⁰⁹

Probably, the most exciting point of Palamas’ teaching is when he speaks of men surpassing the angels. This teaching concerns the image of God in man.⁵¹⁰ The second reason

⁵⁰⁵ Gavin (2009) “*They are like the angels in the heavens*”: *angelology and anthropology in the thought of Maximus the Confessor*, 150.

⁵⁰⁶ Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 123. (Cap. 36, – col. 1144 D – 1145 A)

⁵⁰⁷ Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 123 (Cap. 37, – col. 1145 BC)

⁵⁰⁸ Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 125 (Cap. 38, – col. 1145 D) (Italics mine)

⁵⁰⁹ Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 155 (Cap. 61, col. 1164 D. cf: Homil. 19. PG 151, 257D)

⁵¹⁰ Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 127 (Cap. 39, – col. 1148 B. cf. cap. 43, – col. 1152)

given for the superiority of man is his dominating position in the hierarchy of the universe.⁵¹¹

Finally, the third superiority pointed out by Palamas concerns our cognition and creativity.⁵¹²

However, Palamas claims that the angels surpass men in their likeness of God.⁵¹³

‘In this grace and radiance and with respect to union with God the angels have precedence over men. And so they are secondary radiances, ministers of the supreme radiance; and, “The intellectual powers and ministering spirits are secondary lights, effulgences of the First Light”⁵¹⁴; and the angels are said to be “a primary luminous nature [πρώτη φωτεινὴ φύσις] subsequent to the first in that they are illumined thereby...”⁵¹⁵

Equality with angels

Bulgakov could have found his teaching on equality with angels in Maximus’ *Ambigua ad Ioannem 41*. This text, which summarizes Maximus’ Christological and anthropological doctrine, is very important for Bulgakov’s sophiology.⁵¹⁶ It is noteworthy that in it angels play a remarkable role. Maximus writes about five ‘mediations’ which represent different stages in acquiring ‘equality with the angels’.

The first and second mediations do not speak directly about angels; they are, however, essential to understanding the next stages. First, man must overcome the divisions of masculine and feminine, eliminating the fragmentation of the sexes and restoring unity in the common *logos* of man.⁵¹⁷ In the second mediation, man harmonizes earth and paradise, reuniting the scattered members of the inhabited world through the living of ‘a holy life’. Thunberg notes that ‘the second mediation concerns life on earth and divisions among men, which are to be overcome through a new moral behaviour in imitation of Christ, who made the earth one through his own conduct’.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹¹ Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 134 (Cap. 44, – col. 1152 C)

⁵¹² Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 158-159 (Cap. 63, col. 1165 C)

⁵¹³ Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 159 (Cap.64)

⁵¹⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 44.3* (PG 36, 609B; M. Vinson (2003) *Select Orations*, 231)

⁵¹⁵ Gregory Palamas, Saint. *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 173 (Cap. 77, – col. 1173 D – 1176 A; cf : cap. 65, – col. 1168 B.)

⁵¹⁶ Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 86.

⁵¹⁷ This aspect of Maximus’ thought Bulgakov picked up and developed in his sophiology (Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 87)

⁵¹⁸ Thunberg (1965) *Microcosm and Mediator*, 383.

Mention of equality with the angels begins in the third mediation.⁵¹⁹ This is the beginning of the contemplative life. Man acquires ‘identity’ (ταυτότης) with the angels by the manner of a life conducted in accordance with virtue. Maximus makes it clear that ‘identity’ with the angels does not take place at the level of nature, but at the level of ‘manner of being’. Here one can notice a striking contrast with Bulgakov’s imprecise usage of the term ‘angelic nature’ in relation to St John the Forerunner.

The fourth mediation speaks about equality (ισότης) with the angels in respect of knowledge:

‘And then the human person unites what is perceived by the mind and what is perceived by the senses with each other by achieving equality with the angels in its manner of knowing’.⁵²⁰

The final synthesis involves ‘going beyond’ the angels, into the very likeness of God. This is a common goal for men and angels, ‘their common road’. Yet, it occurs in the mediation of human nature by the power of divine grace.

‘And finally, beyond all these, the human person unites the created nature with the uncreated through love (O the wonder of God’s love for us human beings!), showing them to be one and the same through the possession of grace, the whole [creation] wholly interpenetrated by God, and become completely whatever God is, save at the level of being...’⁵²¹

To sum up, both Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas, distinguishing between the angelic and human natures, speak about an existing unity or commonality between angels and men. This unity is based on their creation by God from non-existence and is a dogmatic fact of great significance to both angelology and anthropology. Although Palamas stresses the superiority of humans in regard to the image of God and the superiority of the angels in regard to the likeness, both fathers point out the special role of man as a psychosomatic being. It appears that Bulgakov’s angelology is very much dependent on the thought of these two fathers. Bulgakov calls the question of a correlation between the angels and humans ‘the fundamental problem of angelology’. He dedicates many pages to this problem in his *Jacob’s Ladder*, finding

⁵¹⁹ *Amb.Io. 41*, PG 91, 1305D-1308A; *Maximus the Confessor*, ed. A. Louth, 155-156.

⁵²⁰ *Amb.Io. 41*, PG 91, 1308A; *Maximus the Confessor*, ed. A. Louth, 156.

⁵²¹ *Amb.Io.41*, PG 91, 1308B; *Maximus the Confessor*, ed. A. Louth, 156.

a solution in the Book of Revelation: “By human measurement which is also angel’s measurement” (Apoc 21:17) - these words express the ontological correlation of both worlds’.⁵²² Bulgakov speaks further about the ‘co-humanity’ of the angels and the corresponding ‘co-angelicity’ of humankind which is ‘rooted in the image of God as the common foundation of the creation of humans and angels’.⁵²³

5.2. The incorporeality of angels

At the end of the 19th century there was a disagreement between two famous hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church – Bishop Theophan the Recluse and Bishop Ignatius (Bryanchaninov) – concerning the corporeality of angels. Theophan the Recluse was in favour of a purely spiritual and incorporeal angelic nature, whereas Bishop Ignatius retained the view that the angels possess an ethereal body.

This argument, mentioned by Bulgakov in his *Jacob’s Ladder*, was inherited from early Christian times.⁵²⁴ In the East, Maximus the Confessor distinguishes an intelligible creation from a material and sensible creation. *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 41 and *Questiones ad Thalalassium* 48 discuss the distinctions to be drawn between Earth (material creation) and Heaven (spiritual creation, the angels); and between sensible creation (corporeal, material creatures) and intelligible creation (angels, *logoi*)⁵²⁵. In making these distinctions, Maximus follows the language and tradition found in both Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius.

Although a number of earlier scholastics in the West defended the view of ethereal bodies, the later opinion of Thomas Aquinas that the angels are pure spirits composed of ‘a form

⁵²² Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, 36.

⁵²³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, 38

⁵²⁴ See Chapter 4.3.

⁵²⁵ Cf. *Amb. Io.* 41 (PG 91, 1305D-1308A-B).

subsisting in itself: but still related to existence as a potency to its actuality' has become the common doctrine of the Catholic Church.⁵²⁶

Despite a certain ambivalence with regard to the nature of the angels which still exists in modern Orthodox and Protestant thought, one can affirm that the aforementioned teaching of St Maximus on angelic immateriality corresponds to the most recent Orthodox works dedicated to the angels.⁵²⁷ For example, a modern Russian theologian, T. Turovtsev, defends the idea of the pure incorporeity of angels by pointing out the simplicity and personality of the angelic nature.⁵²⁸

Bulgakov holds the same position when comparing humanity with the angels:

'Humanity lives its own proper life and its own proper world even when God will be all in all. Angels do not have in this sense their own proper nature and their own world. Because their nature is perfectly transparent for God, theophanies can also occur as angelophanies...'⁵²⁹

According to Bulgakov, 'the fundamental ontological difference between angelic nature and human nature' can be seen in the fact that the human is an incarnate spirit possessing a body whereas angels are absolutely bodiless. All appearances of the angels described in the Scripture and the Church tradition, when they were seen in the human form or in the form of animals, are conditioned by their general co-humanity. Despite the ambiguities in the formulations by some of the Fathers and even in the Acts of the 7th Ecumenical council, Bulgakov insists that the 'angelic essence is *incorporeal* but the appearance of angels in human form is *authentic*'.⁵³⁰

5.3. The question of time in Bulgakov's angelology

It is temporality which appears, according to Bulgakov, as the distinctive feature of human nature compared to the divinity. Before discussing time in regard to the angelic nature we

⁵²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, ST, Ia. 50,2. (Gilby, Blackfriars 1968, vol.9, 15); cf. Parente (1994) *The Angels. (The Catholic Teaching on the Angels)*, 24; Aquilina (2009) *Angels of God: the Bible, the Church and the Heavenly Hosts*, 7-10.

⁵²⁷ Cf. Lossky (1991) *Ocherki misticheskogo bogoslovie Vostochnoy Tserkvi. Dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie* (see Chapter 12. Original sin); Gaebelien (1995) 'The Angels of God', 1,24; Chant (1997) *Angelology: A Study on the Secret Messengers of God*, 56.

⁵²⁸ Turovtsev (2010) *Problema telesnosti angelov*, 4-17.

⁵²⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 74.

⁵³⁰ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 144.

should look at the theme of time in Bulgakov more broadly. Bulgakov touches upon the problem of time in many of his major works as well as in his sermons.⁵³¹ Of course Bulgakov's attention to the problem of time was not unusual at the beginning of the 20th century. Florenskii did the same in many pages of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, as well as in some later works.⁵³² However, unlike Florenskii or Bakhtin, who were mainly interested in the time/space relationship, drawing on the theories of Einstein and Minkovsky, Bulgakov was concerned with the more traditional opposition between time and eternity, a concern which goes back to Plato and Aristotle. He was convinced that space (or spatiality – *пространственность*) is a less general form of creaturely being than temporality, because temporality concerns not only the natural but also the spiritual world.

Bulgakov employs a number of different terms to spell out his understanding of time.

First, he distinguishes between time and temporality. Whereas temporality is a pure becoming, or the making of a content, time is the form and measure of this becoming.⁵³³ One should speak about the beginning of temporality, not about the beginning of time.

Second, Bulgakov introduces various times: time before the Fall (as in his *Philosophy of Economy*), time after the Fall or our discursive time, and the time of angels. He admits the possibility of the existence of a distinct time for animals. Time can also be bad, evil, tending towards death and destruction, or good, tending towards perfection and salvation.⁵³⁴

Third, Bulgakov speaks about different types of eternity. There is uncreated and unsupported, or divine eternity – *aeternitas*. It is different from the created eternity – *aeviternitas*, which is experienced by created spirits.

⁵³¹ Bulgakov (2000) *Philosophy of Economy*, 166; Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 202-207; Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 424; Bulgakov (2008) *The Lamb of God*, 131-135; Bulgakov (2009) *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God*, 57-59; Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 28-29, 103-105; Bulgakov (2002) *The Bride of the Lamb*, 56-79, 315, 467-519. See also: Rezvykh (2014) *Postanovka problemy vremeni u S.N. Bulgakova: context antinomii prirody i svobody*.

⁵³² Florenskii (1993) *Analiz prostranstvennosti i vremeni v khudozhestvenno-izobrazitelnykh proizvedeniyakh*; Chase (2015) *Pavel Florenskii on space and time*, 105-118; Graham, Kantor (2009) *Naming infinity: a true story of religious mysticism and mathematical creativity*; Granin (2015) *Eskhatologia v metafizike prostranstva-vremeni P.A. Florenskogo*.

⁵³³ Bulgakov (2008) *The Lamb of God*, 152; Bulgakov (2002) *The Bride of the Lamb*, 79.

⁵³⁴ Cf. Pattison (2015) *Eternal God/saving Time*, 2.

Bulgakov does not elaborate on the idea of an angelic time. He refers to Augustine as someone who supports this idea, but whereas Augustine clearly says that the angels are subject to time, Bulgakov does not mention any specific term designating angelic temporality. Among the western theologians, Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas were active supporters of a specific time for angels.⁵³⁵ While Bulgakov does not mention the Cappadocian Fathers in this respect, he definitely follows in their footsteps. Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa all substantiate the idea of a created eternity distinct from the divine one.⁵³⁶ Some authors argue that a difference can be traced between the terms *aionios* and *aidios* used by some of the Greek Fathers. Both designate eternity, but the latter always means eternity in the strict sense as divine or blessed eternity, whereas the former could mean the created eternity, which is in some ways limited.⁵³⁷

Although for angels the ideas of time and created eternity seem to coincide, Bulgakov emphasises that ‘for man, eternity is not a specially qualified time that will arrive *after* temporal life, as an event in time itself; rather, it is the depth of his own being, a depth known in time and ceaselessly revealing itself. Eternity is man's rootedness in God, and this eternal life both begins and is accomplished in temporal life: ‘This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’ (John 17:3).’⁵³⁸

One can find a number of different definitions of time in Bulgakov’s works. The following one from *Unfading Light* might seem very Hegelian:

‘Time is an actual synthesis of being and nonbeing, coming to be, *Werden*. The present, which is always being absorbed by the past and is rushing to the future, is as it were a point having no measurement, moving in the ocean of meonal being: of the half-being of the past and the future, of being that is no longer and being that is not yet.’⁵³⁹

⁵³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, ST, Ia, 53, 3. (Gilby, Blackfriars 1968, vol.9, 64-71); cf. Fox (2006) *Time and eternity in mid-thirteenth-century thought*, 273.

⁵³⁶ Bradshaw (2006) *Time and Eternity in the Greek Fathers*, 311-66.

⁵³⁷ Ramelli, Konstan (2007) *Terms for eternity: aiōnios and aīdios in classical and Christian texts*, 226. Cf. in Fox (2006) *Time and eternity in mid-thirteenth-century thought*, 256: ‘The words “aeviternitas” and “aevum” seem to have entered medieval lexicons as alternatives to “aeternitas” for translating the Greek word “aeon” (eternity). They occur in translations as diverse as biblical texts, philosophical writings, and patristic sources.’

⁵³⁸ Bulgakov (2008) *Lamb of God*, 135; cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, 11,11: ‘Who will hold the heart of man, that it may stand still, and see how the still-standing eternity, itself neither future nor past, utters the times future and past?’

⁵³⁹ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 202; cf.: ‘The dimensions of time, *present*, *future*, and *past*, are the *becoming* of externality as such, and the resolution of it into the differences of being as passing over into nothing, and of nothing as passing over into being’. (Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, 36)

The quotation above also echoes Augustine's famous words where he speaks about time as something extremely elusive, with the past which is no longer, the future which is not yet, and the present which cannot be grasped.⁵⁴⁰ A few pages below, Bulgakov refers to the definition of Kant. He accepts his idea that time is the subjective and universal form of perception but does not limit it to the human world. In fact, Bulgakov very often uses someone else's formulations filling them with his own content. This is also true for his understanding of time. The fact that he uses Hegelian or Kantian formulations does not mean that he holds similar philosophical or theological views. What distinguishes Bulgakov's theological language in general and his idea of time in particular is the use of antinomies. Bulgakov writes:

'In the intuition of temporality the antinomy of creatureliness makes itself felt — of the divine principle which is submerged in nothing and which has engendered it by itself. For time is the transience and nullity of all that is, but at the same time the possibility of all that was, the *panta rhei* of being.'⁵⁴¹

The dichotomy of time and eternity is antinomic in itself. Time is the feature of creatureliness. Time was created from nothing, but is rooted in eternity through its creation by eternal God. On the one hand, there is the ontological gap between time and divine eternity. On the other hand, time enters into eternity through creation, and eternity is reflected in time, which is the image of eternity.⁵⁴²

'Time and eternity are correlative: time would not be felt in its flowing, it would not be summed up from separate broken moments if the super-temporal *subject* of time did not accomplish this. Time is presupposed with eternity; it is nothing other than eternity that stretches into being, having creatively embraced nothing'.⁵⁴³

The antinomy of time and eternity is a particular case of a more general Sophiological antinomy. One has to remember that Bulgakov's theological enterprise as a whole should be approached bearing in mind his method of antinomies.⁵⁴⁴ Bulgakov explains his antinomism and gives an antinomic résumé of his system in the second chapter of his *The Icon and Iconveneration* (1931). He expounds three general antinomies:

I. Theological antinomy (God in Himself)

⁵⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, 11, 14.

⁵⁴¹ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 202.

⁵⁴² Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 37c.

⁵⁴³ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 204.

⁵⁴⁴ See Chapter 2.

THESIS: God is the Absolute and, consequently the pure NOT, the Divine Nothing. (Apophatic theology)

ANTITHESIS: God is the Absolute-in-Itself self-relation, the Holy Trinity. (Kataphatic theology)

II. Cosmological antinomy (God in Himself and in creation)

THESIS: God in the Holy Trinity has all fullness and all-bliss; He is self-existent, unchanging, eternal, and therefore absolute. (God in Himself)

ANTITHESIS: God creates the world out of love for creation, with its temporal, relative, becoming being, and becomes God for it. He correlates Himself with it. (God in creation)

III. Sophiological antinomy

(Divine Wisdom in God and in the world)

THESIS: God, unisubstantial in the Holy Trinity, reveals Himself in His Wisdom, which is His Divine life and the Divine world in eternity, fullness, and perfection. (Noncreaturely Sophia — Divinity in God)

ANTITHESIS: God creates the world by His Wisdom, and this Wisdom, constituting the Divine foundation of the world, abides in temporal-spatial becoming, submerged in nonbeing. (Creaturely Sophia — Divinity outside of God, in the world).⁵⁴⁵

In short, the first antinomy deals with God in Himself as Absolute and Trinity; the second is about the possibility of creation out of nothing and what it might mean for the Absolute God and for his creation; finally, the third antinomy is concerned with the possibility of revelation — how the Absolute God can be known by his creation; are there any grounds for a mutual relationship between God and creation?

In the light of Bulgakov's hierarchy of antinomies, his mysterious words that 'time and eternity are the creaturely Sophia and the Divine Sophia' make more sense.

To sum up, Bulgakov holds that time was created by God and that the angels are subject to time as they are part of creation. Angels were created before humans in their own angelic time, which can also be called the created eternity. Which means that angels live in eternity and are immortal according to their nature.

5.4. Divinisation (angels and divine nature)

The idea of the final salvation, theosis (deification or divinisation in the Eastern tradition) of angels and humans, can be found in *Jacob's Ladder*, together with an outline of the role and place of the incarnation in it:

⁵⁴⁵ Bulgakov (2012) *Icons and the Name of God*, 35-36.

‘Even if Adam had not fallen, the incarnation, according to the opinion of some theologians, would have occurred all the same for the sake of the complete divinisation of humankind and in it the angelic world would have been completely and finally reunited with the human’.⁵⁴⁶

One of Lossky’s criticisms targeted Bulgakov’s understanding of divinization.⁵⁴⁷ The former author argued that Bulgakov misunderstood divinization as something given from the beginning, whereas according to Lossky it can only be the final goal of human existence. Lossky believed that Bulgakov’s approach to theosis results in a static system with anthropocentrism at its core.

It is hard to agree with Lossky’s argument in this case, considering that the participation of the angels in theosis is a prominent locus in Maximus the Confessor, who is possibly one of Bulgakov’s key theological sources for the idea of deification.⁵⁴⁸ According to Maximus, angels, like men, are dependent on the Incarnation for their theosis. In God’s original plan for mankind, it was the task of man as mediator to bring all creation to God. Saint Maximus appears to conceive of man’s failure to fulfil his role as mediator in uplifting the creation to God as the precondition of God’s incarnational descent into the material cosmos.

‘It [humanity] proceeds harmoniously to each of the extremities in the things that are, from what is close to what is remote, from what is worse to what is better, lifting up to God and fully accomplishing union. For this reason the human person was introduced last among beings, as a kind of natural bond mediating between the universal poles through their proper parts, and leading into unity in itself those things that are naturally set apart from one another by a great interval’.⁵⁴⁹

However, after the Fall man was not able to perform his original task without the Incarnation of the Word. Jesus Christ, in His flesh, encompasses all of creation in Himself – including the angels – and offers redemption and divinisation through His person.

‘On account of his being the mediator between God and men, it is necessary that he restore the natural relationship between the things mediated by existing as both, in order that, by the truth itself in himself and through himself, he might join earthly things and the material nature of men – the nature having been attacked through sin – to heavenly things. He leads the saved nature to God the Father, after having restored it to friendship and divinised it’.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 158.

⁵⁴⁷ For a recent overview of the Eastern Christian theology of salvation as deification see Russell (2004) *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*.

⁵⁴⁸ Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 87.

⁵⁴⁹ *Amb.Io. 41*, 1305 B. in *Maximus the Confessor*, ed. A. Louth, 157.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ep. 12*, PG 91, 468C; (Gavin (2009) “*They are like the angels in the heavens*”: *angelology and anthropology in the thought of Maximus the Confessor*, 262-263).

The Saviour restores the fallen human nature and makes man again capable of completing his original task of mediation between God and all sensible and intelligible creation. Human persons, the secondary mediators, must fulfil this eschatological task by following Jesus Christ through prayerfully lifting their minds up from earthly to spiritual realities. This eschatological task must be fulfilled by the secondary mediators, that is, all those who follow Jesus Christ:

‘One who is settled in the place of prayer should lift his mind from human matters and the attention of the soul to more divine realities. This will enable him to follow the one who has “passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God,” who is everywhere and who in his incarnation passes through all things on our account. If we follow him, we also pass through all things with him and come beside him if we know him not in the limited condition of his descent in the incarnation but in the majestic splendor of his natural infinitude.’⁵⁵¹

Maximus repeatedly speaks about this intermediary function of man in Christ:

‘With us and through us he [Christ] encompasses the whole creation through its intermediaries and the extremities through their own parts. He binds about himself each with the other, tightly and indissolubly, paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, things sensible and things intelligible, since he possesses like us sense and soul and mind, by which, as parts, he assimilates himself by each of the extremities to what is universally akin to each in the previously mentioned manner. Thus he divinely recapitulates the universe in himself, showing that the whole creation exists as one.’⁵⁵²

As for their final fulfilment, however, Bulgakov stresses that the Incarnation does not become redemption for the angels but serves the purpose of an eschatological reunion of the angelic and human worlds.

‘In divinisation, in graced love the creature as it were loses its creatureliness and with it its limitedness, dissolving in divine love. But in this love there is no place for metaphysical depersonalization, the death of the hypostasis. On the contrary, similar to the union of both natures, divine and human, undivided and unmingled, in the Lord Jesus Christ, so too in a human who is being divinised, the creaturely nature and in it the creaturely hypostasis or individuality are preserved and confirmed in the creature’s own originality, even though they are being expanded in divinisation to universal love.’⁵⁵³

Bulgakov holds that angels truly participate in sanctification and theosis. He specifically makes reference to Gregory Palamas’ view of the ontological superiority of humans (because of their bodies) to angels. Yet Palamas also maintains that angels in turn surpass humans in the degree of their capacity for union with God. This latter idea is also supported by Dionysius.⁵⁵⁴ Following from the idea that the divine nature itself is the source of life for creaturely angelic hypostases,

⁵⁵¹ *Th. oec.* II, 18 (PG 90, 1133B; *Maximus Confessor: selected writings*, ed. G. C. Berthold, 151)

⁵⁵² *Amb.Io.* 41, 1312A. in *Maximus the Confessor*, ed. A. Louth, 160.

⁵⁵³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 5.

⁵⁵⁴ See Chapter 6.1.3. Theosis in Dionysius.

Bulgakov argues that the form of divinisation proper to the angels is different from that of humans. As angels were created as hypostases having the divine nature as their own, they can be called divinised by nature. By contrast, humans become divinised by grace.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Summing up this chapter, there are two aspects to Bulgakov's thoughts which must be taken into consideration when analysing his ideas. First, Bulgakov's theological language is not always strict, his ideas evolve from work to work, resulting in some inconsistency and the possibility of multiple interpretations. Secondly, his method of theological antinomies is not usually explained or even mentioned by the author, but it is widely employed in all of his major works.⁵⁵⁵ This obliges us to look at his particular ideas as a part of a bigger picture. In particular, the problem of the angelic nature in Bulgakov has been approached here by exploring the following questions:

1. The issue of terminology.

Bulgakov uses two Russian terms 'природа' and 'естество', which have both been translated as 'nature' in the English translation but have a slight difference in meaning in the original Russian text. Angels have some 'естество', but do not have their own 'природа'. This distinction strikingly resembles what we saw in Dionysius in respect to the distinction between the terms οὐσία and φύσις.

2. The relationship between divine, human and angelic nature.

In all the sections of this chapter, dedicated to different aspects of the nature of angels, we could not escape also touching upon God and humans. We have seen that Bulgakov's thought concerning the angelic nature is heavily dependent on Maximus the Confessor and Gregory

⁵⁵⁵ Gallaher (2010) *There is freedom: the dialectic of freedom and necessity in the Trinitarian theologies of Sergii Bulgakov, Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 78.

Palamas. He maintains that angels and humans have it in common that they were created after the image of God and they possess hypostatic existence. However, unlike angels, humans have their own independent life, their own individual nature [*нприрода*], which is to be transfigured by God's grace and divinized. All human hypostases have it in common that they each possess this individual human nature [*природа*] and that all together they constitute the human genus [*род*]. Angels do not have their own independent life as do humans; their nature [*естество*] is fully transparent for divine energies. Angelic hypostases make up the angelic assembly and can be said to be divinised by nature. The further perfection of the angels depends on their relationship with humans, which is manifested in the ontological link between human beings and their guardian angels.

Overall, the terms 'nature' and 'hypostasis' are extremely important for Bulgakov's theological language. The term 'nature' is often employed to convey meanings which correspond to Bulgakov's sophiology, and therefore can be said to be related to the metalanguage of sophiology rather than to the metalanguage of the first level. Analysis of the terms 'hypostasis' and 'person', their corresponding meanings and substitutes will proceed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6. Angels as the bearers of God's image in Dionysius and Bulgakov

In the previous two chapters we have already touched upon many of the important aspects of Dionysius' and Bulgakov's angelology in terms of their metalanguages of the first level, in particular, analyzing their use of the term 'nature' in the human and angelic worlds. When in Chapter 5 we discussed the question of the creation of angels after the image of God, we approached it from the perspective of the idea of nature, speaking in generic terms about the angelic and human worlds. The current chapter elucidates the meaning of being created after the image of God for individual angels in both authors.

First, we will look at the characteristics of individual angels in the CD, with a particular focus on the idea of theosis. We then turn to Bulgakov, for whom the characteristics of angels as the bearers of God's image are conceptualized in the idea of personhood, which he borrowed from Soloviev's teaching and applied to God, angels and humans.⁵⁵⁶ 'Everything truly existing is personal', writes Bulgakov in the Introduction to his book on angels. 'Spirit', 'person', 'hypostasis' – all are terms employed by Bulgakov to designate the subjective principle of existence related to God, angels and humans.

6.1. The characteristics of the 'godlike' angels in Dionysius

6.1.1. *The image of God in angels*

Dionysius maintains the Christian doctrine of creation, which means he holds that everything, 'both visible and invisible', was created by God from non-existence:

'One truth must be affirmed above all else. It is that the transcendent Deity has out of goodness established the existence of everything and brought it into being.'⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁶ Antonov (2017) 'Problema lichnosti v myshlenii prot. S. Bulgakova i problematika bogoslovskogo personalizma v XX veke', 190; cf.: Maler (2013) 'Poniatie "lichnosti" v sofiologii i neopatrystike', 225-226.

⁵⁵⁷ CH, 4, 1

The creation *ex nihilo* is clearly stated in the above citation as well as the reason for creation, ‘out of goodness’, which is not uncommon in Patristic thought. According to Dionysius, everything was created ‘in a single act’.⁵⁵⁸ The ontological foundation of the angelic world – its creation after the image of God - is also affirmed by Dionysius:

‘The angel is an image of God [εἰκὼν ἐστὶ τοῦ θεοῦ]. He is a manifestation of the hidden light. He is a mirror [ἔσοπτρον], pure, bright, untarnished, unspotted, receiving, if one may say so, the full loveliness of the divine goodness and purely enlightening within itself as far as possible the goodness of the silence in the inner sanctuaries.’⁵⁵⁹

Dionysius uses here the metaphor of mirror, which helps him to open up the idea of the image of God in angels. The metaphor of mirror is well known in Platonic philosophy.⁵⁶⁰ It is also used in the CH in relation to all intelligent beings, both angels and humans:

‘A hierarchy bears in itself the mark of God. Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself’.⁵⁶¹

This metaphor is also found in the EH, where Dionysius reinforces it by saying that the souls of the hierarchs are the mirrors, made in the image of those divine energies, which illumine them:

‘They must themselves virtually match the purity of the rites they perform and in this way they will be illuminated by ever more divine visions, for those transcendent rays prefer to give off the fullness of their splendor more purely and more luminously in mirrors made in their image [τῶν ὁμοειδῶν ἔσοπτρων].’⁵⁶²

In numerous places of the CD, the angels are referred to as ‘godlike’ [θεοειδεῖς]⁵⁶³, which points to their creation in the image of God. Furthermore, Dionysius notes that the various designations of the angels discussed in his treatise reveal the particular characteristics of their godlike image.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁵⁸ See DN, 5, 10. [825B]: ‘As was often said, he contains beforehand and created everything in a single act. He is present to all and he is everywhere, according to one and the same and the totality of everything.’

⁵⁵⁹ DN, 4, 22; Cf.: The angels are called ‘godlike intelligences’ in CH, 2,1; the definition of hierarchy CH, 3, 1.

⁵⁶⁰ Book X of Plato’s *Republic* (596 c–e); According to Plotinus, what is made in imitation of something is “like a mirror able to catch [the reflection of] a form (ὡσπερ κάτοπτρον ἀρπάσαι εἶδος τι δυνάμενον)” (Plotinus, *Enneads IV*, 3, 11, 7-8; trans. Armstrong, 1984, vol. 4, 71).

⁵⁶¹ CH, 3,2.

⁵⁶² EH, 3, III, 10. [440B]

⁵⁶³ DN 5,8; CH 7,4; etc.

⁵⁶⁴ CH 8,1

6.1.2. *The properties of the divine image and the language of hypostasis*

There are authors who have argued that Dionysius' hierarchical angelology suggests that angels are deprived of their essential hypostatic properties. According to them, Dionysius appears to be not interested in angels as individual beings employing either 'impersonal' or 'generic' terms. For example, Russian author T. Turovtsev writes that Dionysius 'defines angels in different ways', calling them 'minds', either 'heavenly' or 'above worldly' or 'holy'. Less frequently he refers to them as 'ranks', 'orders', or 'beings'. Following J. Meyendorff, Turovtsev argues that Dionysius is more interested in constructing rigid cosmological schemes, influenced by neo-Platonism, rather than in speaking of angels as free and godlike creatures.

However, Dionysius does not define angels as 'beings' or 'minds'. He says exactly the opposite, defining all 'celestial beings and minds' as 'angels.' Chapters 4 and 5 CH are dedicated to the question why all celestial beings are altogether called 'angels'. One has to say that Dionysius extensively uses the name 'angel' throughout his treatises. He explains that the angels are messengers, those who announce the news, reveal something to others. In this context, he notes that Jesus is also called in the Scripture 'the Angel of the Great Council' because he revealed to us what He heard from the Father. Similarly, all the heavenly beings are called 'angels' because each possesses this essential feature - to be an ambassador and able to reveal. Which means that essentially relational features lie at the foundation of the definition of angels given by Dionysius, which is opposite to Turovtsev's conclusions.

Further on in the text, this author claims that Dionysius nowhere speaks of angels as hypostases or persons.⁵⁶⁵ Even more, Turovtsev claims that 'the existential primordial reality is thought by Dionysius not in terms of a transcending principle of the unique person, but in terms of some generic principle.'⁵⁶⁶ Indeed, Dionysius does not seemingly apply the term 'hypostasis' to angels, although there are places in the DN which may relate to angels as well as to human beings. For example, while discussing the nature of evil Dionysius mentions:

⁵⁶⁵ Turovtsev (2015) *Vvedenie v dogmaticheskoe uchenie ob angelakh*, 33.

⁵⁶⁶ Turovtsev (2015) *Vvedenie v dogmaticheskoe uchenie ob angelakh*, 38.

‘The true answer to this will be that evil, qua evil, never produces being or birth. All it can do by itself is in a limited fashion to debase and to destroy the subsistence of beings [τὴν τῶν ὄντων ὑπόστασιν]’⁵⁶⁷

Suggesting the interpretation of the term ὑπόστασις, one has to remember that evil affected angels and human beings in the first place.

Moreover, Dionysius uses the term ὑπόστασις in relation to God and humans.⁵⁶⁸

Furthermore, such fundamental properties of the person as love, creativity, freedom and uniqueness are also found in Dionysius’ angelology.⁵⁶⁹ As for the dynamism of hierarchies, it is difficult not to agree with Perl (1994) who writes that ‘far from being “rigid”, the hierarchies are supremely dynamic, because the more thoroughly “hierarchical” a being is, the more perfectly it performs its appointed task within the hierarchical structure of creation, the more fully it participates in God’.⁵⁷⁰

To be sure, the language of hypostasis is not applied to angels in the CD, but this does not mean that Dionysius denies the idea of distinct and unique beings. In fact, he discusses the question of individuality at length, correlating it with the desire of peace:

“How is it that everything wishes for peace?” someone may ask. “There are many things which take pleasure in being other, different, and distinct, and they would never freely choose to be at rest.” This is true, assuming that what is meant here is that being other and being different refer to the individuality of each thing and to the fact that nothing tries to lose its individuality. Yet, as I will try to show, this

⁵⁶⁷ DN, 4, 20, PG 3, 717B. There is no agreement among the translators concerning the interpretation of the term ὑπόστασις. Rolt (1940), *The Shrine of Wisdom* (1957), and Luibheid (1987) interpreted it as ‘substance’, whereas Parker (1897) and Jones (1980) employed here the term ‘subsistence’. I went for the second option, following also Y. de Andia’s French translation in SCh 578, 2016, 495 (see her extensive footnote 6 on the translation of the term ὑπόστασις, found in the same page).

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. DN, 1, 4: ἐν μιᾷ τῶν αὐτῆς ὑποστάσεων; EH, 2, 7: ἀναδύσσει τὴν τρισσὴν τῆς θείας μακαριότητος ἐπιβοήσας ὑπόστασιν· EH, 3, 6: οὕτω καὶ τῶν ἱερῶν ἢ πάνσοφος ἐπιστήμη πρῶτα μὲν αὐτοὺς τῆ τῶν μορφωτικῶν καὶ ζωοποιῶν λογίων εἰσαγωγικῆ τροφῆ μαιεύεται, τελεσφορήσασα δὲ τὴν πρὸς θεογενεσίαν αὐτῶν ὑπόστασιν ἐνδίδωσι σωτηρίως αὐτοῖς ἐν τάξει τὴν πρὸς τὰ φωτοειδῆ καὶ τελεσιουργὰ κοινωνίαν.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. CH, 2, 4, PG 3, 144A: ‘Intemperance then will be an unfailing and unturning power, seen in the pure and unchanging yearning for divine beauty and in the total commitment to the real object of all desire.’ See Chapter 7.2. for the analysis of the term ἔρωσ in Dionysius; CH, 4, 2, PG 3, 180A: ‘Their thinking processes imitate the divine. They look on the divine likeness with a transcendent eye. They model their intellects on him. Hence it is natural for them to enter into a more generous communion with the Deity’; CH, 3, 3: ‘And so it comes about that every order in the hierarchical rank is uplifted as best it can toward cooperation with God’; CH, 8, 1, PG 3, 237C: ‘The revealing name “dominions” signifies, in my view, a lifting up which is free, unfettered by earthly tendencies and uninclined toward any of those tyrannical dissimilarities which characterize a harsh dominion’; EH, 1, 3, PG 3, 376A: ‘The common goal of every hierarchy consists of the continuous love of God and of things divine, a love which is sacredly worked out in an inspired and unique way, and, before this, the complete and unswerving avoidance of everything contrary to it.’ DN, 4, 7, PG 3, 704A: ‘In that simple but transcendent nature of all beautiful things, beauty and the beautiful uniquely preexisted in terms of their source. From this beauty comes the existence of everything, each being exhibiting its own way (κατὰ τὸν οἰκεῖον λόγον) of beauty.’ For discussion of the concept of love in the CD, see Chapter 7 of this thesis.

⁵⁷⁰ Perl (1994) ‘Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysius the Areopagite’, 346.

situation is itself due to the desire for peace. For everything loves to be at peace with itself, to be at one, and never to move or fall away from its own existence and from what it has. And perfect Peace is there as a gift, guarding without confusion the individuality of each, providentially ensuring that all things are quiet and free of confusion within themselves and from without, that all things are unshakably what they are and that they have peace and rest.⁵⁷¹

The uniqueness of each angelic being can be seen as confirmed and substantiated by the above quotation. According to Dionysius, all created reasonable beings, both men and angels, take part in the ongoing process of purification, illumination, and perfection, which manifests their spiritual dynamism.⁵⁷² When the spiritual dynamism of the created reasonable beings is seen in the perspective of the perfection of the divine image in them, we come up with the concept of theosis.

6.1.3. *Theosis in Dionysius*

The idea of theosis (or deification) is prominent in the CD and concerns both human beings and angels. Dionysius holds that angels surpass humans in the degree of their capacity for union with God. He was the first to offer a definition of deification that is linked to the angelic status of being a priori permanently and constantly deified.⁵⁷³ He maintains that the angels are the pure, the contemplative, the perfect in a real sense, ‘not because of an enlightened understanding which enables them to analyse the many sacred things, but rather because of a primary and supreme deification’.⁵⁷⁴

The following quotation from the EH has theosis as its main theme. God and divine nature (φύσις) is the source of salvation and divinization of every reasonable creature.

Λέγωμεν τοίνυν ὡς ἡ θεαρχικὴ μακαριότης ἡ φύσει θεότης ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς θεώσεως, ἐξ ἧς τὸ θεοῦσθαι τοῖς θεουμένοις, ἀγαθότητι θεία τὴν ἱεραρχίαν ἐπὶ σωτηρία καὶ θεώσει πάντων τῶν λογικῶν τε καὶ νοερῶν οὐσιῶν ἐδώρησατο.⁵⁷⁵

‘What we must say is this. The blessed Deity which of itself is God, is the source of all divinization. Out of its divine generosity it grants to the divinized the fact of this divinization. It has bestowed hierarchy as a gift to ensure the salvation and divinization of every being endowed with reason and intelligence.’⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷¹ DN, 11, 3, PG 3, 952C.

⁵⁷² CH, 3, 2, PG 3, 165A-B.

⁵⁷³ See Chapter 4.1.1.

⁵⁷⁴ Dionysius, *De Caelesti hierarchia* [208D].

⁵⁷⁵ EH, 1,4.

⁵⁷⁶ 376B.

In fact, most of the discussions of deification are found in the EH, and not in the DN, where, however, the task of Christianity is understood as ‘the unification of the whole created order with God through a movement of return effected by a process of purification, illumination, and perfection’.⁵⁷⁷

The main term for deification in Dionysius is θέωσις. It is found throughout the CD in CH, EH, DN and in the Epistles. The term θέωσις is used for the first time in the works by Gregory of Nazianzus.⁵⁷⁸ The Procline terms ἐκθέωσις, ἐκθεόω, and ἐκθεωτικός are found only in the DN. The adjectives θεοποιός and θεοί are applied to the created beings in the DN and CH.⁵⁷⁹

Russell notices that deification is a central metaphor in the CD, which runs through the whole text, and has ecclesiastical and philosophical dimensions. Its ecclesiastical dimension is elucidated in the EH in the course of the discussion of the mysteries of the Church. He points out that the definition of theosis in the EH is repeated word for word in the CH, but is given there as the definition of the goal of hierarchy: ‘The goal of a hierarchy [σκοπὸς ἱεραρχίας], then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him [πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοιώσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις αὐτὸν ἔχουσα]’.⁵⁸⁰ Theosis is therefore the goal of hierarchy and connects the ecclesiastical approach with the philosophical in the CD. In this context Proclus’ term ‘return’ [ἐπιστροφή] acquires a new meaning and ‘represents a direct reaching out to a personal, triadic God, who responds actively not only with the gift of the capacity for deification but also with the gift of himself, wholly present in each of his attributes’.⁵⁸¹

6.2. Bulgakov’s use of the terms ‘person’ and ‘hypostasis’ outside angelology

One cannot find an extended definition of the person in Bulgakov’s book on angels, *Jacob’s Ladder* (1929). Yet it can be found in his other works. One of them, *The Tragedy of*

⁵⁷⁷ Russell (2004) *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 248.

⁵⁷⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 4.71*; 4.124.

⁵⁷⁹ Russell (2004) *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 249.

⁵⁸⁰ CH, 3, 2, PG 3, 165A; cf. EH, 1, 3 [376 A]: ‘divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God’ [ἡ δὲ θέωσις ἐστὶν ἢ πρὸς θεὸν ὡς ἐφικτὸν ἀφομοιώσις τε καὶ ἔνωσις.]

⁵⁸¹ Russell (2004) *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 262.

Philosophy (1927), was written several years earlier in the Crimea just before he fled into exile in the West, published in a German translation a little earlier than *Jacob's Ladder* and provides rich material on Bulgakov's understanding of personhood. Some formulations and clarifications concerning the idea of personhood were given in his later works such as *The Lamb of God* (1933) and *The Comforter* (1936). His article *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity* (1925) was written in answer to questions raised by opponents in his *Unfading Light* (1917), and to clarify his views on the relation of Sophia to the principle of hypostasis.⁵⁸² We will approach the question in a systematic manner rather than in chronological order.

6.2.1. *The Divine Hypostases*

Bulgakov argues that the personalism of the revealed teaching about God from the beginning excludes any possibility for abstract, 'impersonal', as he himself puts it, concepts and lays the foundation for the patristic teaching on the Holy Trinity.⁵⁸³

Before examining Bulgakov's ideas in greater detail, it is necessary to point out once again his main theological method, which is the principle of antinomy or that any theological truth involves holding together – through an act of faith – two logically contradictory but equally essential theses. Thus, Jesus Christ is perfect God but yet perfect man. According to worldly logic, the Chalcedonian definition is irrational, illogical and contradictory. But, according to the truth the Church expresses, this is a paradoxical reality which, when viewed from God's perspective, transcends all worldly hiatuses, all division into unity. Antinomies, therefore, are crucial for him and are employed to express all important theological notions, although this is not always explicitly mentioned.⁵⁸⁴ Very often it is Bulgakov's expression of theological truths in terms of antinomies that makes it seem as if he is hopelessly "contradictory" and lacks all

⁵⁸² The issue of Sophia and hypostatic principle was discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis

⁵⁸³ Bulgakov (1928) 'Glavy o Troichnosti' http://odinblago.ru/pm_1/2 (accessed 15.05.2014)

⁵⁸⁴ Gallaher (2012) 'Antinomism, Trinity and the Challenge of Solov'evan Pantheism in the Theology of Sergij Bulgakov', 205-225.

theological sense and method. All Bulgakov's texts and formulations must be read in a wider context in order to be rightly interpreted.

When Bulgakov speaks about hypostases in respect to God, he means the three Divine Hypostases of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, holding that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, being One God and not three gods. He introduces the notion of God as the Absolute subject and the tri-hypostatically existing *I*:

‘The one absolute subject manifests this absoluteness of his own in an act of mutual love of Three; thereby overcoming the limitedness of *I*, proceeding out into another *I* by self-giving and self-exhaustion in sacrificial love, and in it regaining that surrendered *I*, so that the three hypostases in their unity are the realization, the revelation, of the one absolute *I*.’⁵⁸⁵

One should not be misled by Bulgakov's referring to the one absolute *I*. This is not the introduction of a fourth hypostasis in the Trinity, but rather an expression of the Trinitarian antinomy ultimately inconceivable to human reason. It could mean that the unity between the *I* of the Father and the *I* of the Son and the *I* of the Holy Spirit is so profound that it is almost possible to speak of ‘the one absolute *I* as God is a Tri-hypostatic unisubstantial Spirit.

‘Trihypostaticity is not only the love of the Three to one another but also the love of God for himself, as of the trihypostatic subject to his self-disclosure.’⁵⁸⁶

Bulgakov is trying to find a balance between the threeness of the Persons and the oneness in God. The liturgical practice of the Church gives us examples of addressing God in different ways. There are prayers addressed to different Persons of the Trinity, but there are also prayers addressed to the Trinity as One God and their existence supports the idea of the tri-hypostatic *I*.⁵⁸⁷ Apparently, the terms ‘person’ and ‘hypostasis’ are not synonyms in *The Lamb of God*, where Bulgakov writes:

‘The trihypostatic God is a united Person despite trihypostaticity, and rather in virtue of it. The Divine spirit formally does not differ in this oneness from the created spirit.’⁵⁸⁸

‘God as the Absolute Subject, as the Trihypostatical Person unites in one personal consciousness all modes of personal: ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘he’, ‘we’; by contrast, the monohypostatic person (the created spirit) – though posing all these modes outside itself, in other persons, is limited and conditioned by them in its

⁵⁸⁵ Bulgakov (2005) ‘*Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov: Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light*’, 20.

⁵⁸⁶ Bulgakov (2005) ‘*Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov: Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to the Unfading Light*’, 21.

⁵⁸⁷ Bulgakov (1928) ‘Glavy o Troichnosti’ http://www.odinblago.ru/pm_1/2.

⁵⁸⁸ Bulgakov (1933) *Agnets Bozhii, O Bogochelovechestve*, 118; cf. Zander (1948) *Bog i mir*, 255.

existence. The personal principle, or hypostasis which is fulfilled in its personal destination in the tri-hypostatic person, where the personal unity is revealed in the reality of the three hypostatic centres.⁵⁸⁹

Similar thoughts can be found in *The Comforter* where Bulgakov suggests that the nature of personal self-consciousness presupposes multi-hypostaticity. 'I' supposes *you* or *co-I* as its self-affirmation and is realised only in *we*. Ontologically *I* is not *sole*. Only from this perspective can the following passage be read as Orthodox:

'The trinity of the hypostases in the Divine Person results, first of all, from the nature of the personal self-consciousness, which is not fully manifested in the self-enclosed, singular *I*'.⁵⁹⁰

However, when Bulgakov applies 'the Divine Person' not to a particular person of the Holy Trinity but to God as the Tri-hypostatic subject, it does sound confusing. Indeed, it might seem as if all three Persons are now mingled in one, whereas they should be both undivided and unmingled. God is the supreme "Personality" but as a Tri-hypostatic uni-substantial Spirit--this is a development of Idealist psychology but combined with the Fathers. A number of examples can be cited of late nineteenth-century Russian theologians applying to God the term 'person' in the singular. For instance, Archbishop Filaret (Gumilevsky) speaks about the Person of God without referring to any particular Hypostasis of the Holy Trinity: 'The Holy Scripture assigns to the essence of God not only simplicity, but also unique personality (*самобытную личность*)',⁵⁹¹ and elsewhere that God is a 'self-existing initial person'.⁵⁹² N. Malinovsky writes without mentioning a particular hypostasis that God 'perceives Himself as the absolute, unconditionally free person'.⁵⁹³ Nevertheless, if the terms 'hypostasis' and 'person' are synonyms (and in most nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian authors they are)⁵⁹⁴, then it would be more correct to refer to 'the personhood of God' than to 'the person of God', as the theologian M. Zinkovsky notes.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁸⁹ Bulgakov (1933) *Agnets Bozhii, O Bogochelovechestve*, 118.

⁵⁹⁰ Bulgakov (2004) *The Comforter*, 54.

⁵⁹¹ Filaret (1865) *Pravoslavnoe dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie*, 74.

⁵⁹² Filaret (1865) *Pravoslavnoe dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie*, 150.

⁵⁹³ Malinovsky (1908) *Pravoslavnoe dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie*, V. I, 259.

⁵⁹⁴ Makary (1883) *Pravoslavnoe dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie*, V. I, 171-172, 185, 271; Bolotov (1918) *Lektsii po istorii drevnei tserkvi*, V. IV, 294; Brilliantov (1912-1913) *Varia*, Manusript, 40, 43, 46; Popov (2006) *Konspekt lektsiy po patrologii*, 256, 259; Lossky (2000) 'Kafolicheskoe soznanie', 572; Florovsky (1976) 'Revelation, *Philosophy and Theology*, 38.

⁵⁹⁵ Zinkovsky (2014) *Bogoslovie lichnosti v 19-20 vv.*, 18-19.

The conception of the person is inseparably connected to that of nature. Bulgakov observes that the Divine Person relates to its nature in a different way compared to the created spirit. The latter does not know himself and is not manifested for himself and is always in a state of becoming to be himself. Whereas becoming is the synonym of the creaturely life; there is no place for it in the Divine Spirit, which is fully realised, and in every sense it is perfectly transparent for itself.⁵⁹⁶ In the following subsection we turn to the analysis of the idea of personhood in Bulgakov's anthropology.

6.2.2. Anthropology

6.2.2.1. Bulgakov's engagement with Hegel concerning personalism

In his *The Tragedy of Philosophy* Bulgakov accuses Hegel of impersonalism of a Spinozian kind, mentioning however that this claim contradicts Hegel's own words when he opposes Spinozism as impersonalism.⁵⁹⁷ The person in Hegel is the result of the development of the whole, its moment and self-affirmation. The development of logic goes from impersonal being through impersonal essence to the notion, which is defined by Hegel as subject, which is not convincing for Bulgakov.⁵⁹⁸ Bulgakov is a genuine personalist. The idea of personality is the foundation of his thinking. It is the bridge linking human and divine realities through 'image and likeness'. The notion of the person, however, cannot be said to be central for Hegel, claims Bulgakov:

'Hegel emphasises strongly the category of the person, without providing its metaphysical substantiation in ontology. The person in Hegel can be understood as a particular moment or a mode of being of the Absolute being, as a border of the overcoming of this particularity, but not as an unconditional and absolute centre, indissoluble and indispensable to the life of substance.'⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁶ Bulgakov (1933) *Agnets Bozhii*, 119.

⁵⁹⁷ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 486.

⁵⁹⁸ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 486, cf. 357.

⁵⁹⁹ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 488-489.

Bulgakov indisputably means 'I' by mentioning 'an unconditional and absolute centre' of personality. He had dedicated many of pages to the analysis of 'I' in his own book, and his criticisms in this respect seem to be almost inevitable and absolutely coherent. Indeed, there can be found multiple examples where Hegel touches upon the problem of 'I'. He writes in his

Logic:

'When I say "I", I mean my single self to the exclusion of all others; but what I say, viz. "I", is just every "I", which in like manner excludes all others from itself. In an awkward expression which Kant used, he said that I *accompany* all my conceptions – sensations, too, desires, actions, etc. "I" is in essence and act the universal: and such partnership is a form, though an external form, of universality. All other men have it in common with me to be "I"; just as it is common to all my sensations and conceptions to be mine. But "I", in the abstract, as such, is the mere act of self-concentration or self-relation, in which we make abstraction from all conception and feeling, from every state of mind and every peculiarity of nature, talent and experience. To this extent, "I" is the existence of a wholly abstract universality, a principle of abstract freedom. Hence thought, viewed as a subject, is what is expressed by the word "I"...' ⁶⁰⁰

The 'I' is extremely important for Bulgakov as the centre of our personality, as 'my own I', the hypostasis. The main point made by Bulgakov is that 'I' is absolutely inexpressible. The centre of our personality is only pointed to by the meaningful gesture of the personal pronoun 'I' but is by no means clearly articulated. All predicates of the 'I' are always something external, they do not concern the essence of the 'I'. The peculiarity of any particular 'I' follows from its intrinsic hypostatical character. All external predicates together constitute the common human nature, which is possessed by unique hypostases.

In contrast, the above quoted words of Hegel give the impression that all specificity of any individual 'I' consists only in the specific set of 'sensations and conceptions' and other 'peculiarities of nature'. However, the uniqueness of the 'I' cannot be conditioned by its external characteristics which, in the ultimate sense, are common to all. So, when we abstract from all external 'conceptions' we arrive at the pure 'I' in all its inexpressible uniqueness. Perhaps, the only thing that is shared between unique hypostases, being therefore universal in the Hegelian

⁶⁰⁰ *Hegel's logic* (1975) 31; cf. p.38: "'I", therefore, is mere being-for-self, in which everything peculiar or marked is renounced and buried out of sight; it is as it were the ultimate and unanalysable point of consciousness... Every man is a whole world of conceptions that lie buried in the night of the "Ego". It follows that the "Ego" is the universal in which we leave aside all that is particular, and in which at the same time all the particulars have a latent existence. In other words, it is not a mere universality and nothing more, but the universality which includes in it everything'.

sense, is their singularity itself.⁶⁰¹ Bulgakov did not himself expound this criticism, but it naturally follows from his logic.

Hegel seems to recognize that the idea of singularity is crucial for his universalistic understanding of the 'I':

'Nature does not bring its $\nu\omicron\delta\varsigma$ into consciousness: it is man who first makes himself double so as to be a universal for a universal. This first happens when man knows that he is 'I'. By the term 'I' I mean myself, a single and altogether determinate person. And yet I really utter nothing peculiar to myself, for everyone else is an 'I' or 'Ego', and when I call myself 'I', though I indubitably mean the single person myself, I express a thorough universal.'⁶⁰²

However, from the mere presence of those singularities it does not follow that all are similar or equal. Bulgakov points to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), where the latter affirms that the nature of words is universal and only universal, which is a one-sided approach according to Bulgakov. It is a reason why the 'I' is seen by Hegel as a universal notion.⁶⁰³ The system of Hegel can be said to be fundamentally impersonalist, as its logical foundation is impersonal *pure being*. Some authors see here parallels with the Heideggerian critique of Hegel.⁶⁰⁴

One can find here some parallels with the Schellingian critique as well. Schelling reproaches Hegel for 'the lack of true life' in his philosophy. 'It is not the concept which fills itself, but rather the thought, i.e. I, the philosopher, can feel a need to progress from the empty to the full'.⁶⁰⁵ Schelling does not elaborate on this subject. Following from his remarks, however, one might conclude that Hegel deprives philosophy of human personality, the 'I'. Moreover, he notes that Hegel leaves for God nothing more than 'the movement of the concept', denying in this wise the living personality of God.

Some authors, and first and foremost Hegel himself, would not agree with such accusations. In fact, Hegel refutes Fichte's rejection of a personal God. He speaks about

⁶⁰¹ Saprionov (2008) 'Ya'. *Antologia lichnogo mestoimenia*, 74-75.

⁶⁰² *Hegel's logic* (1975), 38.

⁶⁰³ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 358.

⁶⁰⁴ Reznichenko (2003) "'Ya'". *K metafizike subiekta S.N. Bulgakova v rabotakh 20-h godov*, 241-242; Zaviysky (2011) *Shaping modern Russian Orthodox Trinitarian theology: a critical study of Sergii Bulgakov with reference to Vladimir Lossky and Georgii Florovsky*, 205.

⁶⁰⁵ Schelling (1994) *On the history of modern philosophy*, 143.

personality, and of God's personality in particular, in Part 3 of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*:

'If I say 'one' [of God], I [must also] say this of everything else. But as far as personality is concerned, it is the character of the person, the subject, to surrender its isolation and separateness. Ethical life, love, means precisely the giving up of particularity, of particular personality, and its extension to universality... The truth of personality is found precisely in winning it back through this immersion, this being immersed in the other'.⁶⁰⁶

One cannot therefore say that Hegel ignores the theme of personality, but his understanding of it is different from that of Schelling or Bulgakov. They emphasise the mystery and uniqueness of personality, whereas the former underscores its ethical characteristics – freedom and love.⁶⁰⁷

6.2.2.2. Logical – grammar structure of judgement and the philosophical substantiation of personalism in Bulgakov

Bulgakov opposes the idea of antinomism to the principle of logical monism. Logical monism (such as that of Hegel) posits that the human reason has the ability to describe the world fully and sufficiently, giving to any philosophical attempt the spirit and pathos of a system. Bulgakov states that 'reason is not the only exhausting and almighty creator of the world'.⁶⁰⁸ That is why, according to Bulgakov, any kind of philosophical system is inevitably one-sided and insufficient. He notes that the world is unfolded in reason (*в разуме*), but that the source of new knowledge is mysterious. Touching on this mystery, Bulgakov offers to analyse the universal form of judgement.⁶⁰⁹ He concludes from this analysis that the essence of being is not monadic but triadic, or even triune.

⁶⁰⁶ Hegel (1988) *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1827, 427-428.

⁶⁰⁷ 'Personality is what is based upon freedom' (Hegel (1988) *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 1827, 427); cf. Seiling (2008) *From Antinomy to Sophiology*, 165. Seiling points to the significance of personality in the Idealist movement in Russia.

⁶⁰⁸ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 315.

⁶⁰⁹ 'The Thomistic school emphasizes the capital role of judgement in human knowledge. The judgement (affirmation, internal speech, interior word, mental word) appears to be the completion of the cognitive act.' (Steenberghen (1970) *Epistemology*, 143)

A. Reznichenko argues that Bulgakov's ideas have considerable philosophical significance in respect to the analysis of the subject.⁶¹⁰ One cannot disagree with her. Bulgakov begins his analysis by stating the indefinability of the subject, or the 'I'. Nevertheless, he makes an attempt to find a manner of an acceptable definition. The first and most important philosophical name of the subject in Bulgakov's work is *hypostasis*. He gives several further names which are intended to clarify the idea of hypostasis. First, hypostasis, as the 'I', is the premise of logical and *the subject of thought*. He then points to the Kantian notion of *noumenon* as the most appropriate application of this concept as regards hypostasis. He further mentions that hypostasis, being also a *spirit*, is always *transcendent* to its own thought by nature. Bulgakov touches upon a very important philosophical problem of transcendent – immanent. According to him, transcendent is always and inseparably linked with immanent, the subject being revealed in the predicate.

In order to prevent confusion and misinterpretation, Bulgakov distinguishes the hypostatical 'I' from the psychological 'I' and from the Kantian gnoseological 'I'. The hypostatical 'I' is the indissoluble unity of life. It is timeless and has the image of eternity. The notion of the person or hypostasis is much broader than that of consciousness. Consciousness is only one of the phenomena of the person. R. Williams notes that 'the triadic structure Bulgakov sees in speech (subject/substance, verb, complement) embodies a sort of instability in the very idea of the subject – which is perhaps why he insists upon the priority of 'hypostasis' over nature'.⁶¹¹

Indeed, Bulgakov describes the subject as the personal pronoun 'I' which is a 'verbal mystical gesture' and serves as a foundation for every particular thing. Every judgement necessarily relates subject with object. Hypostasis cannot be grasped by thought and thought is not able to perceive the origin of itself apart from living witness of life which is expressed in

⁶¹⁰ Reznichenko (2003) "'Ya". K metafizike subiekta S.N. Bulgakova v rabotakh 20-h godov', 241-242.

⁶¹¹ Williams, 'Commentary', in Arjakovsky (2009) 'Glorification of the Name and Grammar of Wisdom (Sergii Bulgakov and Jean-Marc Ferry)', 40.

judgement. Any judgement has three aspects to it which, although interconnected, are not reducible to each other. These are as follows:

- 1) pure hypostaticity of the I - subject;
- 2) the nature of the I which reveals itself in the I – predicate;
- 3) self-awareness, or self-relatedness to one's own nature, being or copula, self-knowledge and self-affirmation of the I.

The subject and predicate do not indicate logical analysis, deduction or proof but the synthesis beyond logic. Bulgakov writes: 'Substance is one but at the same time triadic... It exists not only 'in itself' as subject but also 'for itself' as predicate and at the same time 'in itself and for itself' in connection as being'.⁶¹² He argues that they are not only the 'dialectical moments' which sublimate each other as was presented in Hegelian philosophy. The three above-mentioned aspects of judgement exist simultaneously and equally and are as it were the 'roots of being', where the law of identity, which is the basic law of any reasoning, is not applicable.⁶¹³ Here Bulgakov defines the philosophical categories of being (*bytie*) and existence (*suschee*). According to Bulgakov's logic, existence is prior to being as existence is the persistently ongoing synthesis between hypostasis and its own nature, its self-disclosure in the act of being.⁶¹⁴ One can see that the philosophical problems of the relation between being and existence, transcendent and immanent, non-conditional beginning and finite existence are touched upon by Bulgakov within the terms of theological discourse.⁶¹⁵

6.2.2.3. Lossky's critique of Bulgakov's anthropology

The idea of hypostasis is absolutely central to Bulgakov's anthropology. One can argue that Bulgakov's teaching on human beings belongs within traditional Christian anthropology.

⁶¹² Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 319.

⁶¹³ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 319; some of the earliest uses of the law of identity are found, e.g., in Plato, *Theaetetus* 185a, and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV.4.

⁶¹⁴ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia Filosofii*, 322.

⁶¹⁵ Reznichenko (2003) "'Ya". K metafizike subiekta S.N.Bulgakova v rabotakh 20-h godov', 240.

According to him, human beings belong to the created reality and possess one mutual nature. That is why it is possible to speak of the human genus. At the same time, humanity is multi-hypostatical, which means that the one and the same human nature is possessed by many human hypostases (or persons). Every human being manifests indissoluble unity between his or her hypostasis and nature, which is the means of a philosophical and theological understanding of actual human existence. The term ‘individual’ is used to describe the actual existence of humans as embodied hypostases. Every human being as an individual possesses the same human nature as every other human.

One of Bulgakov’s best known critics, Vladimir Lossky, condemned his anthropology as non-Orthodox and heretical. The reason for so harsh an attitude was that Lossky misunderstood some fundamental Bulgakovean ideas concerning the human spirit. In particular, he affirmed that Bulgakov opposed the human spirit as a hypostatical and personal principle with an impersonal psycho-somatic nature. According to Lossky’s interpretation, the spirit in Bulgakov is uncreated and of divine origin, whereas psycho-somatic nature as a ‘dwelling place’ for the spirit is created. He gives the following quotation from *The Lamb of God*: ‘The human spirit is created, not in time, but in God’s eternity, “before time”, precisely at the very threshold of time, although this spirit is predestined for temporal being, which it in fact enters at the proper time’.⁶¹⁶ Then Lossky continues by arguing that ‘one must say the opposite, that the human spirit was in time, and is predestined for eternal life. Only on this condition, when any thought about pre-existence of creation is excluded, one can clearly understand the difference between the created and uncreated, creation and Creator, the world and God’.⁶¹⁷

Lossky offered the following concise formula to express the anthropology of Bulgakov:

Man = uncreated spirit (person, hypostasis) + created psycho-somatic nature, i.e.

man=God+animal.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁶ Bulgakov (2008) *The Lamb of God*, 139.

⁶¹⁷ V.Lossky (2006) ‘Spor o Sofii’, 49.

⁶¹⁸ V.Lossky (2006) ‘Spor o Sofii’, 50.

The authority of Lossky in Russian Orthodox circles is extremely high and his critique of Bulgakov is sometimes accepted uncritically. This uncritical approach can lead to such nonsense as can be found, for instance, in the Candidate thesis by E. Grishaeva where she writes that, according to Bulgakov ‘the created spirit is not created’.⁶¹⁹ In fact, there are places in Bulgakov’s works which can contribute to Lossky’s misunderstanding. For example, in *The Bride of the Lamb* Bulgakov says how human hypostasis was created after God’s image:

‘In the creation of persons, of hypostatic spirits, human and angelic, God repeats Himself, as it were, creates co-I’s for Himself in his hypostatic image, breathing into them the breath of His own divine life. He creates co-gods for Himself, ‘gods by grace’. This creation is transcendent and unfathomable for the human understanding inasmuch as it takes place beyond our being, and our very being is conditioned by God’s creative act.’⁶²⁰

The human hypostasis, however, while inconceivable to itself, is also conscious of its own eternity:

‘Empirically, *I*’s being is connected with temporality, and the sun of *I* appears both to rise from and to set in nonbeing beyond the horizon, yet *I*’s own self-consciousness, its quality of *I* as such, does not know anything about this appearance and disappearance. *I* is conscious of itself as supratemporally existing, as rising in this fixed *I*-ness as if in eternity and not containing any destiny of time.’⁶²¹

Even stronger expressions are found in *The Tragedy of Philosophy*:

‘There is no birth and no death, no beginning and no end for hypostasis. She is both timeless and super-temporal and eternity belongs to her. She is eternal in the same sense as God is eternal, who breathed His Own Spirit into man at the moment of creation’.⁶²²

Judging only from these words, without their context, one might conclude that Bulgakov speaks here about the uncreated human spirit. However, just a few lines below he writes:

‘Man is the son of God and the created god, and the image of eternity is his essential and inalienable property.’⁶²³

So, this all is about the image of God, the image of eternity. Elsewhere in the same work Bulgakov speaks about the human spirit or hypostasis:

‘The nature of the created *I* can be understood only through the nature of the Divine *I*, the human hypostasis is only the image of the Divine Hypostasis’.⁶²⁴ And again: the human spirit is ‘created and relative’.⁶²⁵

⁶¹⁹ Grishaeva (2011) *Uchenie o lichnosti v filosofii Losskogo*, 62.

⁶²⁰ Bulgakov (2002) *The Bride of the Lamb*, 87.

⁶²¹ Bulgakov (2002) *The Bride of the Lamb*, 86.

⁶²² Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 321.

⁶²³ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 321.

⁶²⁴ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 421.

⁶²⁵ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 418.

When Bulgakov brings together seemingly incompatible opposites offering controversial formulations, his purpose is to demonstrate intrinsic antinomies in the human hypostasis. Zander nicely summarized the ideas of Bulgakov concerning the human hypostasis, pointing out its three main features: antinomism, super-temporal –temporal character and multi-unity.⁶²⁶

Bulgakov argues in *The Lamb of God* that the very idea of spirit is personal – one cannot imagine an impersonal spirit. The spirit is personal in the sense that it has its personal self-consciousness or the *I*. The *I* is not just a pure abstraction - it is full of life. The personal spirit is alive and the living *I*, which realises itself in its nature. The idea of nature in Bulgakov has been considered in more detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis, but it is, in fact, impossible to isolate these definitions (the *I* or hypostasis and its nature) one from another. The *I*, its nature and personal self-consciousness together constitute one indissoluble unity at the foundation of the life of a personal spirit. Bulgakov calls this unity an ‘utmost intuition’ and an ‘initial ontological axiom’, which is contained in the Revelation and is witnessed by the Church in its doctrine that God has hypostases and nature being the personal and living Spirit. This can be said to be the definition of any living spirit – Divine, human, or angelic.⁶²⁷

Bulgakov does not give a definition of human personhood. In this respect his understanding corresponds with that of Lossky, who argues that the ‘human personhood cannot be expressed in notions’ and ‘eludes all rational definitions’.⁶²⁸ However, Bulgakov speaks of personal self-consciousness as the base of the human spirit:

‘Every spirit has its own *personal* self-consciousness; then, the knowledge of its own nature or its self-revelation; and finally, life in this nature, the living-out of this knowledge as its own reality and life. In the self-revelation of the spirit there is, therefore, a certain ideal element, the ‘word’ and a real element, the connection between this subject (person) and predicate (the definition of its nature), its own being and life, its *is*. This scheme of self-revelation corresponds to the life of every creaturely spirit in its limitedness... This limitedness, first of all, is expressed in the fact that nature is *given* to the spirit being the object in the subject.’⁶²⁹

The unity of human nature is manifested and can be experienced in love:

⁶²⁶ Zander (1948) *Bog i mir*, 255.

⁶²⁷ Bulgakov (1933) *Agnets Bozhii*, 112.

⁶²⁸ V. Lossky (1991) *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 53.

⁶²⁹ Bulgakov (1936) *Utshitel*, 75-76; (*The Comforter* (2004), 62)

‘The person is a noetic sun, which gives off rays of love and its warmth. It needs not only to give itself away but also to find itself, to love and be loved, “to love one’s neighbour as one’s very self”, to love mutually’.⁶³⁰

The principle of personhood for Bulgakov is therefore the principle of relatedness, first of all, the relationship of love between persons – between human persons, between humans and God and between humans, God and angels: ‘In its integral substance the world is humanityness [ЧЕЛОВЕЧНОСТЬ] and mankind is the living centre-point of the world, the lord of the world, its “god” (in his predestination). Sophia, as hypostaticity, is pre-eternal humanity [ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСТВО]’⁶³¹

And second, but no less important, is the idea that the human hypostasis is the central principle of the whole created world: ‘In the final reckoning, all creation has a human hypostasis, but it itself possesses only hypostaticity, a capacity and a striving to hypostasize itself in a multiunity of hypostases. All creation is pierced by Sophianic rays and has on itself the seal of the Trihypostatic God.’⁶³²

The idea of the centrality of humanity was not welcomed by Lossky, who argued that man was placed at the head of the earth, not of the whole creation. However, one might say in defence of Bulgakov, there is a similar thought in St Maximus the Confessor, whose theology is one of the most significant of Bulgakov’s sources.⁶³³

Concluding this section and before turning to the angels, I would like to make a couple of remarks concerning Bulgakov’s understanding and usage of the terms ‘hypostasis’ and ‘person’ in relation to God and human beings. The idea of hypostasis or hypostaticity of Sophia was discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Firstly, the Trinitarian formulations are at the foundation of Bulgakov’s personalistic approach. Bulgakov holds quite a traditional orthodox doctrine concerning the Trinity as the threehypostatic deity, three Hypostases in one Divine nature. The Trinitarian dogma is – *par*

⁶³⁰ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 2.

⁶³¹ Bulgakov (2005) *Hypostasis and hypostaticity*, 31.

⁶³² Bulgakov (2005) *Hypostasis and hypostaticity*, 38-39.

⁶³³ See Chapter 5.1.

excellence – inconceivable and antinomical. The Divine Hypostases are revealed as the tri-hypostatically existing Absolute subject. It is not absolutely clear whether the terms hypostasis and person are used as synonyms in this context, as Bulgakov tends to speak of three Hypostases and one Absolute Divine tri-hypostatic Person in God.

Second, as was discussed in Chapter 2, Bulgakov's controversial views on the personhood of Sophia were evolving from one work to the next in the course of his lifetime. The personhood of Sophia as the mediating reality is rather problematic and, after unsuccessful attempts to ascribe hypostasis to Sophia, Bulgakov introduces a new term – hypostaticity – which apparently did not resolve all the difficulties connected with the use of the concept of Sophia in dogmatic theology.

Finally, the created spirit, and in particular the human hypostasis, is the image of the Divine Tri-hypostatic Person. Bulgakov points to the human *I* as the essence of personal existence. He demonstrates some antinomies intrinsic to the human *I* that can be resolved only in God through the relation of free love between the created persons.

6.3. The concept of personhood in Bulgakov's angelology

We have examined Bulgakov's understanding of the idea of personhood and its function within his Trinitarian theology, sophiology and anthropology. We shall now turn to the questions of angelology and examine the ontological foundation and the properties of the angelic hypostasis.

It has been mentioned that one of Bulgakov's essential thoughts is the parallel he draws between the relationship of heaven and earth in the created universe, on the one hand and, on the other hand, the Platonic Ideas and the sensible realities whose prototypes they are. Although he likens angels to Platonic ideas, this does not mean that angels do not possess personhood in its fullest sense:

‘The angelic world is not merely the sum total of ideal prototypes; rather, it consists of hypostatic spirits which have personal activity and are capable of manifesting it in the world, without merging with it or ever being separated from it.’⁶³⁴

The idea of personhood can be seen as a principle that really unites the angelic and human worlds justifying the terms ‘co-humanity of angels’ and ‘co-angelicity of humans’.⁶³⁵

6.3.1. *Ontological basis – the image of God*

The idea of the creation of angels after the image of God was examined earlier in Chapter 5. It has been mentioned that Bulgakov holds that humans and angels were brought into existence by God out of nothing.⁶³⁶ He, however, points out the difference in their creation after the image of God. God’s image resides in the entirety of human composition: in their bodies, souls, and spirits or hypostases, whereas ‘the image of God in angels about which the holy fathers bear witness is realised for them in hypostatic existence, personal self-consciousness. It unites of course with the possibility of independent life, characteristic of spiritual beings. But the content of this life is determined not by the proper nature of the angelic world but directly and immediately by the nature of Divinity’.⁶³⁷

Bulgakov explains that by the thoroughly hypostatic angelic world he means a world where ‘there is nothing which would not have personal being’. It is opposed to our pre-human, i.e., inorganic and organic world, which is impersonal and ‘is hypostatized only in and through the human, and hypostatic being is only proper to the human’.⁶³⁸

Hypostasis is more than a term referring to the individual as opposed to the general. Bulgakov claims that in the material world this term can be applied only to humans and it is hypostasis that links the two worlds – human and angelic.

⁶³⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 151-152.

⁶³⁵ ‘The appearances of angels in human form must be explained on the basis of the angels’ general co-humanity, while fully dismissing the natural corporeality of this appearance in any sense whatsoever’ (Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 153).

⁶³⁶ Bulgakov (1993) *Tragedia Filosofii*, 479.

⁶³⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 75.

⁶³⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 75.

‘Hypostasis is proper to angels and it is in a literal sense hypostasis or substantia, the support or receiver of divine life which is of course for them supernatural, graced. Their nature [priroda] is to live by grace, like a mirror, like second lights’.⁶³⁹

One of Lossky’s accusations against Bulgakov was that he confused the terms ‘hypostasis’ and ‘nature’ and lost a clear sense of the Cappadocian Trinitarian terminology.⁶⁴⁰ In fact, the Cappadocians shifted the reading of the term 'hypostasis' from *substantia* to *persona*, and Bulgakov’s suggestion that it should again be read as *substantia* seems like a backward move.

Turning now to Bulgakov’s theology of the person, certain essential features characteristic of the person might be emphasised. These features, however, may vary from author to author writing on personhood.⁶⁴¹ It can be argued that in Bulgakov the same properties are found in a human person as in an angelic hypostasis.

6.3.2. *The properties of the person*

6.3.2.1. Love

The message of God’s love is the essence of the Gospel and the commandment of love is the essence of Christian teaching. Love is the essential property of the person. Both angels and humans were created by God out of love and for love. Bulgakov begins his *Jacob’s Ladder* with a reflection concerning love. He points out two main types or, as he calls them, the ‘images of love’.

⁶³⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 74.

⁶⁴⁰ V.Lossky (2006) ‘Spor o Sofii’, 37, 65-66, 74, 88.

⁶⁴¹ Cf. Williams (2018) *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons*; Ware (1996) “‘In the Image and Likeness’: The Uniqueness of the Human Person’, 1-13; N.V. Lossky (2004) ‘The idea of personhood in V.N. Lossky, 326-327; Horuzhy , ‘Concept, semantica i problematica lichnosti u o.Georgia Florovskogo’ (<http://synergia-isa.ru/?p=5299>, accessed 15.05.2018); Staniloae (1982) *Prayer and holiness: the icon of man renewed in God*; Daniel P. Payne. *The “Relational Ontology” of Christos Yannaras: The Hesychast Influence on the Understanding of the Person in the Thought of Christos Yannaras* (https://www.academia.edu/1479462/The_Relational_Ontology_of_Christos_Yannaras_The_Hesychastic_Influence_on_the_Understanding_of_the_Person_in_the_Thought_of_Christos_Yannaras accessed 19.05.2018)

First, it is *universal love* which can also be called ‘natural’. The essence of this love lies in one human nature shared by all humans and wider – in one general foundation of all created reality. Universal or natural love consists in the ability to feel with another creature, to suffer with another to such a degree as to almost become the other. The sense of humanity as a whole is essential for natural love. The sufferings of other human beings are then perceived as one’s own suffering. To share the common lot with others becomes a moral imperative and inner necessity.⁶⁴²

However, there is a danger of depersonalization and self-destruction in an excessive emphasis on universal love which must be balanced with *personal love*.

‘Humans cannot and must not be depersonalized in their love; the loss of the soul is necessary in order to save it, and humans must love their neighbor as their very self – perhaps there is a certain form of legitimate self-love established by God. This is love for oneself and not for one’s own, love for the hypostatic person’.⁶⁴³

According to Bulgakov, personal love is profoundly relational and ‘reciprocal’ as one’s hypostatic person can only be revealed through its contact with *another* person.⁶⁴⁴

‘The need for personal love – to love and be loved, is placed in the human being as its ontological property. The human cannot know itself, see itself, and consequently love itself in its positive nature itself, without being reflected in another, and this quest for itself of the other is the quest for the friend’ (in Russian the word ‘friend’ is друг = ‘other’).⁶⁴⁵

Bulgakov points to various forms of personal love: paternal, maternal, spousal, filial, daughterly, brotherly, sisterly, familial, and friendship. All are conditioned by human spiritual-corporeal nature. Even the love of God is embodied, through the Mysteries and the veneration of icons.

The bond of love between the angelic and human worlds can be seen in the service of angels as guardians and keepers of the world. Bulgakov insists that the Bible provides rich material, confirming that angels were created by God not to be independent and separate from the human world but to serve human beings. Angels and humans need each other to fulfil the

⁶⁴² Cf. Weil (1959) *Waiting on God*, 13.

⁶⁴³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 2. (Italics in original)

⁶⁴⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 3.

⁶⁴⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 4.

will of God about them. Although angels serve humans, they ‘are closer to God than are human beings and all other creatures, with the exception of the Mother of God, who is the closest of all to God. Angels are “second lights” that surround and radiate out from the first light, that of God. They are powers of God, rays of His glory that receive hypostatic being... The creatureliness of the angels consists in the fact that their hypostatic countenances are summoned by God to being from nonbeing, [they] are created. But these hypostases are created as having the divine energies as their nature.’⁶⁴⁶

Two main directions of the angelic service can be pointed out: 1) towards God and 2) towards men and the world.

The angelic service towards God finds its most known description in the text of *the Sanctus*⁶⁴⁷:

‘... We thank Thee also for this Liturgy which Thou hast been pleased to accept from our hands, though there stand about Thee thousands of archangels and tens of thousands of angels, the cherubim and the seraphim, six-winged, many-eyed, soaring aloft upon their wings singing, crying, shouting the triumphal hymn, and saying:

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of thy glory; Hosanna in the highest: Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.’⁶⁴⁸

What is described in this text received the name of ‘the heavenly liturgy’ or ‘the liturgy of the angels’.

The second aspect of the angelic service can be identified with the words in the epistle to the Hebrews:

‘Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?’ (Hebr. 1:14)

The introductory chapters of *Jacob’s Ladder* are dedicated to the guardian angel. Bulgakov writes so gracefully that sometimes his theological prose becomes real poetry:

‘The other of each human, this friend, unique and personal, proper to each human being, is the guardian angel, a being not from here, not of the human world.

When the noise of life subsides and its dissonant voices fall silent,
When the soul is washed in quiet and filled with silence...’⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *The Friend of the Bridegroom*, 164.

⁶⁴⁷ Cf. Isaiah 6:3, Apoc. 4:8. Taft (1991,1992) ‘The interpolation of the Sanctus into the anaphora: when and where? A review of the dossier’.

⁶⁴⁸ From the Offertory Prayer of *The Liturgy of John Chrysostom*.

⁶⁴⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, 11. See this quotation in Chapter 3.3.3.

This excerpt is the evidence of Bulgakov's deep personal experience, not just intellectual but also mystical-visionary, from which he writes of angels.⁶⁵⁰

Bulgakov's concept of love presents humans as finding their authenticity, freedom and fullness of being in love with their guardian angels, which can be seen as their 'concrete transcendental *alter ego*.'⁶⁵¹

A human being is not a monad, a sole creature thrown into the world, longing for God between hope and despair, but a dyad, or syzygy. The heavenly friend, the guardian angel is the highest dignity and fulfilment of man. When we meet our guardian angels we come face to face with our true selves.

If angels are 'co-humans' then humans are 'co-angels', and therefore when we speak about a human being we should not mean just a creature limited by body and transformed by society, but a self-sufficient dyad, a concrete living link between heaven and earth.⁶⁵²

6.3.2.2. Creativity

Creativity is another characteristic of the person which Bulgakov attributes to God, angels and humans alike. He notes in *Jacob's Ladder* that, whereas God creates out of nothing, neither man nor angel can do the same. Nevertheless, creativity as personal initiative and participation in history can be said to be their common feature.

'The other of each human being' – the guardian angel – has the highest and the most difficult task: to lead, to educate and to bring to salvation the human soul. It is not about dictatorship and instructions. Angels perform this task not automatically or mechanically but with genuine creativity. They achieve their purpose through the awakening of a good initiative in the soul and rekindling it with the Divine fire.

⁶⁵⁰ Bulgakov (1996) 'Sophiologia smerti', 291-293. See also Chapter 8 of this thesis.

⁶⁵¹ Upravitelev (2001) *Konstruirovanie sub'ektnosti v antropologii S.N. Bulgakova*, 15.

⁶⁵² Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 141-143.

‘It is necessary to turn away completely from an understanding of angels as passive executors who display no creative work of their own. Such a reduction of the bodiless spirits to the role of simple instruments is incompatible with their dignity and their nature equally’.⁶⁵³

Whereas Bulgakov contrasts the Divine and creaturely creative activity, he makes no mention of distinctions found, for example, in Gregory Palamas, between angels and humans in respect of their creativity.⁶⁵⁴ St Gregory Palamas argues that humans alone were given the faculty to create something new, which did not exist before, ‘bringing forth from nothing, though not from absolute non-being’.⁶⁵⁵

6.3.2.3. Freedom

‘Creative work does not exist without *freedom*,’ writes Bulgakov.⁶⁵⁶

Indeed, freedom is another fundamental characteristic of personhood. The Russian thinker gives the following definition of freedom in *Jacob’s Ladder*:

‘Freedom is the realizable but not yet realized possibility to become oneself.’⁶⁵⁷

Bulgakov defines two aspects of this freedom. The first he calls ontological or pre-temporal. This is freedom in creation. It means that God created us not without our consent. This is reflected in the self-affirmation of the hypostatical person. We do not remember the moment of our creation, but ‘ontological memory’ is kept in our I. The I is that point where we affirm our existence and consent to our creation. It is God who brought us into existence, but it is ourselves who approve it. We accept our existence every time we pronounce ‘I’. This is freedom which has already been realised and fulfilled in the act of creation. God’s creative act is balanced by creaturely co-creation.

⁶⁵³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, 62.

⁶⁵⁴ ‘Creaturely creative activity is not creation out of nothing; the very idea of such an absolute creation is godless and anti-Sophianic... Creaturely creative activity has its own theme which becomes its own only inasmuch as it is appropriated, and not rejected for the sake of the non-existent, in the emptiness of rebellious nothingness’ (Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, 107)

⁶⁵⁵ Gregory Palamas, *The one hundred and fifty chapters*, 158-159 (Cap. 63, col. 1165 C.)

⁶⁵⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, 64. (Italics in original)

⁶⁵⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder: On Angels*, 108.

The second aspect of freedom is in time and is manifested as becoming. Potentiality becomes reality. It is what we usually mean by freedom as an opportunity to choose an option.

However, this is a sign of spiritual immaturity as there is a possibility of bad choice.⁶⁵⁸ The purpose and limit of genuine spiritual development is to overcome this potentiality and to set one's foot on the other side of freedom and necessity.

'To be sure, angels too possess the freedom of self-determination, and the creatureliness (*tvarnost*) of their nature contains the possibility of their fall. Satan with his armies underwent just such a fall'.⁶⁵⁹

6.3.2.4. Individuality and uniqueness

The uniqueness of human hypostases is conditioned by their creation after the image of God. Each hypostasis is unique, unrepeatable and irreplaceable. However, it is absolutely impossible to define or grasp the uniqueness of a human person. This does not consist in the features of character or appearance. It is not a set of natural features or characteristics. The uniqueness of humans does not concern their common human nature in any way, but is rooted in the hypostatic person, the I. Bulgakov argues that, strictly speaking, it is improper to call humans 'individuals', as each human person has everything potentially and all humans together possess one-and-the-same human nature which cannot be divided among individual hypostases. Humans constitute therefore a multi-hypostatical unity which is ultimately the manifestation of one in many and many in one. In contrast, angels can be said to be individuals not only as spirits possessing unique hypostases, but also according to their nature, which is believed to be different from angel to angel:

'Angels could not arise through simple reproduction, i.e. self-repetition, as humans did, but are created simultaneously, each by a special creative act, according to the doctrine of the Church. Therefore, the ontological individuality of being is inherent in them; each of them is not only a hypostatic form of being, but also its natural mode'.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁸ Here Bulgakov echoes Maximus' concept of gnostic will. See *Disputatio con Pyrrho*, PG 91, 312B-C. For secondary literature, see McFarland (2005) 'Naturally and by Grace: Maximus the Confessor on the Operation of the Will', 410-33; Gauthier (1954) 'Saint Maxime le Confesseur et la psychologie de l'acte humaine', 51-100.

⁶⁵⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *The Friend of the Bridegroom*, 157.

⁶⁶⁰ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 76.

6.3.2.5. Dynamism

Taking our discussion of theological antinomy further, one cannot seek to define the totality of divine truths fully in terms of Aristotelian logic. Many truths can be pointed out only apophatically and through theological antinomies or opposing and seemingly contradictory affirmations. This also concerns the understanding of dynamism or the progress and spiritual development of angels.

On the one hand, Bulgakov argues that angels do not have their own nature. They are created hypostases possessing the divine nature. Which means that from the very moment of their creation they were fully perfect and divinised.⁶⁶¹ On the other hand, the possibility of their growth is conditioned by their limitedness as created beings. This initial limitedness sets the perspective of unlimited development and growing in their personal qualities, knowledge and love.

‘No matter how high on the ladder of divine wisdom and mutual cognition the holy angels are found, because they remain creaturely-limited entities, they are limited in their knowledge, which therefore can be continually enriched and broadened. This refers both to their general penetration in the life of the Holy Trinity and comprehension of the Wisdom of God, as well as to events in the life of the world, in which the creative will of God is revealed, in the plan of salvation of the human race (e.g., the angels rejoice over one repentant sinner)’.⁶⁶²

Bulgakov’s emphasis on the role of knowledge and graced illumination of one another in the life of angels is very Dionysian.

‘With respect to God the life of angels is an unceasing divine cognition through divine life, an ascent having no limit. With respect to themselves the life of angels is the mutuality of graced illumination and knowledge of one another in the manner of hierarchical correlation, where, however, the lowest ranks keep their independent meaning for the highest, for all angels are individually provided with qualities and enter into the fullness of the angelic world’.⁶⁶³

With regard to the question of spatio-temporality in relation to the angelic nature, Bulgakov affirms that angels along with humans are subject to time⁶⁶⁴:

‘One can establish development and growth in the life of angels, the presence of a real filling of time; this is generally characteristic of creaturely existence which is limited in every moment of time. But

⁶⁶¹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 101

⁶⁶² Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 117.

⁶⁶³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 116.

⁶⁶⁴ See more on time in Chapter 5.

together with this there is present the potential for becoming unlimited in the fullness of time. The thresholds of this development and its ages lie beyond human discerning, except those to which the doctrine of the Church directly points (in particular the time of the angels' testing).⁶⁶⁵

Bulgakov stresses that this dynamism in the life of angels is limitless and points to the concept of theosis in the eschatological perspective.⁶⁶⁶

Summing up, the idea of personhood links Bulgakov's angelology and anthropology. One can even argue that Bulgakov's angelology, and particularly his teaching about the guardian angels, is the way of personalising anthropology and constructing a compound metaphysical subject – the I and its other. An opposition between the uncreated and created is sublated in this angelology by assuming that angels are created hypostases, while possessing a nature identical with the divine nature.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this chapter it is shown that Dionysius understands angels as being created after the image of God. This is the essential characteristic of the angelic world, which defines its existence as a whole, as well that of individual angels. Each individual angel is a unique reasonable creature, one which loves God, other angels, and human beings. It is free, creative, perfect in divine illumination and capable of further perfection. The idea of the eternal perfecting of individual angels and their everlasting growth in likeness of the image of God is manifested in the idea of theosis. This key idea as well as the terms, which express it, were borrowed by Dionysius from the earlier authors, both Christian and Neo-Platonic.

Second, we have analysed the features of the individual angels in Bulgakov's works. The difference between Bulgakov and Dionysius is that, whereas Dionysius speaks of these features as specific characteristic aspects of the angelic life without providing further conceptualization, Bulgakov refers to the concept of the person in this respect. One can conclude that the concept of

⁶⁶⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder: On Angels*, 118. See our discussion of the time of angels in Chapter 4.

⁶⁶⁶ See Chapter 5 for the detailed analysis of theosis in Bulgakov.

personhood is at least implicitly present in Dionysius' treatises and, far from standing at variance with his notion of hierarchy, is integral to it. Louth is thus convincing when he asserts the Dionysian hierarchy to be profoundly communal and intrinsically connected to the idea of personhood, arguing that 'the hierarchical arrangements themselves are emphatically not impersonal, but are the arrangement of a community, or group of communities, whose members are seeking to draw near to God and draw others near to God'.⁶⁶⁷

Finally, therefore, Dionysius' hierarchies can be seen as manifesting the principle of personhood through and through. This overarching conclusion becomes unavoidable when we turn to Dionysius' vision of the final goal of the hierarchies. This is the salvation of all beings participating in the sacred life of the hierarchical cosmos understood as *theosis*, becoming God-like by grace to the greatest degree possible for created beings: '...the goal of a hierarchy... is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him.'⁶⁶⁸ This puts the life of the created reasonable creatures in an eschatological perspective. The idea of *theosis* can only be properly interpreted through the concept of personhood.

Part 2: Conclusion

In the second part of the thesis we dealt with the theological metalanguages of the first level in Dionysius and Bulgakov. Our main goal was to identify the terms employed by our authors in their discussion on angels which, though, cannot be described as 'Biblical'. These include theological and philosophical terms, appropriated by our authors from the previous generations of theologians. As has already been mentioned, the metalanguage of the first level includes only established theological and philosophical terms, used without any considerable change in their meaning.

⁶⁶⁷ Louth (1989) *Denys the Areopagite*, 41.

⁶⁶⁸ CH, 3, 2, PG 3, 165A.

In particular, in the course of our analysis in Chapters 4 and 6 we looked at the following terms in the CD: φύσις, νοῦς, οὐσία, ἔσοπτρον, ὑπόστασις, θέωσις. We have not identified any peculiarity in Dionysius' use of the terms, which indicates that all belong to the metalanguage of the first level. Further, in Chapters 5 and 6, we analysed the ontological terms 'nature', 'essence', 'hypostasis', 'person', which Bulgakov uses to describe the nature and life of angels. We showed, that one can see certain parallels between Bulgakov's use of the terms 'nature' and 'essence' and the terms φύσις and οὐσία in Dionysius. As for 'person' and 'hypostasis', it is evident from our analysis that, although Bulgakov's usage of these does not always correspond to the established meaning in Patristic thought, it is possible to point out some examples in contemporary Russian theology, which demonstrate, that these terms do not belong to Bulgakov's idiosyncratic language. However, one must remember that, even if Bulgakov employs the terms, which belong to the metalanguage of the first level, without considerable change in their meaning, he frequently uses them within the logic of antinomies; this often puzzles researchers and prevents them from an adequate assessment of Bulgakov's thought.

The idea of antinomies is crucial for Bulgakov's conceptual languages, both metalanguages of the first and second levels. Nonetheless, there is an area in his theology, where antinomies are not applicable. This is the area of religious experience, where he uses another theological language – the language of anthropology or the language of the Bible – descriptive language of the prophetic visions. Part 3 of this thesis is dedicated to an analysis of this fundamental theological language in the angelologies of Dionysius (Chapter 7) and Bulgakov (Chapter 8).

Part III. Angelology and anthropology – who are angels in relation to humans?

In Part 3 we turn to the sources of the different concepts about angels discussed in the previous chapters of the thesis. In other words, we are dealing with those terms which reflect the most immediate human experience of angels. I call this theological language ‘the language of anthropology’, where the angelic beings are spoken of as if human. This approach makes it clear that our understanding of angels is very much dependent on our understanding of humans.

One might question the central position of anthropology in this respect. In response to this, it must be emphasised that belief in the Incarnation is a crucial reason for a theological reading of anthropology. Furthermore, in theologising on man, we obtain knowledge of God. Paul pointed to this general principle of theology and philosophy: ‘Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.’ (Rom 1: 20). Another aspect of no less importance is that anthropology became central to 20th century philosophy.⁶⁶⁹ We can say the same about the theological thought of that period. This was so obvious that Karl Rahner wrote of the ‘anthropological turning-point’ in theology.⁶⁷⁰ Although Rahner’s ideas were controversial in Catholic theology at the time, it is now generally agreed that the existence of such an ‘anthropological turning-point’ in modern theology is unarguable.⁶⁷¹ Furthermore, a strong focus on anthropology by many 20th century Orthodox

⁶⁶⁹ E.g. the appearance of philosophical anthropology in the 19th -20th cent. (Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Martin Buber and many others).

⁶⁷⁰ Rahner (1967) ‘Theologie und Anthropologie’.

⁶⁷¹ Cf. Scheffczyk (1969) ‘Die Frage nach der Gottebenbildlichkeit in der modernen Theologie’; Eicher (1970) *Die anthropologische Wende. Karl Rahners philosophischer Weg vom Wesen des Menschen zur personalen Existenz*; And from a Protestant perspective see: Pannenberg (1983) *Anthropologie in theologischer Perspektive*; Kunzler (2001) *The Church's Liturgy*, 2-6.

theologians allows us to speak about a kind of ‘anthropological turning-point’ in modern Orthodox theology.⁶⁷²

God-manhood (theandria) is not only the main principle of the divine economy but is also, according to P. Evdokimov, the basic principle of theology – keeping its equilibrium and allowing theology to remain theology relevant to questions of the world and human being.⁶⁷³ M. Kunzler develops his idea:

‘Precisely from the theandric viewpoint one cannot speak enough about man, but not about man as he happens to be now – and here the “anthropological turning-point” can in fact stand as a symbol for “unbelief” -, nor yet about man at the cost of speaking about God, but as theological discourse about man in the relationship with God which always precedes his existence, with God who created him as a theandric being, who comes to terms with himself in deification’.⁶⁷⁴

Chapter 7. Men and Angels in Dionysius

The language of ontology is a philosophical language. It appeals to both mind and reason. It is a descriptive language used when one needs to convey certain ideas as precisely as possible, operating with abstract philosophical terms, such as being, hypostasis, and nature.

The language of anthropology is a poetical language. It speaks to our feelings and emotions and operates with poetic metaphors and symbols. In this chapter, I will look at some such metaphors and images which Dionysius employs to express his understanding of the angelic world and its interrelation with God and our human world. First, I will analyse the Dionysian approach to anthropomorphisms in the description of angels in the light of his understanding of symbols and images (εἰκόων). I will then proceed by assessing different approaches to the relationship between the angelic world and human beings, paying particular

⁶⁷² Bulgakov (1917) *Svet Nevecherny*; Kiprian (Kern) (1950) *Antropologia sv. Grigoria Palamy*; Lossky (1974) *In the Image and Likeness of God*; Pozov (2008) *Osnovy drevne-tserkovnoy antropologii*; Giannaras (2007) *Person and Eros*; Zizioulas (1985) *Being as communion: studies in personhood and the church*; Nesmelov (1906) *Nauka o cheloveke*.

⁶⁷³ Evdokimov (1959) *L'Orthodoxie*, 13.

⁶⁷⁴ Kunzler (2001) *The Church's Liturgy*, 5.

attention to the concept of love (ἔρωϑ) in Dionysius. In the final section I will deal with the metaphor of light (φῶϑ) in CD in the context of the idea of the guardian angels.

7.1. Anthropomorphisms in angelology

In Chapter 1.1. of this thesis we analysed the understanding of the term σύμβολον by Dionysius. He dedicated Chapter 2 in the CH to an analysis of this term. The word σύμβολον has several different meanings, most of which are connected to relations between two counterparts and with proof of identity in various situations – political, legal, commercial, financial etc. The term was widely used by the Fathers, too, as is shown in Lampe’s *Patristic Greek Lexicon*.⁶⁷⁵ According to its theological interpretation, the symbol represents a supersensible reality other than itself. ‘It is precisely the very nature of the symbol that it reveals and communicates the “other” as precisely the “other”, the visibility of the invisible as invisible, the knowledge of that which cannot be known otherwise, for knowledge here depends on participation – the living encounter with and entrance into that “epiphany” of reality which the symbol is’.⁶⁷⁶

Further, in the same chapter the Areopagite employs another word with a close meaning to symbol, namely εἰκών. Εἰκών or image can apparently demonstrate a greater degree of similarity with its archetype than a dissimilar symbol. However, Dionysius claims that dissimilar symbols represent a supersensible reality even better than images, which have some sort of resemblance to their archetype, because the former speak of it more apophatically. To be more precise, the meaning of εἰκών in Dionysius is wider than that of σύμβολον. The latter can be said to be a particular case of the former. Whereas σύμβολον can only be dissimilar (ἀνομοίωv), εἰκών can be dissimilar but can also be like-to-like (ὁμοίωv). It is important to look at the kind of

⁶⁷⁵ *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (1961).

⁶⁷⁶ Schmemmann (1973) ‘Sacrament and Symbol’, 141.

imagery Dionysius considers to be completely dissimilar and the kind that, according to his understanding, contains some degree of similarity with its archetype.

In the beginning of Chapter 2 CH, Dionysius refers to all sorts of dissimilar symbols found in the Scripture in relation to angels:

‘We cannot, as mad people do, profanely visualize these heavenly and godlike intelligences as actually having numerous feet and faces. They are not shaped to resemble the brutishness of oxen or to display the wildness of lions. They do not have the curved beak of the eagle or the wings and feathers of birds. We must not have pictures of flaming wheels whirling in the skies, of material thrones made ready to provide a reception for the Deity, of multicolored horses, or of spear-carrying lieutenants, or any of those shapes handed on to us amid all the variety of the revealing symbols of scripture.’⁶⁷⁷

What is mentioned here either relates to the world of animals or depicts an inanimate object. One can argue that the lieutenants are mentioned here only because they are ‘spear-carrying’; in other words, they possess a material object. A few lines later in the same chapter Dionysius again lists what he calls ‘completely dissimilar’ symbols:

‘One would likely then imagine that the heavens beyond really are filled with bands of lions and horses, that the divine praises are, in effect, great moos, that flocks of birds take wing there or that there are other kinds of creatures all about or even more dishonorable material things, whatever the completely dissimilar similarities of the revealing scriptures depict as tending toward the absurd, counterfeit, and emotional.’⁶⁷⁸

One can notice that human appearances are not mentioned in this list of dissimilar symbols. Apparently, the dissimilarity of these images is conditioned by their zoomorphism or utter materiality. Indeed, Dionysius puts anthropomorphisms in the group of the ‘alike images’ (ὁμοίων εἰκόνων). This must mean that he considered men and angels to be similar beings. In other words, according to Dionysius, not only are they close to each other in the chain of the hierarchy, there is some fundamental similarity between them, one which is lacking between each of them and the natural world. However, Dionysius insists that, despite such a similarity, men and angels are still different enough, and the language of the anthropomorphisms remains a language of speaking about angels:

⁶⁷⁷ CH, 2, 1, PG 3, 137A.

⁶⁷⁸ CH, 2, 2, PG 3, 137D.

‘High-flown shapes could well mislead someone into thinking that the heavenly beings are golden or gleaming men, glamorous, wearing lustrous clothing, giving off flames which cause no harm, or that they have other similar beauties with which the word of God has fashioned the heavenly minds.’⁶⁷⁹

In the quotation from the EH we will see below that Dionysius gives an interpretation of the Scriptural account of the Seraphim found in Isaiah 6, Ez 1:6f, and 10: 14, and Rv 4:6-8. He notes, that the descriptions of the Seraphim are given in ‘perceptible imagery’ (αισθηταῖς εικόσι). It is striking how anthropomorphic his language is here and how conscious he is about this. The divine-human figure of Jesus is put at the centre of the picture. This not only justifies the use of anthropomorphisms in the description of angels, but gives a new perspective to the relationship between the angelic hierarchy and humanity, which in Jesus becomes the object of angelic contemplation and adoration. Dionysius writes of the Seraphim:

‘These have a preeminent place at the head of all those holy beings which transcend us. They stand in assembly around Jesus and they rightly embark upon the most blessed sight of him, and in the infinitely pure receptacle of their souls they receive the fullness of his spiritual gifts and, if one may use the language of sense perception, they sing, with voices that never grow silent, the glorious hymn of divine praises. For the sacred knowledge characteristic of transcendent beings never falters. Their yearning for God never fails. Their exalted status puts them beyond evil and forgetfulness. They cry out and are never silent because, it seems to me, they know and understand divine truth always and unchangeably, and they do so with all earnestness and thanksgiving. The incorporeal characteristics of the seraphim are described by holy scripture in perceptible imagery which reverently conveys their conceptual nature and I think I have described these sufficiently in my discussion of the ranks of transcendent hierarchies. I think I made them sufficiently clear to the eyes of your mind.’⁶⁸⁰

One can see that Dionysius in this text distinguishes two different languages. He translates the Scriptural images from the language of the senses to the language of the mind.⁶⁸¹ It is possible now to point out some important observations concerning the two mentioned languages.

First of all, there is a connection between these languages: one conveys, reveals (ἐκφαντορικός) the other. This revelation however is not direct. It is hidden, apophatic. The conceptual nature of angels is conveyed ‘reverently’ in the Scripture. Presumably, it is not for everyone, but only for those who are capable of perceiving this interpretation.

⁶⁷⁹ CH, 1, 3, PG 3, 141B.

⁶⁸⁰ EH, 4, 5-6, PG 3, 480C, 480D.

⁶⁸¹ Hierarchy is above mind. Hierarchy is a possible acquisition of mind. Mind must become ‘hierarchical’. In this sense hierarchy is a metalanguage, when mind is translated into the new state of ‘hierarchical mind.’

Secondly, the language of images and symbols is not precise, it does not give any certain knowledge about angels. Dionysius reserves for himself the right for mistakes ('it seems to me'). This sort of attitude of Dionysius to his own text introduces a new dimension in the relationship between the author and the reader, namely the dimension of freedom. Dionysius elaborates on this issue in the final paragraphs of the DN:

'These, then, are the divine names. They are conceptual names, and I have explained them as well as I can. But of course I have fallen well short of what they actually mean. Even the angels would have to admit such a failure and I could scarcely speak praises as they do. Even the greatest of our theologians are inferior to the least of the angels. But in this I have fallen wretchedly short not only of the theologians, their hearers and their followers but even of my own peers. So if what I have said is right and if, somehow, I have correctly understood and explicated something of the names of God, the work must be ascribed to the cause of all good things for having given me the words to speak and the power to use them well. It may be that I have omitted some [name] of similar power, and if so this should be explained using the same methods. And perhaps there is something incorrect or imperfect about what I have done. Perhaps I have completely or partly strayed from the truth. If so I ask you to be charitable, to correct my unwished-for ignorance, to offer an argument to one needing to be taught, to help my faltering strength and to heal my unwanted frailty. I beg that you pass on to me whatever you have discovered by yourself or from others, all received from the Good.'⁶⁸²

Dionysius does not impose on the reader his understanding and conclusions as the final truth. He tries to engage the reader in thinking, inviting them to do their own research and to share their findings with him. It is noteworthy that, in Chapter 15 of CH, the theme of human freedom along with the power of reason and intelligence becomes an important point for his explanation as to why the anthropomorphic images of angels are used in the Scripture.

'But they also describe them with forms drawn from the realm of the human. For man is, after all, intelligent and capable of looking toward the higher things. Sturdy and upright he is, by nature, a leader and a ruler, and even if by comparison with the irrational animals he is least in the scale of the power of sense perception, still it is he who dominates all with the superior power of his intelligence, with the mastery deriving from rational understanding, and with the natural freedom and independence of his spirit.'⁶⁸³

⁶⁸² DN,13, 4, PG 3, 981C – D.

⁶⁸³ CH, 15, 3, PG 3, 329D.

7.2. Relationship between angelology and anthropology – the angelic and ecclesiastical hierarchies

Four basic models of the relation between anthropology and angelology appropriated by modern scholars may be pointed out when approaching Dionysius.

First, angelology is said to be a part of anthropology, i.e. when we speak of angels we are actually speaking of humans, their desires and aspirations. In this case, angelology is subordinated to anthropology. This does not necessarily involve the author ascribing to Dionysius such a vision, or that she denies the existence of angels, but the talk about angels is subordinated in every sense to an analysis of human experience.⁶⁸⁴ This approach tends to concentrate primarily on the MT, reading the CH through the lens of the MT and the letters.

However, it may be argued that such a subordinate reading of angelology is typical of a certain form of anthropocentrism. Man, in such a vision, is the measure of all things in this reference frame. The danger of this position is that, just as is the case with angelology, any theological issue can be also limited within the borders of anthropology, such as the doctrine of God leading us to wonder whether all theology (in the manner of Feuerbach) is simply a tacit anthropology. According to this paradigm, man is simply thinking about himself when he is thinking about God or the angels. Obviously, Christian thought cannot be reconciled with such a relation of angelology to anthropology as it is fundamentally reductionist and disguises a thinly veiled form of atheism.

The second way of conceptualising the interrelationship of these two concepts is when anthropology is seen as a part of angelology. This is the reverse of the first model.

⁶⁸⁴ Jantzen (1995) *Power, gender and Christian mysticism*, 95-101; Shaw (1999) 'Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite', 597-598; Cf. Upravitelev (2001) *Konstruïrovanie sub'ektnosti v antropologii S.N. Bulgakova*.

But such a dominant position of angelology in relation to anthropology reveals an outlook more or less stemming from the ideas of Platonism. John Gavin names this position as ‘angelism’: “the tendency to make a disembodied, purely ‘intellectual’ existence the ideal for man”⁶⁸⁵. Philo and Origen are the best-known representatives of this world-view. Nevertheless, such an overly Platonizing (even Gnostic) view in Christian thought does not do justice to the corporeality that is central to the theological mainstream of Christian anthropology accepted by Dionysius.

Another possible option of the relation between angelology and anthropology supposes their independence. It suggests that the world of the angels and our human world are somehow separated from each other. Methodologically, this option is represented by the selective approach to the CD, focusing purely on the CH.⁶⁸⁶

However, the question arises: are they really separated so much that there are no points of contact?

Apparently, such an isolated position of angelology does not correspond to the theology of Dionysius because, from his point of view, both angels and men are created by God.⁶⁸⁷ They make up a common created reality and are not unrelated as they have the same Creator. Therefore, in considering the Christian doctrine of creation, we have to look towards a theology that allows for the intersection of angelology and anthropology at least at one point – their common creation by God as Creator.

Arguably, the final fourth model corresponds to the Dionysian as well as to the traditional Christian world-view best of all when we say that angelology may shed light on the different important questions of anthropology. This is possible because the angelic world has many contact points with the human world. First of all, this is true for the ontological level.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁵ On “angelism”, see Gavin (2009) “*They are like the angels in the heavens*”: *angelology and anthropology in the thought of Maximus the Confessor*, 19-63.

⁶⁸⁶ This is exemplified in Turovtsev’s approach. See Turovtsev (2015) *Vvedenie v dogmaticheskoe uchenie ob angelakh*, 33ff.

⁶⁸⁷ DN, 2, 1, PG 3, 637B; DN, 4, 2, PG 3, 696 B-C; DN, 5, 10, PG 3, 825B.

⁶⁸⁸ See Chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis.

One may note that this model presents a kind of synthesis of all the previous models by balancing the extremes of the first, second and third variants. In other words, both the union and distinction of the angelic and human worlds are expressed in this model of relationship between angelology and anthropology⁶⁸⁹.

One might respond that it would be much simpler to try to define a ‘pure’ angelology and a ‘pure’ anthropology which are unrelated to each other. Nevertheless, there can still be outlined general ideas concerning the commonality of anthropology and angelology.

First of all, there is some communication between angels and men. Angels are God’s messengers, who reveal the divine will to men.

‘It is they who first are granted the divine enlightenment and it is they who pass on to us these revelations which are so far beyond us. Indeed, the Word of God teaches us that the Law was given to us by the angels.’⁶⁹⁰

However, this does not mean that men remain passive in this communication. Dionysius calls humans ‘co-ministers’ and ‘co-workers’ with the angels in doing ‘the things of God’.⁶⁹¹ We have thus two hierarchies - angelic and ecclesiastical - in which both angels and humans are striving towards salvation through theosis.⁶⁹²

Theosis or divinization can be said to be the mutual task and mutual destination for both angels and humans.

‘Every being endowed with intelligence and reason, which, totally and as far as it can, is returned to be united with him, which is forever being raised up toward his divine enlightenments, which if one may say so, tries as hard as possible to imitate God—such a one surely deserves to be called divine.’⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁹ Törönen (2007) *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor*, 222.

⁶⁹⁰ CH, 4, 2, PG 3, 180B.

⁶⁹¹ ‘He did so out of concern for us and because he wanted us to be made godlike. He made the heavenly hierarchies known to us. He made our own hierarchy a ministerial colleague [συλλειτουργόν] of these divine hierarchies by an assimilation, to the extent that is humanly feasible, to their godlike priesthood. He revealed all this to us in the sacred pictures of the scriptures so that he might lift us in spirit up through the perceptible to the conceptual, from sacred shapes and symbols to the simple peaks of the hierarchies of heaven.’ CH, 1, 3, PG 3, 124A.

‘Now there is no need to tell of the loving-kindness of Christ, bathed as it is in peace. But we must learn from it to cease from strife within ourselves, against each other and against the angels. We must work together and with the angels [συνεργήσωμεν] to do the things of God, and we must do so in accordance with the Providence of Jesus "who works all things in all," making that Peace which is ineffable and was foreordained from eternity, reconciling us to himself and in himself to the Father.’ DN, 11, 5, PG 3, 953B.

⁶⁹² EH, 1, 3, PG 3, 373A-C.

⁶⁹³ CH, 12, 2, PG 3, 293B; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 175.

It is emphasised by Dionysius that this effort towards theosis is made by angels and men not independently from each other but in relation to all members of the hierarchies. Each one has ‘a partial, proportionate share’ in that effort, ‘and they do so as part of that one, harmonious, intertwined communion of all’.⁶⁹⁴

He does not speak here about any unification or, as it were, depersonification. On the contrary, the difference between them is preserved and clearly affirmed:

‘Indeed all intelligent godlike beings have their own participation in wisdom and knowledge, and the difference between them depends on whether this share is direct and primary or secondary and inferior, relative to the capacities of each. This is something which can rightly be said of all the divinely intelligent beings, and just as the first possess, in a complete fashion, the holy attributes of their subordinates, so too do the latter possess those of their superiors, though not in the same way but in a humbler mode.’⁶⁹⁵

Dionysius explains differences in knowledge by the different capacities of men and angels.

It might seem that the use of such expressions as ‘their subordinates’, ‘primary’, ‘secondary’, ‘inferior’ etc. establish some sort of relationship, which is hardly compatible with crucial Christian concepts, such as the ideas of freedom and love.

In order to elucidate the relationship between the two hierarchies, one needs to look at the key terms and analyse the concepts which Dionysius uses in respect to any relations, especially between the members of the two different hierarchies.

The concept of love (ἔρωσ)

It is arguable that ἔρωσ is the most significant term which describes relations in Dionysius. Ἐρωσ means ‘love’, ‘passion’, or ‘desire’ in the Greek classic poets. The appropriation of the term ἔρωσ in the Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy is analysed in detail in the seminal work by A.Nygren *Agape and Eros*.⁶⁹⁶ Nygren argued that Dionysius’ most fundamental idea of ἔρωσ as a unitary force ‘permeating the whole universe and holding all things together’ was adopted from Proclus.⁶⁹⁷ Indeed, Dionysius gives his definition of ἔρωσ in Chapter 4 DN along similar lines:

⁶⁹⁴ CH, 12, 2, PG 3, 292 D; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 174.

⁶⁹⁵ CH, 12, 2, PG 3, 293A; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 174-175.

⁶⁹⁶ Nygren (1953) *Agape and Eros*, 49-52, 166-200.

⁶⁹⁷ Nygren (1953) *Agape and Eros*, 577-8.

‘When we talk of yearning (τὸν ἔρωτα), whether this be in God or an angel, in the mind or in the spirit or in nature, we should think of a unifying and co-mingling power which moves the superior to provide for the subordinate, peer to be in communion with peer, and subordinate to return to the superior and the outstanding.’⁶⁹⁸

According to Nygren, the genuinely Christian concept of love is expressed by the Biblical term ἀγάπη, and Dionysius, in replacing ἀγάπη with ἔρωσ promotes a neo-Platonic agenda. However, it is difficult not to agree with those of Nygren’s critics, who question the sharp opposition between the two terms for love in Dionysius and thereby defended his Christianity.⁶⁹⁹ One of them, J. Rist, convincingly demonstrates that Dionysius is ‘the first person to combine the Neoplatonic ideas about God as Eros with the notion of God’s “ecstasy”’.

‘This divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved.’⁷⁰⁰

Rist concludes that ‘it would seem merely perverse to deny that Dionysius’ Christianity is the direct cause of this adaptation’.⁷⁰¹

Moreover, since Dionysius, the term ‘Divine Eros’ has been widely accepted in mainstream Christianity both East and West. The term ἔρωσ is found in the writings of Maximus the Confessor, John Climacus, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicholas Cabasilas to name just a few.⁷⁰² We must mention a particular interest in this topic which existed in Russian religious philosophy, especially in such authors as Vysheslavtsev, Soloviev, Florenskii, Berdyaev, and Bulgakov.⁷⁰³ Among the most recent theologians one can point to St Paisios of Mount Athos and Pope Benedict XVI as those who teach about Christian love as ἔρωσ along with ἀγάπη.⁷⁰⁴ The Dionysian interpretation

⁶⁹⁸ DN, 4, 15, PG 3, 713B.

⁶⁹⁹ Rist (1965) ‘Note On Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius’, 235-243; see the analysis and up-to-date critique of Nygren’s work in: Werpehowski (2007) ‘Anders Nygren’s Agape and Eros’, 433-448.

⁷⁰⁰ DN, 4, 13, PG 3, 712A.

⁷⁰¹ Rist (1965) ‘Note On Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius’, 239.

⁷⁰² Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, 49 (SCh 554, 98); 55 (SCh 554, 254); for ἔρωσ in John Climacus see: Chryssavgis (1989) *Ascent to Heaven*, 189-194; Symeon, the New Theologian, *Hymnen*, Hymn 46; Nicolaus Cabasilas, *De Vita in Cristo*, Lib. 6.12-14, PG 150, 645.

⁷⁰³ Cf. Crone (2010) *Eros and creativity in Russian religious renewal: the philosophers and the Freudians*; Matich (2005) *Erotic utopia: the decadent imagination in Russia’s fin-de-siècle*; Vysheslavtsev (1994) *Etika preobrazhennogo Erosa*; Solovyov (1985) *The meaning of love*; Dzhezher (2011) ‘Fenomen Erosa v filosofsko-esteticheskikh kontseptsiiyah V.S. Solovieva, V.I. Ivanova, S.L. Franka: dialektika otnoshenii “ia-ty”’; Pavenkov, Rubtcova (2016) ‘Love as a Concept in the Religious Philosophy of Pavel Florenskii’, 163-180; Berdyaev (2008) *Eros i moral’*; Bulgakov (2004) *The Comforter*, 313-341.

⁷⁰⁴ Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, *Sayings*, Volume 5. 2.2.1; Benedict XVI, *Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for Lent 2007*.

of the term ἔρωσ has played a key role in the theology of Chrystos Yannaras.⁷⁰⁵ Yannaras employs the Dionysian concept of apophaticism and that of erotic communion to develop his theology of personhood. He argues that one can discern in the CD the seeds of Christian personalism. When speaking about the relationship between men and angels, one supposes the relation between persons, because the mutual relationship of love can only exist between persons.

7.3. The enlightenment of men by angels

Dionysius does not use the term ‘guardian angels’, but he definitely has the idea and develops it. One can argue that, to express the idea of the guardian angel, Dionysius employs such terms as ἀγαθῶν καθηγεμόνων (DN, 4, 2) and διδασκάλους (CH, 13, 3). He also speaks about angels’ χειραγωγίας’ (CH,13,4) and elsewhere refers to them as ‘φιλανθρώπων’ (Ep 8).

One might wonder what the difference is between the neo-Platonic teaching on the ‘personal daimonion’ and the Christian understanding of guardian angels.⁷⁰⁶ Indeed, Proclus writes about personal daimonions in his *Alcibiades I Commentary*:

‘For he [i.e., the personal daimon] who guides aright our whole life, fulfilling both the choices we have made before our birth, the gifts of fate and of the gods who guide it, and further bestowing in due measure the illuminations of providence, such is our guardian daimon. As souls we are dependent upon the intellect alone, but as souls using a body we are in need of the guardian daimon. . . . The guardian daimon alone moves, controls and orders all our affairs, since it perfects the reason, moderates the emotions, infuses nature, maintains the body, supplies accidentals, fulfills the decrees of fate and bestows the gifts of providence; and this one being is ruler of all that lies in us and concerns us, steering our whole life.’⁷⁰⁷

The most notable difference lies, however, in the very use of the term ‘daimon’ by neo-Platonist philosophers. They can use both the term ‘angel’ and the term ‘daimon’ to describe good spiritual entities, whereas Christian authors employ the term ‘daimon’ only when they speak about the fallen angels. Origen was among the first to emphasise the above-mentioned

⁷⁰⁵ Giannaras (2007) *Person and eros*; Giannaras (2005) *On the absence and unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, 99-110.

⁷⁰⁶ Cf. Layne, Tarrant (2014) *The Neoplatonic Socrates*.

⁷⁰⁷ Proclus, in Alc. 77.4–9; 78.1–6.

difference in terminology.⁷⁰⁸ Dionysius' use of the terms in respect to angels and demons is undoubtedly Christian, as he never mentions demons in a positive sense.

Another, and subtler, difference is that the neo-Platonic daimons have as it were a more functional description, with their intermediary and instrumental role particularly emphasised, whereas their Christian counterparts in Dionysius have much more pronounced personal features: they can experience grief and joy, feel pity and love:

'But let us lift our eyes to the heights. Let us not be satisfied to praise the gentleness of sacred men or the generosity of those angels, the friends of humans, who pity the nations and plead to God on their behalf, who punish the destructive and evil-doing hordes, who lament for the wicked, who rejoice over those summoned back to goodness, or whatever other things the word of God has taught us about all the good works of the angels. Instead, let us quietly receive the beneficent rays of the truly good, the transcendently good Christ and let us be led by their light toward his divinely good deeds.'⁷⁰⁹

Angels are seen as not purely instrumental and functional, but as those who can be in a live personal relationship with men and with God. This situation of the relationship might cause the human beings to 'strive towards angelic life'.⁷¹⁰

Here the problem of 'angelism' arises – what can it mean for human beings and for the human body to become 'like angels'? Dionysius does not give a direct answer, but he speaks about the equality with angels in the context of the Transfiguration of the Lord, which allows us to think of this equality not in terms of disembodiment but rather in terms of transfiguration of the human body. According to Dionysius, in the eschatological perspective the differences between men and angels in respect to knowledge will cease to exist:

'But in time to come, when we are incorruptible and immortal, when we have come at last to the blessed inheritance of being like Christ, then, as scripture says, "we shall always be with the Lord." In most holy contemplation we shall be ever filled with the sight of God shining gloriously around us as once it shone for the disciples at the divine transfiguration. And there we shall be, our minds away from passion and from earth, and we shall have a conceptual gift of light from him and, somehow, in a way we cannot know, we shall be united with him and, our understanding carried away, blessedly happy, we shall be struck by his blazing light. Marvelously, our minds will be like those in the heavens above. We shall be "equal to angels and sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." That is what the truth of scripture affirms. But as

⁷⁰⁸ Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.8.1 (PL 22.763); cf. Cline (2011) *Ancient angels: conceptualizing angeloi in the Roman Empire*, 4-8.

⁷⁰⁹ Ep, 8, 1; PG 3, 1085C, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 269-270. (Underlinings mine)

⁷¹⁰ 'Next to these sacred and holy intelligent beings are the souls, together with all the good peculiar to these souls. These too derive their being from the transcendent Good. So therefore they have intelligence, immortality, existence. They can strive towards angelic life. By means of the angels as good leaders, they can be uplifted to the generous Source of all good things and, each according to his measure, they are able to have a share in the illuminations streaming out from that Source. They too, in their own fashion, possess the gift of exemplifying the Good and they have all those other qualities which I described in my book *The Soul*. ' DN, 4, 2. [696C].

for now, what happens is this. We use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upward toward the truth of the mind's vision, a truth which is simple and one.⁷¹¹

The quotation above is important not only because of its reference to the eschatological equality of men and angels, which is remarkable in itself, but also because this text links the idea of unity with God and angels with the theme of light.

The concept of light (φῶς)

The idea of light as signifying knowledge and divine truth is found both in the Old Testament tradition⁷¹² and in Greek thought.⁷¹³ There is, however, a significant difference in the understanding of light between the Old and the New Testament. Lossky asserts that the former saw light as something unbearable and fearful for men because it was a phenomenon ‘foreign and external to human nature as it was before Christ and outside the Church’.⁷¹⁴ Christianity has changed the perception of light, it has become the source of joy and happiness, which is reflected, for example, in the words of Peter at the divine Transfiguration: ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here’ (Matthew 17:4).

One cannot overestimate the importance of the concept of light for Dionysius.⁷¹⁵ This is the concept which is found in all four treatises of the CD and in four of its ten epistles. Moreover, each of the treatises begins with more or less extensive deliberation on light and enlightenment.

The first paragraph of the CH speaks about light:

“Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.”⁷¹⁶ But there is something more. Inspired by the Father, each procession of the Light spreads itself generously toward us, and, in its power to unify, it stirs us by lifting us up. It returns us back to the oneness and deifying simplicity of the Father who gathers us in. For, as the sacred Word says, “from him and to him are all things.”⁷¹⁷

⁷¹¹ DN, 1, 4; PG 3, 592C.

⁷¹² Gierlich (1940) ‘Die Lichtgedanke in den Psalmen. Eine terminologischexegetische Studie’, 42-76; Goodenough (1935) *By light, light: the mystic gospel of Hellenistic Judaism*.

⁷¹³ Beierwaltes (1957) *Lux intelligibilis: Untersuchung zur Lichtmetaphysik der Griechen*; Verdenius (1949) *Parmenides' Conception of Light*; Notopoulos (1944) ‘The Symbolism of the Sun and Light in the Republic of Plato’.

⁷¹⁴ V.Lossky (1991) *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 223.

⁷¹⁵ Bychkov (1991) *Malaya istoria vizantiyskoy estetiki*, Chapter 2; Soldatenkova (2006) *The concept of light in the culture of the Old Rus'*, 33.

⁷¹⁶ James, 1:17.

⁷¹⁷ CH, 1, 1; PG 3, 120A-B;121A.

A. Golitzin argues that the CH should be seen as the first treatise in the CD, as it appears in the first place in all Greek manuscripts.⁷¹⁸ Apart from that, there is an internal piece of evidence which also speaks for this order. Namely, the first three chapters of the CH can be seen as introductory to the whole Corpus. This means that the introductory function relates to the above-mentioned quotation about light too.

A little further in the same chapter Dionysius seems to be introducing the concept of light as a linkage between different ontological levels, between the transcendent and the immanent.

He employs antinomies to express this idea:

‘We must lift up the immaterial and steady eyes of our minds to that outpouring of Light which is so primal, indeed much more so, and which comes from that source of divinity, I mean the Father. This is the Light which, by way of representative symbols, makes known to us the most blessed hierarchies among the angels. But we need to rise from this outpouring of illumination so as to come to the simple ray of Light itself. Of course, this ray never abandons its own proper nature, or its own interior unity.’⁷¹⁹

Dionysius speaks here that the divine light is known in ‘its outpouring of illumination’, in other words is immanent, but at the same time it remains transcendent and ‘never abandons its own proper nature’. He continues by pointing out the antinomy of multiplicity and unity in the perception of the divine light:

‘Even though it works itself outward to multiplicity and proceeds outside of itself as befits its generosity, doing so to lift upward and to unify those beings for which it has a providential responsibility, nevertheless it remains inherently stable and it is forever one with its own unchanging identity. And it grants to creatures the power to rise up, so far as they may, toward itself and it unifies them by way of its own simplified unity.’⁷²⁰

In Chapter 3 CH Dionysius incorporates the concept of light in his definition of hierarchy. Hierarchy appears to be an order, knowledge and activity concerned with receiving and sharing divine enlightenments, or divine light. And this is what is really beautiful. When he speaks about

⁷¹⁸ Golitzin (2013) *Mystagogy: a monastic reading of Dionysius Areopagita*. See Introduction.

⁷¹⁹ CH, 1, 2; PG 3, 121B.

⁷²⁰ Ibid. Cf. DN, 4, 6, PG 3, 701B: ‘So then, the Good which is above all light is given the name "light of the mind," "beam and spring," "overflowing radiance." From its fullness, it illuminates every mind which is above and beyond the world, or around it or within it. It renews all the powers of their minds. It steps beyond everything inasmuch as it is ordered beyond everything. It precedes everything inasmuch as it transcends everything. Quite simply, it gathers together and supremely anticipates in itself the authority of all illuminating power, being indeed the source of light and actually transcending light. And so it assembles into a union everything possessed of reason and of mind. For just as it is ignorance which scatters those in error, so it is the presence of the light of the mind which gathers and unites together those receiving illumination. It perfects them. It returns them toward the truly real. It returns them from their numerous false notions and, filling them with the one unifying light, it gathers their clashing fancies into a single, pure, coherent, and true knowledge.’ (Luibheid’s translation is corrected here).

the goal of hierarchy, he mentions that the members or hierarchy do not produce as it were their own light, but are called to be able to reflect the divine light, to be like mirrors.

‘Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself. It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendor they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God’s will to beings further down the scale.’⁷²¹

In Chapter 4 Dionysius uses the term τῶν Λογίων φωτοφανείας translated by Luibheid as ‘revelations of scripture’; here it is used in parallel with the expression τῆς γνώσεως χάρις (the gift of knowledge).⁷²² Light therefore is revealed knowledge, but it is also a power and an instrument of God’s Providence. Light renews the powers of the mind and is perceived as a perfecting activity. One can argue that the terms φωτοδοσία and ἐπίγνωσις, while both are related to knowledge, they have some difference in meaning.⁷²³ In CH 9, 4 they are used together in the same phrase – here they have a complementary meaning.

Chapter 13 CH is especially interesting for us because here Dionysius attempts to explain a particular place from the Scriptures, the purification of Prophet Isaiah by the seraphim, in the light of his concept of hierarchy. In other words, he suggests one of several possible translations from the language of immediate human experience to his metalanguage of hierarchy.⁷²⁴ In order to clarify his understanding of the transmission of the divine light, Dionysius employs the images of the Sun and of fire. He then reiterates the principle of the hierarchical order:

‘Following that same harmonious law which operates throughout nature, the wonderful source of all visible and invisible order and harmony supernaturally pours out in splendid revelations to the superior beings the full and initial brilliance of his astounding light, and successive beings in their turn receive their share of the divine beam, through the mediation of their superiors. The beings who are first to know God and who, more than others, desire the divine virtue have been deemed worthy to become the prime workers of the power and activity which imitate God, as far as possible. In their goodness they raise their inferiors to become, so far as possible, their rivals. They ungrudgingly impart to them the glorious ray which has visited them so that their inferiors may pass this on to those yet farther below them. Hence, on each level,

⁷²¹ CH, 3, 2, PG 3, 165B.

⁷²² CH, 4, 4, PG 3, 181B-C.

⁷²³ See *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 566.

⁷²⁴ See the concluding paragraph of Chapter 13 CH, PG 3, 308B: ‘This was what I learned from him, and I pass them on to you. And it is up to your intelligence and your critical understanding to decide on one or another of the solutions to the problem referred to, accepting it as more likely, more reasonable, and hence closer to the truth. Unless, of course, you yourself have a solution closer to the real truth or have learned it from someone else—God having given the word and angels having explained what he said. And then you might be able to reveal to me, a lover of the angels, a contemplation which is clearer and thus more beloved to me.’

predecessor hands on to successor whatever of the divine light he has received and this, in providential proportion, is spread out to every being.⁷²⁵

In the final chapter of the CH Dionysius discusses different iconographic images and symbolic descriptions related to angels, which can be found in the Scripture. Two particular places where he mentions that heaven is the abode of light and that angels are filled with hidden light point to the ontological meaning of light in Dionysius.⁷²⁶

Further, in Chapter 2 DN, Dionysius uses the term ‘light’ to designate the godlike beings – angels and humans:

‘This is why we declare that the Superessential Unity surpasses not only the unions according in the bodies but also those in the souls and in the very minds, which all of godlike and super celestial lights possess unmixedly and super cosmically through all things, according to the participation in the analogy with those partaking of the union beyond all expression’.⁷²⁷

Although the term ‘light’ is considered in the CD as one of the Divine names as well as one of the angelic symbolic designations, there is a deeper significance to this term. Dionysius points out at least three different levels of the symbolic representation of light.

‘It is not only the transcendent lights and the conceptual things—or, putting the matter more simply, the divine things— which are depicted in the various symbolic forms...This same image ... takes on different meanings, depending on whether it refers to the God who transcends all conceptions, to the providential activities or reasons of God, or indeed to the angels themselves. In one instance one thinks under the heading of “cause”, in another under the heading of “subsistence,” in a third instance under the heading of “participation”, and in other instances under other headings according as their contemplation and wise arrangement determines’.⁷²⁸

In other words, light can mean something which causes it, its primary source. This level corresponds to the transcendent and absolutely inconceivable essence of God (Divine οὐσία). The term ‘light’ can also mean, as it were, the substance of light manifested in particular beams and lightnings. This is something which is revealed and corresponds to the divine thoughts (*logoi*),

⁷²⁵ CH, 13, 3, PG 3, 301C.

⁷²⁶ ‘I think that the shining and fiery robe symbolizes the divine form. This accords with the imagery of fire. And the power to illuminate is a consequence of the inheritance of heaven which is the abode of light. It makes all things enlightened in the mind and is enlightened in the mind.’ CH, 15, 4, PG 3, 333A.

‘The word of God represents them also as clouds. This is to show that the holy and intelligent beings are filled in a transcendent way with hidden light. Directly and without arrogance they have been first to receive this light, and as intermediaries, they have generously passed it on so far as possible to those next to them.’ CH, 15, 6, PG 3, 336B.

⁷²⁷ DN, 2, 4, PG 3, 641C. This is a suggested translation. Luibheid’s translation is here unfaithful to the original and reads as follows: ‘But turn now to that unity above being. I say that it surpasses not only the union of things corporeal, but also the union of souls, and even that of minds themselves. These minds purely, supernaturally, and thoroughly possess the godlike and celestial lights, but they do so in a participation proportionate to their participations in the unity which transcends all things’.

⁷²⁸ Ep, 9, 2, PG 3, 1108D.

which constitute the uncreated essence of all created beings. Finally, one can call light as something which is part of our experience, the light which is seen with our own eyes. This is the light for us, by our participation.

As has already been mentioned, Dionysius mentions light in Chapter 1 EH, where he speaks about the possibility of our enlightenment, our human experience of light:

‘...We thereby come to look up to the blessed and ultimately divine ray of Jesus himself. Then, having sacredly beheld whatever can be seen, enlightened by the knowledge of what we have seen, we shall then be able to be consecrated and consecrators of this mysterious understanding. Formed of light, initiates in God's work, we shall be perfected and bring about perfection’.⁷²⁹

Dionysius says that ‘light comes from the Good, and light is an image of this archetypal Good.’⁷³⁰ According to him, both the physical light and the spiritual or divine light are linked with the Good, which is the life bestowing feature of God.⁷³¹ What distinguishes light from the beautiful is that light is able to put order ‘upon disorder’ and to ‘give a form to the formless’.⁷³² ‘The Good is not absolutely incommunicable to everything. By itself it generously reveals a firm, transcendent beam, granting enlightenments proportionate to each being, and thereby draws sacred minds upward to its permitted contemplation, to participation and to the state of becoming like it’.⁷³³

The divine light cannot be grasped by the human senses and ‘is concealed in a variety of sacred veils’. It is only visible to the eyes of the mind by means of symbols - the material images of the immaterial light. ‘The divine Light, out of generosity, never ceases to offer itself to the eyes of the mind, eyes which should seize upon it for it is always there, always divinely ready with the gift of itself.’⁷³⁴

However, it is in our free will to accept this light or to reject it. It is also impossible to receive light and not to pass it on further. One cannot keep the light for yourself - if you are filled with light you will share it with others.

⁷²⁹ EH, 1, 1, PG 3, 372B.

⁷³⁰ DN, 4, 4, PG 3, 697B.

⁷³¹ Cf. ‘There is a recurring Byzantine association between Life and Light and between light and the immaterial element in material things. Colour is conceived as light materialised’. Mathew (1963) *Byzantine aesthetics*, 6.

⁷³² EH, 2, 8, PG 3, 404C-D.

⁷³³ DN, 2, 1, PG 3, 588D.

⁷³⁴ EH, 2, 3, PG 3, 400A.

‘Each rank around God conforms more to him than the one farther away. Those closest to the true Light are more capable of receiving light and of passing it on. Do not imagine that the proximity here is physical. Rather, what I mean by nearness is the greatest possible capacity to receive God. If then the rank of priests is that most able to pass on illumination, he who does not bestow illumination is thereby excluded from the priestly order and from the power reserved to the priesthood. For he is unilluminated.’⁷³⁵

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Distinguishing between dissimilar symbols and alike images, Dionysius puts anthropomorphisms in the second category. This points to his idea of the essential likeness between angels and human beings. He also distinguishes two different languages of speaking about angels. The language of prophecies is found in the Scriptures and is called the language of sense perception. This language operates with symbols and metaphors and can be translated into the language of the mind by means of explanation and clarification. However, Dionysius allows a significant amount of freedom in this translation and is ready to accept different interpretations.

We have seen that the most appropriate approach to the relationship between the angelic and human worlds in Dionysius is that which considers multiple points of intersection between the two realities, at the same time allowing for differences between them. Dionysius employs the concept of love, mainly using the term *ἔρωσ* to establish relations both within angelic and human worlds, and between them, as well as between God and creation. The usage of the term *ἔρωσ* in this respect corresponds to the mainstream Christian tradition.

Finally, the metaphor of light is employed by Dionysius throughout the whole corpus of his writings. Along with the concept of love, the idea of light links the angelic and human worlds in activity and knowledge. Light has both ontological and gnoseological meanings in Dionysius and is incorporated in his definition of hierarchy.

⁷³⁵ Ep. 8, 2, PG 3, 1092B.

Chapter 8. Men and Angels in Bulgakov

The anthropological language in Bulgakov's angelology is clearly articulated and easily identifiable. This chapter demonstrates how it is used in his *Jacob's Ladder*, and also seeks to answer the question why Bulgakov employs the language of anthropology and what are its functions in his theology. This leads us to an analysis of the idea of religious experience, the area where the language of anthropology is primarily used. After analysing Bulgakov's experiences of angels, we will briefly touch on the controversial question of gender distinction in the angelic world – a powerful example of 'anthropological intrusion' in Christian angelology.

8.1. Three theological languages in Bulgakov's angelology

In this section we will look at Bulgakov's *Jacob's Ladder* (1929) from the perspective of the three logical levels of speaking of angels. Indeed, it is possible to assess the structure and inner logic of this work by analysing how he employs these different languages.

The subtitle of the Introduction *On a Heavenly Friend*, as well as its content, unambiguously point to the use of the language of anthropology at the beginning of the work on angels. Starting with a careful analysis of the concept of love between human beings, and by suggesting its meaning for the human personality, Bulgakov describes various types of human love.⁷³⁶ He concludes that there is no perfect love existing on earth that could satisfy and fill the depths of the human soul. Further, Bulgakov describes his own near-death experience when he encountered a loving heavenly being, perceived as his guardian angel. Although one can discern

⁷³⁶ See Chapter 6, section 2 of this thesis.

the sophiological theme in Bulgakov's insistence that one's guardian angel – who keeps watch over each person, lives 'with each *person's life*' – overall, the Introduction is overwhelmingly dominated by the language of anthropology.⁷³⁷

Bulgakov employs a number of different designations and concepts to describe the relationship between human beings and their guardian angels. Apart from the already mentioned 'heavenly friend', he refers to the angel as 'the other for each human being', 'a spiritual warrior', 'a companion', and 'an educator'. Bulgakov draws on liturgical prayers and hymns in his attempt to explain the details of the relationship between human beings and their guardian angels. He describes this relationship as 'heavenly pedagogy', and as a self-abandoning service inspired by angelic kenotic love.

Chapter 1, 'Heaven and Earth' turns its attention to a more general problem, namely to the relation between the world of angels and that of humans. It speaks of the 'common ontological foundation' of the two worlds, the result of their common creation 'in the beginning' (Genesis 1:1). In this chapter Bulgakov moves from the level of the individual guardian angel to that of the whole angelic world. This causes him to change the language of anthropology, used in the Introduction, to that of philosophy, the language operating with general abstract terms and concepts rather than with metaphors. Indeed, in the first two pages of this chapter Bulgakov employs the following abstract terms to designate the angelic world: 'noetic heaven', 'the ranks of angels', 'hierarchy', 'the bodiless powers', 'the world of noetic powers', 'bodiless spirits' and others relating to or describing the nature of angels. Most of these terms have been dealt with in previous chapters of this thesis. Here, however, one can observe that *Jacob's Ladder* is not a homogeneous text, and that a considerable amount of it is dominated by another theological language. After pointing out the multiplicity of the angelic links with our world, and discussing the ways of the angelic ministry, Bulgakov particularly concentrates on the idea of the oneness of the ontological foundation of all created reality both visible and invisible: 'Heaven and earth

⁷³⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 11.

represent as it were two forms of being of the one world, the one creation'.⁷³⁸ This is the point when he begins to use the language of sophiology in his discussion of angels because, according to Bulgakov, there is a 'single underlying, world-creating principle - the Wisdom of God'.⁷³⁹ The designations of the angelic world here include the following formulations: 'second lights'; 'the angelic world as the sum total of ideas, themes, and paradigms of the world in the hypostatic form of being'.⁷⁴⁰

It is in the sophiological context that Bulgakov refers to angels as 'heavenly co-humans'.⁷⁴¹ He contends that the invisible world is distinct from the visible creation and is independent of it to a certain extent. It is man who is the goal and summit of creation. Bulgakov stresses that the co-humanity of angels does not simply mean that the angels were created to exist alongside human beings. The angelic co-humanity appears to be 'the fundamental condition of their angelic service'.⁷⁴² The correlation between the two worlds is not exterior; their conformity relates to the fundamental principles of the angelic beings and 'is inherent in the entire angelic world *as a whole*, in the totality of all its hierarchies'.⁷⁴³ This intrinsic correlation does not, however, suggest any repetition. One should not think that the angelic world is a mere reflection of our world in the realm of spirit. Angels are clearly distinct from human beings, first, because of their purely hypostatic mode of being, and second, because of angelic hierarchies. The particular realisation of the co-humanity of angels is revealed in the existence of guardian angels.

Chapter 2, 'The Guardian Angel' starts a new circle in the use of theological languages. Bulgakov discusses the existence of the guardian angels interpreting the Biblical texts. For this he employs the language of anthropology.

⁷³⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 27.

⁷³⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 28.

⁷⁴⁰ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 32.

⁷⁴¹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 33.

⁷⁴² Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 36.

⁷⁴³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 38.

He then briefly analyses the relation between a guardian angel and a human being, pointing out the features of union and distinction. Guardian angels are distinct in possessing their own hypostases and nature, but are united with men by the same ‘ontological theme’. Here Bulgakov returns to the language of Sophiology. The guardian angel is now called ‘the idea of the human person’ and ‘our heavenly I’.⁷⁴⁴ He dedicates several pages to the discussion of the aspects of unity between the human person and the guardian angel before returning to the language of anthropology, which remains dominant until the end of the chapter.

Chapter 3, ‘Angels in the Life of the World’ deals with the similar structure to that of the previous one. The overarching theme of this chapter is that angels make history together with us. Bulgakov illustrates his thought by referring to New Testament texts, in particular to the Book of Revelation. He interprets the visions from Chapter 5: 3-14 as a ‘comprehensive expression of the unity of the angelic and human worlds, of heaven and earth, in the worship of the Lamb’.⁷⁴⁵ He emphasises that the liturgical unity expresses the unity of life in all its aspects and signifies the mutual destination and destiny of the visible and invisible worlds. Specifically, Bulgakov points to the role of angels in the second coming of Christ (Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38). The Old Testament texts give the idea of angels as living ‘instruments of God’s will’ (2 Samuel 24: 16ff; 2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chronicles 32:21; Isaiah 37:36) as well as guardians of individuals and nations (Genesis 48:16; Daniel 10:13 etc.) He makes specific reference to the active participation in human history of the Archangel Gabriel (Daniel 10:20-21; 11:4). In general, according to Bulgakov, all the instances of angels’ appearances and actions revealed in the Bible support the idea of the angels’ participation in human history.

The chapter begins with the language of anthropology, which is followed by the language of philosophy.⁷⁴⁶ Bulgakov tries to systematise the Scriptural data and, for this purpose uses such

⁷⁴⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 42-43.

⁷⁴⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 54.

⁷⁴⁶ Cf. Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 53-61.

concepts as angelic nature [естество], creativity, and personal relation.⁷⁴⁷ He also speaks here of the self-renunciation of the angels, their freedom and creative self-disclosure. Having considered all these topics in detail, Bulgakov returns to the discussion of the specific relationship between a human being and a guardian angel. The chapter culminates in the formulations of this relation in the language of sophiology. The angels in this chapter are referred to as ‘the Sophianic seeds of the whole earthly, human world’, and the men related to them - ‘their personal human likeness’.⁷⁴⁸ The latter formulation was developed by Bulgakov from the idea that both angels and humans were created after the image of God and can, therefore, be called the image and likeness of each other. However, this conclusion regarding the mutual likeness of men and angels does not necessarily follow from the assumption of the same Divine Prototype, and can be seen as an example of the deliberate sophiological intervention in theology.

Certain expressions in this chapter reveal a possible dependence of Bulgakov on Hegel’s approach to history:

‘If in the history of humanity everyone has so to say their own place, being linked by the unity and continuity of a pragmatic bond, by the solidarity of all humanity in the common work of history, we must accept the same concerning the angelic world in no less a degree’.⁷⁴⁹

One may notice that, in each of the analysed chapters, Bulgakov’s approach is characterised by the consecutive change of the three theological languages: the language of anthropology, the language of philosophy, and the language of sophiology. This development of Bulgakov’s thought can be compared with the famous dialectical method of Hegel with its three stages. Hegel writes in Part 1 of his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*:

‘Logic is subdivided into three parts:

The Doctrine of Being.

The Doctrine of Essence.

The Doctrine of Notion and Idea.

That is, into the Theory of Thought:

In its immediacy: the notion implicit and in germ.

In its reflection and mediation: the being -for-self and show of the notion.

⁷⁴⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 61-62.

⁷⁴⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 66, 68.

⁷⁴⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 67.

In its return into itself, and its developed abiding by itself: the notion in and for itself.⁷⁵⁰

Indeed, the language of anthropology in Bulgakov can be paralleled with the first moment in Hegel's description of his dialectical method, or its immediate stage. Bulgakov's philosophical and theological analysis of angelic nature and personhood corresponds to the second stage of Logic in Hegel, which is characterised by relation, mediation, and reflection.⁷⁵¹ Finally, Bulgakov's metalanguage of sophiology can be likened to Hegel's third synthetic stage which is explained as the return to unity on a new level.

Several years before writing his book on angels, Bulgakov explicitly adopted the triadic model in his work *The Tragedy of Philosophy* (1927).⁷⁵²

The title of Chapter 4 'The Nature of Angels' belongs to the language of philosophy. This language is also largely employed in the first three pages of the chapter. Distinguishing between the human and angelic worlds, Bulgakov suggests his understanding of the angelic nature as absolutely transparent for the grace of God, and in some sense even absent. What is proper to angels, according to Bulgakov, is hypostasis and hypostatic existence, in other words personal self-consciousness, which is the realisation of the image of God in angels.⁷⁵³ The concept of individuality is analysed here in relation to human beings and angels.

The transition to the language of sophiology in Chapter 4 is not explicitly marked but is clearly signalled by the use of the terms 'sophia' and 'sophianity' in the discussion of the oneness of human nature. An individual angel is called here 'a single ray of Divine Sophia in creaturely-hypostatic consciousness'.⁷⁵⁴ What we define as sophiological themes of unity and

⁷⁵⁰ Hegel (1975) *Hegel's logic*, 121.

⁷⁵¹ Hegel (1977) *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 90.

⁷⁵² See Bulgakov (1993) *Tragediia filosofii*. Bulgakov argues in Part 1 of 'The types of philosophical constructions' that the nature of our judgement expressed in the form of a sentence defines the nature of our thought. He points to the three constitutive parts of judgement: 1. Hypostasis, person (or 'I'); 2. Nature, predicate; 3. Interdependence or self-awareness (the verb 'to be'). Different systems of modern philosophy, says Bulgakov, can be classified in accordance with this tripartite approach to judgement. Further, in Part 2 the Russian theologian develops his own 'philosophy of threeness'. One can say that Bulgakov tries to apply the Christian dogma of the three Persons of the Godhead to philosophy and to deduct from this dogma a kind of general rule or logic of 'threeness'. In other words, Bulgakov claims that Christian dogmas, and in particular the dogma of the Trinity, can have a philosophical meaning.

⁷⁵³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 75.

⁷⁵⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 76.

wholeness penetrate and overshadow all other topics in this section. Bulgakov speaks of the collectivity in the world of angels constructed on ‘the union of plurality’. He then comes to the theme of hierarchy, with particular emphasis on a ‘hierarchical whole’.⁷⁵⁵ Moreover, he argues that the triunity of persons of the Holy Trinity is reflected in the hierarchy of angels, which is another indication of the sophiological theme. Bulgakov concludes this section by characterising the beauty of the world as ‘Sophianic through the operation of angels’.

The anthropological section in Chapter 4 is separated from the rest of the material. It deals with the discussion of a possibility of a distinction in the angelic world corresponding to the male and female principles in the human world. It is precisely its emphasis on such ‘human’ features as love and friendship that creates a thematic difference between the anthropological and sophiological sections, where the main idea is that of unity. ‘The angelic assembly is united in the fusion of personal reciprocal love in which the angelic hypostasis seemingly dies for itself in order to resurrect and live in the assembly, in a multi-one, collective, pan-angelic I.’⁷⁵⁶ ‘Angelic love... opens the paths of human love’.⁷⁵⁷

All three theological languages are found in Chapter 5 ‘The Life of Angels’. However, the order here is different again. Bulgakov begins his deliberation by saying that angels ‘are Sophianic’.⁷⁵⁸ He then quickly turns to the philosophical language discussing in detail the questions of nature and hypostasis, immortality and created eternity, holiness, freedom and personal love. The final anthropological section is separated from the rest of the material in this chapter as it was in the previous one. Bulgakov touches upon the theme of angelic cognition, and discusses the idea of beauty which is related to angels on the one hand and is manifested and realised in human art and creative activities on the other. It is in this way that angels become related to singing. ‘Angelic singing’ and ‘angelic praise’ are the terms to be found in this section.

⁷⁵⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 78.

⁷⁵⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 94.

⁷⁵⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 99.

⁷⁵⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 101.

Light and colours as the characteristics of beauty can also be applied to angels and the angelic world.

In Chapter 6 ‘Theophanies and Angelophanies’, Bulgakov returns to the initial order of the languages, starting his discussion with the language of anthropology. He lists a number of Scriptural accounts of the angelic and divine appearances where God speaks through his angels and, even more, when the angels are identified with the Lord. In the ‘philosophical’ section Bulgakov expounds the exegetical analysis of the given texts and distinguishes between the hypostatic and non-hypostatic theophanies. The term ‘hypostasis’ is here essential. However, the naming of angels ‘the creaturely-hypostatic countenances of the Divine Wisdom-Glory’, betrays the gradual transition to the language of sophiology in this chapter.⁷⁵⁹

The remaining two short chapters ‘The Incorporeality of Angels’ and ‘The Angelic World and Divine Incarnation’ deal with the particular questions related to the angelic nature and do not introduce terms which had not previously been used by him.

To sum up, one can point out three logical stages in Bulgakov’s discussion on angels.

The theme of angels is introduced in Bulgakov’s theology through the mediation of human experience. Their existence is taken for granted, is never questioned in Bulgakov’s works. He draws on Scriptural data and on his own mystic experience, using such human terms as ‘a friend’, or ‘a companion’ to describe and designate the guardian angel. This is the initial stage of theologising on angels, which reflects the most immediate experience of angelic beings. The prophetic visions of angels and other Biblical accounts of angelic appearances are characterised by the language of sensual imagery, which I call that of anthropology or of prophets and poets. This language is that of discovery of the transcendent reality. It is used to affirm the existence of angels as belonging to the transcendent world, without any attempt to systematise the experience of the transcendent.

⁷⁵⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob’s Ladder*, 135.

Bulgakov uses the language of philosophy to establish a permanent and systematic relation between the worlds of angels and men. This is the second logical stage in his discussion on angels. Once angels are discovered in our human experience and their existence affirmed, one tries to establish a connection, to relate the realities of the immanent and the transcendent. For this purpose, such abstract philosophical and theological terms as nature and hypostasis are employed. The existence of angels acquires an ontological substantiation.

The third and final logical stage in Bulgakov's approach to angels is referred to as sophiological. It comes after the relation between the transcendent and the immanent have been established. The language of sophiology is the language of unity, inspired by the intuition of all-unity. Angels are called here our 'second ego' or our 'heavenly other'. At this stage the transcendent is, as it were, appropriated by the immanent.

8.2. Bulgakov's experience of angels

8.2.1. The role of experience in Bulgakov. Bulgakov about religious experience

As has already been said in Chapter 2, Bulgakov noted in his diaries and publications several cases of his own mystical experience, interpreted by him as the appearances of angelic beings. The earliest of these appearances took place at the funeral of his son, who died in 1909 from nephritis. Bulgakov included the description of this experience in *The Unfading Light*:

"The liturgy was proceeding. I do not know where it took place, on earth or in heaven.... "Escorted invisibly by angelic ranks," the usual already-familiar sacred words ... but who is this in the sanctuary on the right ... can it be heavenly concelebrants? But these dreadful demonic faces, looking at me with such malice unknown to me and exceeding my imagination and ... also from the sanctuary.... But I am not afraid of you for he is ascending to heaven, my fair boy, and you are powerless before his defense, before his light....

I listen to the 'Apostle' on the resurrection and the universal sudden transformation ... and for the first time I understand that it will be so and how it will be...

Does one need to believe that the liturgy is performed with the ministration of angels when I saw ... this? Did not the priest Zachariah likewise see an angel around the altar of incense or did not the one serving with the venerable Sergius see an angel performing the liturgy with him (as his vita relates)? But

even here is it not impertinent, is it possible to make such comparisons? One must! For, we are not comparing ourselves, not our sinful darkness, but what was seen by divine condescension.⁷⁶⁰

Bulgakov writes of his feelings, his vision of an angelic being and a demonic figure – as well as his transformed perception of the reading from the Epistles, which was familiar to him, but acquired a deeper meaning at the service. He claims the reality of this vision and affirms his right to relate it to similar Biblical and hagiographical accounts.

Another extraordinary experience of the angelic presence took place several years later, when Bulgakov was extremely ill. He believed he was about to die, when the consolation from heaven came in the form of his guardian angel. The full account of his disease and the vision is given in his *Sophiology of Death*, but the same experience is also reflected on the pages of *Jacob's Ladder*.⁷⁶¹

These personal encounters with supernatural angelic reality form part of what Bulgakov calls religious experience. He picked up the theme of religious experience from Soloviev and Florenskii.⁷⁶²

For Soloviev the metaphysical idea of all unity (*всеединство*) is a key to his understanding of the significance of religious experience.⁷⁶³ Soloviev distinguishes between religion and religiosity. Religion for him is a reigning principle, the centre of spiritual gravity, which has a universal meaning for everything in existence, whereas religiosity is a personal mood and represents an interest or taste for religious matters in particular persons.⁷⁶⁴ He maintains that experience is essential both for the visible world and for the sphere of religion. However, the facts of inner religious experience need to be accompanied by faith in order to acquire an objective meaning.⁷⁶⁵ The data of religious experience affirmed by religious faith are organised in a coherent system by the way of religious reasoning.

⁷⁶⁰ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 16.

⁷⁶¹ Bulgakov (1996) 'Sophiologia smerti', 361-3; see also Chapter 2.1. of this thesis; Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 18-19.

⁷⁶² See Soloviev (2001) 'Vera, razum i opyt'; Soloviev (1990) 'Krizis zapadnoy filosofii: protiv pozitivistov'.

⁷⁶³ See Bubnov (2003) *Gnoseologicheskie osnovaniya religioznogo opyta v russkoy filosofii rubezha XIX-XX vekov*.

⁷⁶⁴ Soloviev (1944) *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 79, 86.

⁷⁶⁵ Soloviev (1944) *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 105.

He argues that those who exclude ‘the divine principle of all unity’ from their conscience inevitably fall into dependence on materiality. Man loses his position in the reigning centre of the natural world and becomes only one of many natural beings.

‘If before, as the spiritual centre of the universal creation, he embraced in his soul all nature and lived one life with it, loved and understood and therefore governed it; so now, having asserted himself in his separateness, having shut his soul off from everything, he finds himself in an alien and hostile world, which no longer speaks with him in any intelligible language, and which does not understand or obey his word. If previously man had in his consciousness a direct expression of the universal organic connection of all that exists, and that connection (the idea of the all-unity) determined the whole content of his consciousness; then now, no longer having this connection in himself, man loses with it the organising beginning of his inner world - the world of [his] consciousness is transformed into chaos.’⁷⁶⁶

Florenskii’s opening phrase in *The Pillar and Ground of The Truth* reads as follows:

‘Living religious experience as the sole legitimate way to gain knowledge of the dogmas - that is how I would like to express the general theme of my book... Only by relying on immediate experience can one survey the spiritual treasures of the Church and come to see their value.’⁷⁶⁷

Florenskii calls this immediate experience ‘churchliness’ [церковность] or ‘new life in the Spirit’.⁷⁶⁸ According to him, churchliness is not subject to any definition or logical criteria. He argues against the canonical legalism and overly academism of the Western Church and claims that spiritual beauty is the only criterion for Orthodoxy in the spiritual life. One cannot prove Orthodoxy or teach it without experiencing it. The only way to know Orthodoxy is to have experience of it under the guidance of experienced and skilful guides - ‘the spiritual elders’ [старцев].⁷⁶⁹

On the one hand, Florenskii states that it is only possible to know Church dogma through genuine religious experience. ‘But to me it seems a great blasphemy to think that religious truth, “holiness”, can be apprehended in the case of *any* inner state, without asceticism’.⁷⁷⁰ On the other hand, he affirms that dogma as the object of faith necessarily contains an antinomy, which must be accepted and held together by an Orthodox mind. The Church dogmas have a different meaning depending on the stage of spiritual development. ‘For rationality, dogma is only

⁷⁶⁶ Soloviev (1944) *Lectures on Godmanhood*, 200.

⁷⁶⁷ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 5.

⁷⁶⁸ B. Jakim uses the word ‘ecclesiality’ in his translation of *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*.

⁷⁶⁹ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 8-9.

⁷⁷⁰ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 119.

formal...[it] is filled with the sap of life and becomes self-proving Truth only when the soul is filled with grace.⁷⁷¹ Florenskii points out the dangers of false mysticism, or negative religious experience, but does not speak directly about dogma as a criterion for a genuine religious experience.

Florenskii was well acquainted with the recently published book on religious experience by W. James, to which the Russian thinker provides many references.⁷⁷² However, for James, who was a psychologist, the area of religious experience was primarily limited to ‘religious feelings and religious impulses’, focusing therefore on the experience of an individual.⁷⁷³

Florenskii brings another person into the narrative of religious experience – an experienced elder [страец], someone who verifies any given religious experience as genuine. Moreover, the role of the elder is not limited merely to the verification of religious experience. Relations with the elder can become an important religious experience as well. It is remarkable, that an elder played an important role in Bulgakov’s return to the Orthodox Church. He described that memorable experience in the following words:

‘Autumn. A lonely, forgotten hermitage in the woods. A sunny day and the familiar nature of the north. Confusion and impotence control my soul as before. Taking advantage of an opportunity I had come here in the secret hope of encountering God. But here my resolution definitively abandoned me.... I stood through vespers unfeeling and cold, and after it, when the prayers “for those preparing for confession” began, I almost ran out of the church, “went out, weeping bitterly.” In melancholy I walked in the direction of the guest house seeing nothing around me, and I came to my senses ... in the elder's cell. It led me there: I went entirely in another direction as a result of my usual absentmindedness which now was intensified thanks to depression, but in actuality — I knew this then reliably — a miracle happened with me.... When the father saw the prodigal son drawing near, he made haste one more time to meet him. From the elder I heard that all human sins are like a droplet before the ocean of divine mercy. I left him then, forgiven and at peace, trembling and in tears, feeling myself borne up inside the churchyard as if on wings. At the gate I met a startled and happy fellow-traveler who had only just seen me leave the church in confusion. He became an involuntary witness of what had happened with me. “The Lord has passed by,” he said touchingly then....’⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷¹ Florenskii (1997) *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 118.

⁷⁷² James (2002) *The Varieties of Religious Experience: a Study in Human Nature*; The book was translated and published in Russian soon after its first English edition. See *Mnogoobrazie religioznogo opyta*. Translated into Russian by V.G. Malakhieva-Mirovich and M.V. Shick, ed. S. Lurie, Moskva: “Russkaya Mysl”, 1910.

⁷⁷³ James (2002) *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 8,11, 387. For the purposes of his research, James defines religion as ‘the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine’. Ibid, 29-30.

⁷⁷⁴ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 11.

Bulgakov encountered God in his conversation with the elder. The role of the elder was significant in the conversion to Christianity of many educated Russians in the second part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. It was Dostoevsky who brought into the spotlight the phenomenon of the elder in *The Karamazov Brothers*. The renowned elder Amvrosiy, whom Dostoevsky visited together with Soloviev in 1878, was to become the prototype of the elder Zossima in the novel.⁷⁷⁵ Dostoevsky wrote that the elders ‘attracted crowds of worshippers from thousands of versts⁷⁷⁶ around— indeed, from all over Russia— to come and listen to them. And so, what is a starets?⁷⁷⁷ A starets is one who subsumes your soul, your will, into his soul and into his will.’⁷⁷⁸ ‘Both the common people and the noblest in the land flocked to our monastery to prostrate themselves before the startsy, to confess their doubts, their sins, their sorrows, and to seek counsel and instruction.’⁷⁷⁹ ‘This institution— that is, the cult of startsy— does not arise from any theory, but is a practical tradition which evolved in Byzantium and is now already a thousand years old.’⁷⁸⁰ ‘The obligations due to a starets are not the same as the normal “obedience” that has always been practised in our Russian monasteries. They involve constant confession to the starets by his pupils, and constitute an indissoluble link between master and disciple.’⁷⁸¹

‘It was often said of Starets Zosima that, because he had received all who came to him to pour out their hearts, anxious for his advice and healing words, for so many years, because he had absorbed so many revelations and confessions, so much grief into his soul, he had acquired a sensitivity so finely tuned that, from one glance at a stranger's face, he could tell why he had come, what his needs were, and even what kind of suffering tormented his soul, and he astonished, confused, and sometimes almost terrified the supplicant by a recognition of his innermost secret even before a word had been uttered. But Alyosha noticed that many, nearly all, who came to see the starets in private arrived in a state of fear and anxiety, but nearly always left radiant with joy, that the gloomiest face became happy.’⁷⁸²

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. Williams (2014) *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction*, 203-204; Pyman (2001) ‘Dostoevsky in the prism of the orthodox semiosphere’, 109.

⁷⁷⁶ 1 versta = 0.66288 mile

⁷⁷⁷ ‘Starets’ (Russian) - Elder

⁷⁷⁸ Dostoevsky (1998) *Karamazov Brothers*, 32.

⁷⁷⁹ Dostoevsky (1998) *Karamazov Brothers*, 36.

⁷⁸⁰ Dostoevsky (1998) *Karamazov Brothers*, 35.

⁷⁸¹ Dostoevsky (1998) *Karamazov Brothers*, 35.

⁷⁸² Dostoevsky (1998) *Karamazov Brothers*, 36-37.

Bulgakov's own story fits very well Dostoevsky's description of the elder Zossima and might well have been included in the chapter on Father Zossima and his visitors.

Bulgakov and Florenskii were part of the movement in the Russian intelligentsia, who converted to Orthodoxy and became close to the monasteries and their elders. Some interesting details about the elders and an attitude to them are known from N. Berdyaev's autobiography. One must say that Berdyaev himself was rather critical of traditional Orthodoxy, as well as of the cult of the elders [старчество] and the elders [старцы] themselves. He wrote:

'Members of the intelligentsia returning to the Orthodox Church made a cult of starchestvo and sought spiritual guidance from the startsy. At the time this was even more typical of the intelligentsia, in its attempts at self-identification with Orthodoxy, than of the traditional Orthodox who had never left the fold...

At the suggestion of and accompanied by Novoselov I went to the Zossimova Hermitage to see the startsy for myself. We were joined by Bulgakov... The service occupied the greater part of the night. Pavel Florenskii, who at the time was not yet ordained, stood behind me in church...'

However, after his conversations with the elders, Berdyaev

'did not find the things which other people ascribed' to them, and 'discovered nothing that could make <him> join those who surrendered their entire will to the guidance of a starets.'⁷⁸³

Although Bulgakov had a much more successful experience with the elder, their relationship did not last long. There is no evidence that Bulgakov was in a relationship or in correspondence with an elder in the later stages of his life. Bulgakov's work and thought was not verified by elders, and that is what perhaps makes him less Orthodox and less accepted in the Orthodox Church than, for example, Florovsky, who visited the Athonite elder St Siluan and later was in correspondence with his disciple elder Sophrony (Sakharov), the founder of the Monastery of St John the Baptist in Essex.⁷⁸⁴

One has to say that one of the early slavophiles I. Kireevsky was very close to the elders in the Optina Pustyn Monastery. Kireevsky also attended Schelling's famous Berlin lectures and was influenced by the ideas of the German philosopher. In particular, he wrote in his article *Schelling's Speech* (1845):

⁷⁸³ Berdyaev (1950) *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography*, 188-189.

⁷⁸⁴ Sophrony (2008) *Perepiska s protoiereem Georgiem Florovskim*.

‘According to Schelling, religion is not just knowledge about God, it is neither abstract, nor ideal, but actual, existential, and real relationship with God’.⁷⁸⁵

The ideas of Schelling resonated with the life and thought of Russian thinkers: Kireevsky, Florenskii, and Bulgakov. It is possible to suggest that the communication with the elders was for them precisely that experiential dimension of religion of which Schelling spoke.

On a theoretical level, Florenskii adopts the terminology coined by Schelling and employs for his own purposes Schelling’s methodological division between theoretical knowledge (*negative philosophy*) and practical knowledge (*positive philosophy*).

On a practical level, it can be argued that both Florenskii and Bulgakov were in line with Schelling’s idea of the experiential proof of God.⁷⁸⁶ Schelling said:

‘The experience to which the positive philosophy is progressing is not just a particular one, but the total experience from beginning to end. It is the whole of experience. But for precisely that reason, this proof (Beweis) itself is not just the beginning or a part of the science (least of all some syllogistic proof posed at the pinnacle of philosophy); it is the whole science, namely the whole positive philosophy: This is nothing other than the continuing demonstration (Erweis), ever growing and becoming stronger with each step, of the actually existing God. And because the realm of the actual in which this [demonstration] unfolds is not a completed or finished one—for even if nature now is ended and stands still, yet in history there is continual movement and progress—because to this extent the realm of actuality is not a finished one, but is rather one continually approaching its completion, so too the proof [viz., of God’s existence] is never finished.

...

The object of positive philosophy is the object of a proof which, to be sure, is already accessible at earlier levels of development, but which yet is not for that reason a finished proof. There could still always arise in some succeeding stage a contradiction (Widerspruch) to what went before. Even the present is here no limit, but there opens here the glimpse into a future which will also be nothing other than the continuing proof of the existence of that power ruling over being, [a proof] of that which is no longer merely das Seiende (with which the negative philosophy concerned itself), but which is das Überseiende.’⁷⁸⁷

Bulgakov dedicates the Introduction in his *Unfading Light* to an analysis of the nature of religious consciousness. The introduction consists of seven short essays, developing the theme of religious experience. In the first essay ‘How is Religion possible?’ Bulgakov shares his own religious experiences and offers his theoretical interpretation.

⁷⁸⁵ Kireevsky (2006) ‘Rech Schellinga’, 115 [in Russian, translation ours].

⁷⁸⁶ Beach (1994) *The Potencies of God(s): Schelling’s Philosophy of Mythology*, 154-162.

⁷⁸⁷ Cited in Beach (1994) *The Potencies of God(s): Schelling’s Philosophy of Mythology*, 158-159.

There are several aspects to religious experience, which Bulgakov expounds and substantiates in his first essay. Bulgakov points out that authentic religious experience pertains to the sphere of reality, being ontologically grounded. According to Bulgakov, God, angels, demons, heaven and hell have real existence outside human consciousness. This is neither the play of human imagination nor the work of the subconsciousness.

‘Religious experience assures the human being of the reality of another, divine world, not so as to demonstrate its existence or by various conclusions to convince him of its necessity, but so as to lead him to a living, immediate bond with religious reality, and show it to him. Only the human being who really has encountered divinity on his life's journey, who has been overtaken by it and on whom it has been poured out with its prevailing force has embarked on an authentically religious path.’⁷⁸⁸

Bulgakov distinguishes religious experience in its immediacy from any kind of scientific, philosophical, aesthetic, or ethical experience. He does not deny that there can be some philosophical, aesthetic, or ethical elements present in the given religious experience, but they themselves do not comprehend the religious in its distinctiveness. Bulgakov argues that religion is based on a personal encounter with the Divinity of religious geniuses and those influenced by them.

‘The life of saints, ascetics, prophets, and founders of religions and the living monuments of religion — literature, cult, custom, in a word, that which can be called the phenomenology of religion — here side by side with the personal experience of each person, is what leads more reliably to cognition in the domain of religion than abstract philosophizing about it.’⁷⁸⁹

Bulgakov further argues that the possibility of a personal religious encounter supposes the existence of a special ‘religious organ’, ‘the eye of noetic knowing that penetrates higher reality where neither the mental nor physical eye reaches’.⁷⁹⁰ He reiterates, several pages on:

‘Whoever does not allow a special religious attestation and denies a special organ of religious knowledge must come to a halt in astonishment before the universal historical fact of religion, as some kind of general mass hypnosis and insanity.’⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁸ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 7.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid; Cf. One of the recent publications is very close to Bulgakov’s suggestion: Ellens, Harold (2013) *Heaven, hell, and the afterlife: eternity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, xv - xvi: ‘It is apparently the case that all humans experience the kind of moments which, if taken seriously, should be seen as a possible indication of the directions in which real answers to the question of life after life may lie. The phenomenological data of what are called paranormal events in personal lives is voluminous throughout history and if studied carefully would no doubt manifest patterns and categories accessible to scientific analysis. Quite likely such attention to the available human testimony would produce a heuristic science of the paranormal. Such scientific study would almost certainly demonstrate that what is now considered paranormal is really very normal, and perhaps more normal than what we consider normal experience today, in this post-Enlightenment age.’

⁷⁹⁰ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 7.

⁷⁹¹ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 16.

In the Orthodox ascetic tradition this ‘religious organ’ is called the heart.⁷⁹²

In the second essay ‘Transcendent and Immanent’, Bulgakov employs the concepts of the transcendent and the immanent to discuss the difference between authentic religious experience and non-authentic, or occult experience. Whereas religious experience is the living bond between the immanent and transcendent, occultism, according to Bulgakov, tries to expand the immanent at the expense of the transcendent. He stresses the role of prayer in the authentic religious experience, which is that ‘living bond’ between the immanent and transcendent worlds:

‘Up until now prayer remains insufficiently understood and valued in its religious-“gnoseological” meaning as the foundation of religious experience. What does prayer represent according to its “transcendental” makeup? First of all, it is the striving of all the spiritual forces of a human being, of the whole human person, for the Transcendent. Every prayer (of course, sincere and ardent, not only external) realizes the command: *transcende te ipsum* [go beyond yourself]. The human makes the effort in prayer to come out of himself, to rise above himself.’⁷⁹³

In the essays ‘Faith and Feelings’, ‘Religion and Ethics’, and ‘Religion and Philosophy’ Bulgakov critically discusses the approaches to religious experience exemplified in the works by Schleiermacher, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. Finally, in the essay ‘Faith and Dogma’ he affirms the necessity of the dogmas of the Church for the communication of religious experience:

‘For only in thought, in word does religious experience receive certainty, only thus is sentimental vagueness (Schleiermacher) overcome and the final chasing imparted to myth; only in thought and through thought are its objectivity and catholicity definitively recognized... The catholic nature of dogma in particular is revealed in the fact that only in word and through word can religious experience be initially communicated to other people, thanks to which the preaching of religion is possible, the “service of the word”.’⁷⁹⁴

8.2.2. Liturgical prayer as a source for Bulgakov’s anthropological language

References to the liturgical texts abound in all of Bulgakov’s theological works and in his book on angels in particular.⁷⁹⁵ In fact, some of those texts were used by Bulgakov on a regular basis as part of his prayer routine. First of all, it concerns *The Canon to the Guardian Angel* and the texts of *the Holy Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*, which he celebrated very often, sometimes

⁷⁹² Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 14.

⁷⁹³ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 24.

⁷⁹⁴ Bulgakov (2012) *Unfading Light*, 78.

⁷⁹⁵ See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

daily. Bulgakov would probably agree with St Justin (Popovich) who affirmed: ‘The Church expresses herself through the life of prayer brilliantly and fully’.⁷⁹⁶ In fact, all the major beliefs and dogmas of the Orthodox Church are expressed in its liturgical texts in a poetical form.⁷⁹⁷

Bulgakov emphasises the importance of the liturgical sources for his angelology:

‘As always, in her life, in her practical veneration of God and her liturgy the Church knows much more than what enters into her dogmatic consciousness and theologizing. She triumphantly bears witness to the angels’ constant communion with us: with respect to iconography, the presence of icons of angels in church buildings is evidence of their actual presence, and with respect to hymnography, the attestations of the prayerful accompaniment of angels in the temple are constantly repeated.’⁷⁹⁸

Jean Danielou argues that, according to the ancient Christian tradition, angels participate in the work of redemption⁷⁹⁹ and also in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist whenever it is celebrated.⁸⁰⁰ The same thoughts can be found in the liturgical texts, particularly in the *Prayer of the Entrance*:

‘O Master, Lord our God, who hast established in heaven orders and hosts of angels and archangels for the service of Thy glory: grant that together with our entrance, there may be an entrance of holy angels, ministering with us and with us glorifying Thy goodness. For to Thee belongs all glory, honour and worship, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.’⁸⁰¹

From this short prayer one can draw some general ideas about the angelic world. First of all, angels dwell in the heavens; secondly, there are some divisions among them (‘orders and hosts of angels and archangels’); thirdly, they have been appointed by God to the service of His glory; and finally, an interaction between men and angels is possible and desirable.

There is no doubt, that Bulgakov knew by heart the above-mentioned prayer as well as other hymns from the liturgy. One can argue that the liturgical texts contributed significantly to

⁷⁹⁶ St Justin (Popovich) (2004) *The Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church*.

⁷⁹⁷ For example, see: Bulgakov (2009) *The Burning Bush*, 5: ‘The veneration of the Mother of God, which rests, of course, on defined ecclesiodogmatic doctrine about her, is confirmed by church *practice*, primarily through the liturgy which is actuated by the Holy Spirit and which expresses the prayed life of dogma. On the contrary, school doctrine about this subject in Orthodoxy is inconsistent and unclear, it is absent to a significant extent or, what is far worse, it falls into a polemical dependence on Catholic dogmatization, digressing from its straightforward and positive task.’

⁷⁹⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 25.

⁷⁹⁹ Danielou (1957) *The Angels and Their Mission According to the Fathers of the Church*, 24-54.

⁸⁰⁰ Danielou (1957) *The Angels and Their Mission According to the Fathers of the Church*, 55-68.

⁸⁰¹ *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 9.

Bulgakov's understanding of the relationship between the angelic and human worlds, and encouraged his particular emphasis on their union.

A number of texts in the liturgy of St John Chrysostom point to the unity between humans and angels. In some places Bulgakov mentions those texts in passing without giving a direct reference: 'The holy Church in her prayers and canticles constantly bears witness to the fact that the holy angels stand before the throne of God "singing the triumphal hymn, shouting, crying and saying..."⁸⁰² Bulgakov does not find it necessary to mention that these words come from the Eucharistic canon. Immediately after this exclamation, however, the priest continues *The Prayer of the Anaphora*: 'With these blessed hosts, O Master, Who lovest mankind, we also cry aloud and say: Holy art Thou and all-Holy, Thou and Thine only-begotten Son and Thy Holy Spirit; Holy art Thou and all-Holy, and magnificent is Thy glory...' ⁸⁰³ These words not only affirm but also perform, on the part of the priest, the unity in prayer with the angels.

One should also mention *the Cherubic Hymn* which is sung by the choir during the Great Entrance and is recited three times by the priest and deacon:

'We, who in a mystery represent the Cherubim and sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, let us now lay aside every care of this life. That we may receive the King of all, invisibly escorted by the hosts of angels. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.'⁸⁰⁴

On the one hand, the hymn says that we represent the Cherubim chanting the thrice-holy hymn. This means, one might assume, that we replace them in the course of the Liturgy. On the other hand, the last clause affirms that the angels invisibly participate in the mystery and therefore celebrate with us.

⁸⁰² Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 119.

⁸⁰³ *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 37.

⁸⁰⁴ *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 25, 28; This chant is mentioned throughout the manuscript tradition. Cedrenus in his *Historiarum Compendium*, writing in the eleventh century, dates the Cherubic Hymn to the ninth year of Justin II's reign, in 574: 'Under him [=Justin] it was decreed that *Cenae tuae mysticae* be chanted on Holy Thursday. Also the image "not made with hands" came from Camulianis, a village in Cappadocia, and the venerated wood from the city of Apamea in Syria Secunda. And it was decreed also that the Cherubic Hymn be sung.' (PG 121, 748.) Taft suggests the Cherubic Hymn was composed in Constantinople. (Taft (1975) *The Great Entrance*, 54, 68-69. cf. Kucharek (1971) *The Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom: Its Origin and Evolution*, 482-483.)

The Trisagion hymn is referred to in *Jacob's Ladder*.⁸⁰⁵ A fundamental Christian tenet of creation of all things from non-existence is reflected in the text of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom in the prayer of the Trisagion.⁸⁰⁶ This prayer has a rich dogmatic content. The creation of man out of nothing (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος) in God's image and likeness (κατ' εἰκόνα σὴν καὶ ὁμοίωσιν), the teaching on the constitution of human nature, sin and repentance and salvation and sanctification of man are all contained in this prayer.

‘Ο Holy God, Who art at rest amidst the holy ones, hymned by the Seraphim with the thrice-holy song, glorified by the Cherubim and worshipped by every heavenly power, Who hast brought all things from nothing into being, and hast created man after Thine image and likeness, adorning him with Thine every gift’.⁸⁰⁷

It is noteworthy that this prayer begins with mentioning the Seraphim, the Cherubim and all the heavenly hosts who unceasingly glorify God. Although the anthropological part of this prayer is much more significant and longer, it is not our focus now. Let us pay attention to the expression which can be found at the point of junction of the two parts of the prayer: “Who hast brought all things from nothing into being”. This links anthropology and angelology, not only through its location in the text but also through its very meaning pointing out the common ontological base in creation by God from non-being.

Furthermore, Bulgakov mentions the association of the guardian angel with peace referring to the liturgical petitions.⁸⁰⁸

The first spiritual condition of participating in the liturgy is peace (Matt 5:23-24).

Ἐν εἰρήνῃ τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθῶμεν

‘In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

⁸⁰⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 124. The earliest evidence of the use of the Trisagion is found in the documents of the Council of Chalcedon (451). By the end of the 5th century, the Trisagion had already been used throughout the East, including the Monophysite and Nestorian Churches. The Church tradition tells about the divine inspiration of the Trisagion during a severe earthquake at Constantinople at the time of Patriarch Proclus (434-446). Whatever is the source of its origin, this chant appears to have been included into the Liturgy at Constantinople sometime between 430 and 450 and its position in the Liturgy was certainly fixed by the eighth century. See: Kucharek (1971) *The Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom: Its Origin and Evolution*, 402-405.

⁸⁰⁶ Kucharek suggests that the origin of this prayer can go back at least to the 7th century as its text is found in the 8th century Armenian version of Chrysostom's Liturgy. See: Kucharek (1971) *The Byzantine-Slav Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom: Its Origin and Evolution*, 402.

⁸⁰⁷ *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 10.

⁸⁰⁸ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 11, 86.

For the peace from on high...

For the peace of the whole world, for the stability of the holy churches of God, and for the union of all, let us pray to the Lord...'⁸⁰⁹

The words of peace are the first words of the Divine Liturgy after the priest's opening blessing, as they were the first words of the risen Christ to his disciples (John 20:19,21). The theme of peace is one of the most central throughout the Liturgy.⁸¹⁰

Peace is the sign of God's Kingdom, 'for the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink: but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17).

On the one hand, peace is the preliminary condition, the right mood which in approaching God ('In peace let us pray to the Lord'). On the other hand, peace is the subject of supplications and something that we hope to receive from God and which is only possible as 'the gift from above'. This duality reveals the necessity but insufficiency of mere human effort towards obtaining peace. This, in turn, may be the reason why the petition for 'an angel of peace' has appeared in the

⁸⁰⁹ *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 1.

⁸¹⁰ See in *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*:

'Again and again in peace let us pray to the Lord'. (5 times)

'Peace be with you all' (3 times)

The Litany of Supplication and the Litany Before the Lord's Prayer (The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, 45):

'That the whole day may be perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless, let us ask of the Lord.'

'An angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies, let us ask of the Lord.'

'Those things which are good and profitable for our souls, and peace for the world, let us ask of the Lord.'

'That we may complete the rest of our life in peace and repentance let us ask of the Lord.'

'For a Christian end to our life, painless, unashamed and peaceful, and for a good answer before the dread judgment seat of Christ, let us ask.'

The Anaphora (The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, 35):

'Let us stand aright; let us stand with fear; let us attend, that we may present the Holy Offering in peace.

Mercy and peace, a sacrifice of praise'.

Intercessions (The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, 43):

'...Grant them, O Lord, peaceful times, that in their tranquility we too may live a calm and peaceful life in all godliness and holiness...'

'...and grant that, for Thy holy churches, in peace...'

Thanksgiving (The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, 58-60):

'Having asked that the whole day may be perfect, holy, peaceful, and sinless, let us entrust ourselves and one another, and our whole life unto Christ our God.'

'Let us go forth in peace.'

'...Give peace to Thy world, to Thy Churches, to the priests, and to all Thy people...'

Ps 33 '...Turn away from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it...'

litanies: ‘An angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies, let us ask of the Lord.’⁸¹¹

Finally, Bulgakov illustrates his idea of the co-humanity of angels and co-angelicity of men by referring to the rite of the liturgy, as well as to the practical requirements for clergy concerning their sexual abstinence before the service:

‘The Church attributes to angels a special participation in prayers and in liturgy, especially in the celebration of the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ. And the celebrants, present before the Lord’s altar, are considered worthy of the angelic service: the priest who celebrates the liturgy is “an angel of the Lord.” Priesthood represents an angelic order, although it does not have to be so in the course of an entire life. Its union with monasticism constitutes an exception. In entering into marriage, a priest sets out on the path not of the renunciation of the flesh but of its inner conquest. Monasticism, on the other hand, is an angelic condition not only in virtue of the ascetic renunciation of the flesh but also in virtue of the unceasing presence before God in prayer, which is the main spiritual task of the monk. Finally, the angelic condition is connected with leadership in the Church, which is why a bishop is usually called an “angel of the Church”: like a guardian angel, he prays to God for the Church.’⁸¹²

8.3. Angels and gender

The idea of the co-humanity of angels and the co-angelicity of men leads Bulgakov to raise the question of the possibility of gender differences in the angelic world. This is one of the most striking examples of how Bulgakov employs the language of anthropology to express his thoughts on angels and their relationship with human beings.

The substantiation of the male and female principles goes back to Plato and Aristotle. The opposition male/female was widely used by such Russian philosophers and thinkers of the Silver Age as Soloviev, Rozanov, Berdyaev, Ern, Florenskii and others. Bulgakov discusses the problem of gender differences from the perspective of the fullness of the human image in *The Unfading Light* and touches on it in a number of other works. In *Jacob's Ladder* he says:

⁸¹¹ The expression ‘an angel of peace’ appears in the Jewish apocalyptic literature, where the angel of peace is the one who accompanies Enoch and explains the meaning of his visions. See in *Enoch*, 52,5; 53,4.

⁸¹² Bulgakov (2010) *The Friend of the Bridegroom*, 170.

‘The distinction of the male and female principle is not only bodily but also spiritual.’⁸¹³

The male principle is associated with the primacy of reason and thought over the sense of beauty. Correspondingly, the characteristic of the female principle is the primacy of the aesthetic sense and the activity of heart over mind. These fundamental principles are found not only in creation but also in the Holy Trinity, where the Second Hypostasis can be related to the male principle. The pre-eternal Logos is incarnate in the male figure of Jesus Christ. The Third Hypostasis is associated with the female principle. The Holy Spirit descended upon the Virgin Mary and is the Spirit of Life, the Comforter, and the Beautifier. Bulgakov continues:

‘If the male and female in humankind, as spiritual principles, have their highest foundation in the personal properties of the Second and Third hypostases, and are correlative to them, then they cannot be subject to annihilation in the resurrection’⁸¹⁴.

He emphasises that the male and female principles are not mutually exclusive but complementary. ‘The fullness of the image of God, of the Holy Trinity,... is not contained in the male or female creature in their fragmentedness but presupposes their reunion’.⁸¹⁵

As has been mentioned in one of our previous sections, the creation of angels after the image of God is one of the accepted tenets of early Christian and patristic writings. However, there is no single opinion concerning the manner in which the image of the Holy Trinity is reflected in angels. Bulgakov mentions two main possibilities in this regard. First, that every individual angel can bear the image of the Trinity. Alternatively, the entire angelic hierarchy as a whole may be created after the image of the Holy Trinity, and consequently some of the angelic ranks as well as individual angels would bear the image of particular Persons of the Trinity. Taking a clue from Dionysius, Bulgakov leans to the second option:

‘In the threefold triple hierarchy of the angelic ranks one can distinguish not only a triplicity of degrees according to the proximity to God, but also a triplicity of modes of their standing before the three persons of the Holy Trinity’.⁸¹⁶

⁸¹³ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 87.

⁸¹⁴ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 91.

⁸¹⁵ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 88; cf. Maximus' *Ambigua ad Ioannem 41*.

⁸¹⁶ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 80.

He argues therefore that there are angels of the First, of the Second, and of the Third Hypostasis. Here Bulgakov turns to the problem of gender and introduces the idea of male and female in the angelic world. Indeed the angels of the Second Hypostasis become associated with the male principle and the angels of the Third Hypostasis with the female one. Finally, Bulgakov supposes some spiritual correlation between male or female human beings and their guardian angel:

‘Each soul seeks itself, its manifestation in the other, in the friend. And this friend, this heavenly friend, “safeguards”, by helping the human not with what it already had as a given, but what it seeks as something proposed, cherishes as a dream and loves in advance as the slaking of the thirst of being, as consolation. Does not the masculine spirit, which is already marked with the seal of the Logos, and carries it within as the power of his being, have all the more need of a heavenly guardian of the image of the Third hypostasis who inspires and gives joy and comfort? And on the contrary: the feminine spirit, already imprinted with the seal of the Spirit Comforter and through Him provided with the force of life and beauty, requires the heavenly guardian of the image of the Logos which the trembling feeling element seeks and gazes upon spiritually?’⁸¹⁷

Lossky criticized Bulgakov’s ideas. According to him, it is Bulgakov’s invention that the Son and the Holy Spirit represent the male and female principles in God. He argued that the Logos assumed the ‘male nature’ in the Incarnation because ‘the nature of Adam is more primal and complete than the nature of Eve which emanated from the former and “was taken from the husband”’.⁸¹⁸

One can see that to a certain extent Bulgakov’s ideas in the field of gender agree with some of the presuppositions of the latest ‘postmodern’ theories. In particular, Bulgakov maintains the difference between sexuality and gender. He also recognises that the human spirit has both masculine and feminine features, but with the definite predominance of one of the principles. The fullness of human nature supposes both principles united in one person in an “androgynous unity”.⁸¹⁹ Bulgakov calls gender the essential characteristic of the human being belonging to the sphere of spirit. On the one hand, gender is something which is given to us from the beginning. On the other

⁸¹⁷ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 97-98.

⁸¹⁸ Lossky (1936) *Spor of Sofii. Part 2*, §7.

⁸¹⁹ Bulgakov (2010) *Jacob's Ladder*, 89.

hand, however, its mystery is to be perceived and its fullness achieved in the eschatological perspective.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In the discussion of angelology by Bulgakov the most fundamental language of speaking of angels is that of anthropology. This theological language is based on the immediate experience of angels and reflects human feelings, emotions and sensations. It is a descriptive language, used to describe situations when what is perceived as angelic reality enters human experience. Close analysis of the text of Bulgakov's *Jacob's Ladder* demonstrates that, although the places in the text where the language of anthropology is employed can be easily identified, they are not self-sufficient, but have the purpose of creating a foundation, on which the author develops his theology and sophiology. The most obvious example of this is the text of the Introduction to *Jacob's Ladder* with its telling subtitle *On a Heavenly Friend*.

Bulgakov draws his inspiration from two sources, and also his themes, and sometimes his terminology. The first is Scripture. It is not accidental that Bulgakov's works abound in references to Biblical texts. He considered Holy Scripture to be the primary and universal source of faith above any sort of tradition. That said, it must be emphasised that, for Bulgakov, the Biblical accounts of angels represent a second-hand religious experience. Bulgakov's own liturgical and mystical experience appears to be another important source of his angelology. The theme of religious experience was previously developed in the works of Schelling, Soloviev, and Florenskii, whose influence on Bulgakov in this respect is not to be dismissed. Bulgakov argues that religion must have its own logic, different to that of science or philosophy. He likens religious experience to the experience of beauty, but does not equal them. Whatever importance is given to personal experience, it is always limited by dogma as well as being verified by someone more experienced

in spiritual matters - an elder (*cmapeu*). Bulgakov thus admits that, in some cases, personal experience may not be genuine, but misleading and false. However, experience of prayer, especially of liturgical communal prayer, verified by the Church and expressed in Her worship is, according to Bulgakov, a reliable source in thinking about angels.

Part 3: Conclusion

In the final part of the thesis we have been dealing with the terms of the language of anthropology in Dionysius and Bulgakov. It is assumed that the anthropological language and the problems of anthropology are at the heart of Christian theology, because it has the Incarnation at its core.

The angelology of the CD draws on several principal sources analysed in this thesis. First of all, Dionysius' own insights, expressed in his metalanguage of hierarchy and conditioned by the needs of his historical moment. Second, the philosophical and theological concepts prior to the CD provide Dionysius with terminology and a conceptual framework, which ensure that any discussion of angels is comprehensible to his contemporaries. Finally, the Bible is the most foundational source for Dionysius, providing him with a variety of the angelic images and symbolic descriptions. Chapter 7 showed the difference between the terms 'symbol' and 'icon' when applied to the Biblical descriptions of angels. Here was also discussed the ontological relationship between angelology and anthropology in Dionysius and, here too were analysed the terms love ($\epsilon\rho\omega\varsigma$) and light ($\phi\omega\varsigma$), which elucidate this relationship.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by looking at the language of anthropology in Bulgakov. It demonstrates that the anthropological language must be read in the perspective of sophiology. In fact, it is also impossible to understand sophiology without realising its rootedness in religious

experience, in particular – in Bulgakov’s personal religious experience. The presence and interaction of all three theological languages in Bulgakov’s writings cannot be ignored at the expense of one or another language. One cannot say that sophiology is merely an expression of certain feelings and intuitions, nor is it limited to pure conceptual and dogmatic formulations. It certainly has its own logic, as was established in Chapter 2. However, the dogma is seen as putting limits on the play of thought and imagination – it is neither invalidated nor overridden by sophiology. Although, as has been mentioned, there are no antinomies in the language of anthropology, the antinomic approach returns again once we try to simultaneously keep all three languages with their own particular logic.

General Conclusion

In the concluding section we would like to summarise the findings of this thesis by reiterating the main principles of distinguishing different theological languages in the works of Dionysius and Sergius Bulgakov, and by comparing their respective angelologies in the light of this approach.

One may notice that there are only two chapters (Chapters 4 and 7) out of eight dedicated exclusively to Dionysius, whereas Bulgakov has four. The remaining two chapters (Chapter 1 and 6) contain sections on both authors. Overall, the prevalence of material on Bulgakov is indisputable. This predominance can be explained by our initial interest in his angelology. One may say that we came to Dionysius via Bulgakov. Indeed, the guiding conjecture of this thesis, that hierarchy in Dionysius and Sophia in Bulgakov can be read as their respective theological metalanguages, came to my mind while analysing Bulgakov's works. Although we have analysed certain points of Dionysius' influence on Bulgakov's angelology, in particular as regards the idea of hierarchy and the nature of angels, our major task has been approbation of the idea of metalanguage in the theological analysis of the angelology of both authors.

We can speak about a theological metalanguage only if there is something distinctively new in the work of the author. This may be either new terminology or a new reference system. It has been demonstrated that the term 'hierarchy' is certainly new and did not exist before Dionysius. Apparently, one term is not enough to form a language, unless this term refers to a fundamental concept and acquires the features of a universal point of reference within the analysed work. It has been shown that such is the case with the Dionysian hierarchy. The term 'hierarchy' denotes a concept applied to different aspects of created reality. Apart from this, it is employed to form a number of other complex terms, which are widely used in different treatises of the CD. Among those new terms and expressions belonging to the language of hierarchy in Dionysius we have dealt with the following: οὐρανία ἱεραρχία, ἀνθρώπινα ἱεραρχία, καθ' ἡμᾶς

ιεραρχία, ιεραρχική πραγματεία, ιεραρχικός θεσμός, ιεραρχικός λόγος, ιεραρχική παράδοση, νομική ιεραρχία, ιεραρχική ἐπιστήμη, τῶν οὐρανίων νοῶν ιεραρχία, ιεραρχικῶς ἀνάγεται, κατὰ νοῦν ιεραρχικόν, ιεραρχικῶς ἐννόησον - to name just a few.

What are the benefits of the approach to hierarchy as a metalanguage?

First of all, the highlighting of hierarchy as a metalanguage allowed us to articulate clearly the most significant original contribution of Dionysius to theological discourse. It is conditioned by the above-mentioned characteristic of the novelty of a metalanguage.

Secondly, when hierarchy is seen as one of the concepts along with the other neo-Platonic philosophical and Christian theological concepts, it is inevitably reduced to only one of its aspects, as it has to be incorporated in the previously existing systems of thought instead of being analysed as an independent concept in its own right. The understanding of hierarchy as a metalanguage preserves its original variety of meanings.

Thirdly, the extrapolation of the concept of hierarchy and its incorporation in the neo-Platonic paradigm of thought is ahistorical, as such an approach combines earlier philosophical systems with a later concept; whereas the reading of hierarchy as a metalanguage requires analysis of the historical context of the creation of the CD. In fact, it does not exclude the analysis of the preceding philosophical terms and concepts, it only sets justified limits to such an analysis. The idea of a metalanguage points to the possible concerns of Dionysius expressed by the idea of hierarchy.

Finally, the reading of hierarchy as a metalanguage confirms the Orthodoxy of Dionysius. His Christianity is evident when the logic of different theological languages in his works is examined and clearly pointed out.

The main advantage of speaking of Sophia as a metalanguage is that it corresponds to Bulgakov's own understanding of sophiology as an interpretation without the rejecting or changing of any dogmas of the Church. We have seen that the interpretation of certain texts in

Bulgakov can differ, depending on whether Sophia is or is not read as a metalanguage. On the whole, reading Sophia as a metalanguage helps us to save Bulgakov himself from the accusation ‘heresy’, which otherwise would imply that Bulgakov wanted to impose on all Christians his understanding as the only correct one for all time. However, the reading of Sophia as a metalanguage does not prevent us from the need to assess Bulgakov’s interpretation on the subject of its Orthodoxy.

In the course of our analysis, we have demonstrated that it is possible to speak of three different theological languages in the angelologies of each of our authors. These three constitute three chronological and logical layers of interpretation in their works. The upper layer is the most recent one in each of the authors and is called the metalanguage of the second level. This is hierarchy in Dionysius and Sophia in Bulgakov. These concepts were introduced by our respective authors and applied in their discussion of angels. Each author had his own reason for employing a new theological metalanguage. The difference is that, whereas we know why Bulgakov developed a new theological language from his own words, we can only guess the reasons of Dionysius. Bulgakov saw in the concept of Sophia a possibility of new theological interpretations, which were necessary to bridge a gap between the Church and the secularised educated society of his time. In particular, Bulgakov’s angelology appears to be instrumental in the construction of a new Christian anthropology. In this context, the traditional Christian guardian angel is known as ‘the idea of the human person’ and ‘our heavenly I’. The angels are ‘the Sophianic seeds of the whole earthly, human world’ and ‘the sum total of ideas, themes, and paradigms of the world in the hypostatic form of being’.

It is more complicated with Dionysius, who did not state in his writings the purpose for the introduction of the term hierarchy. One can, however, suggest his purpose judging from the historical context of his writings, as well as from some internal hints in the CD. We pointed out two main considerations in this respect. First, the post-Chalcedon situation in the Eastern Church was characterised by an active search for new theological formulations that would reconcile the

defenders and opponents of the decisions of the fourth Ecumenical Council. That Dionysius employed a new theological language, which allowed him to avoid the controversial Christological formulations, is very plausible. Indeed, the goal of every hierarchy is defined in the CD as theosis, the concept previously discussed, mainly in connection with the language of the Incarnation. Second, the monastic provenance of the Dionysian Corpus points to the upbringing of monks as another possible purpose for the introduction of the metalanguage of hierarchy, which is reflected in the text of the CD.

The middle layer of terminology in both authors is the language of theology and philosophy. It comprises all the philosophical, ‘non-Biblical’ terms and concepts which are employed in speaking of the angels in the analysed treatises. This is the metalanguage of the first level. In Dionysius we dealt with the following terms: τάξις, ἐπιστήμη, ἐνέργεια, εικόνα, σύμβολον, θέωσις, ἐπιστροφή, φύσις, νοῦς, οὐσία, ὑπόστασις, αἰὼν, χρόνος. In Bulgakov we focused on the terms ‘nature’ (*природа*) and ‘essence’ (*сущность*), as well as on hierarchy, which belongs to the metalanguage of the first level in the Russian author but was analysed in Chapter 1 because of the thematical consistency. The middle layer in Bulgakov also includes the extremely important for him terms ‘hypostasis’ and ‘person’ (*личность*). Though etymologically close to ‘hypostasis’, the term ‘hypostaticity’ was coined by Bulgakov and belongs therefore to the metalanguage of the second level in his theology. The following designations of angels in Bulgakov can be said to belong to the metalanguage of the first level: ‘noetic heaven’, ‘the ranks of angels’, ‘hierarchy’, ‘the bodiless powers’, ‘the world of noetic powers’, and ‘bodiless spirits’.

Both Dionysius and Bulgakov accepted the language of the Bible, or the language of the prophets, with the description of angels as found in Scripture, without any alterations and criticism. This is whereon the argument for their Christianity rests. This is also the language of the liturgical poetry and hymns, where the relation between men and angels is not only conceptualised but is realised and fulfilled in the experience of prayer. In Dionysius we

discussed the following terms: ἔρωσ, ἀγάπη, φῶς, ἀγαθὸς καθηγεμόνος, διδάσκαλος. While speaking of the angels in the language of anthropology, Bulgakov employed the following expressions: ‘heavenly friend’, ‘heavenly pedagogy’; he refers to an angel as ‘the other for each human being’, ‘a spiritual warrior’, ‘a companion’, and ‘an educator’. Although angels are described in Scripture in the language of symbols, Dionysius proves that it is also possible to speak about the heavenly beings in the language of hierarchy.

The God of the Bible and the God of Dionysius is the God Almighty Creator of the visible and invisible worlds. God creates everything in beauty and in order. The Creator does not abandon His creation but supports and perfects its existence in various ways through the divine providence. The concept of hierarchy in Dionysius appears to be the universal principle of the relation between God and creation. According to this principle, the angels closely partake in the life of humankind. To be part of hierarchy means to be responsible not only for your own position in it and corresponding purification, illumination and perfection, but also for those ‘lower ranks’ who rely on you, who are purified illumined and perfected through the divine illuminations transmitted through you. Every member of the hierarchy acquires a vested interest in the spiritual progression of all other members. In this sense, there is no separation between heaven and earth. Both heaven and earth are expected to contribute their part to the realization of the will of God in creation. This relatedness of the angelic and human worlds, which is so forcefully pronounced in Bulgakov’s Sophiology, can already be seen in Dionysius. In order to succeed in one’s spiritual journey, one has to preserve and foster an existing relation between the two worlds at one’s own level. This is achieved through prayer and contemplation, not least through the prayerful conversation with one’s guardian angel. Such conversation with the angels is not limited to certain ecstatic moments, detached from everyday life, as we cannot say that our everyday life is no less relevant to our salvation as any so-called ‘mystic experiences’. Moreover, those ascetics who have been recognised by the Orthodox Church as exemplary monks and nuns are addressed in hymns as ‘instructors of monastics and conversers with the

angels'.⁸²⁰ One can say that, according to both Dionysius and Bulgakov, angels are intimately engaged with our lives. Belonging to the community of the heavenly beings, they are not excluded from our earthly troubles and discussions because of the fact of their immediate relationship with their counterpart human beings. In other words, both theologians would agree with K. Barth that the role of the invisible world of angels is indispensable in salvation history as well as in the teaching of the Church about the Kingdom of God, which is also called the Kingdom of Heaven, and which 'is not coming with things that can be observed' (Luke 17: 20).⁸²¹

⁸²⁰ *General Menaion*, <http://www.st-sergius.org/services/menaion/Monastic.pdf>

⁸²¹ Barth (1961) *Church Dogmatics*, Vol.III,3, 431-433.

Abbreviations

CD	<i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i>
CH	<i>De Caelesti Hierarchia</i>
EH	<i>De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia</i>
DN	<i>De Divinis Nominibus</i>
MT	<i>De Mystica Theologia</i>
ST	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>
JL	<i>Jacob's Ladder</i>
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
GNO	Grigorii Nysseni Opera
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
SCh	Sources Chrétiennes

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