Amsterdam Lectures 2011-12:

Eastern Orthodox Theology: a Personal Introduction

Lecture III: The Doctrine of Creation

The first article of the Creed reads: ‘I believe in One God, Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible’. The spelling out of what has been made, or created – heaven and earth, all things visible and invisible – is partly to underline the fact that God created everything; there is nothing that exists that he did not create, apart from the Holy Trinity, which is consubstantial, *homoousios*, with God the Father. But the mention of heaven and things invisible reminds us that the created order is not limited to the world of visible earthly beings; we shall have more to say of that later on. Creation, then, is included in the first article of the creed, along with the existence of God the Father. The prominence of the doctrine of creation is further underlined by the fact that the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, begins with an account of the creation of the world in six days (Gen. 1:1–2:3), followed by a more discursive account of the creation of human kind, Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:4–24). This emphasis on creation is even more manifest in the Greek Septuagint translation (a Jewish translation, which survives almost entirely in Christian manuscripts), which calls this first book *Genesis* (or in some manuscripts: *Genesis Kosmou*): ‘The coming-into-being [of the world]’, in contrast to the Hebrew, which simply calls the book by

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its first word, *B^e^rêshith*, 'In the beginning'. In the first few Christian centuries, commentaries on the first chapter of Genesis, sometimes spilling over into the second chapter, were very common—Eusebius in his *Church History* lists eight; they were generally referred to as commentaries on the *Hexaemeron*, 'Six Days'. It was a tradition inherited from the Jews: Philo's treatise *On the Making of the World* had a great influence on subsequent Christian exegesis. The most famous and influential Greek commentary was the *Hexaemeron* by St Basil the Great, an incomplete set of homilies, which did not get to treating the creation of human kind, an omission made good by his younger brother, St Gregory of Nyssa, in his short treatise, *On the Making of Human kind*.[1]

It is clear from this that the doctrine of creation was immensely important for early Christians. The reason for this is not far to seek, for the doctrine of creation was not a generally held belief, except among Jews and Christians, in late antiquity, and for them it conveyed something very important. The idea of the origin of the world was a matter about which human beings had long speculated. Ancient myths had told of the emergence of the earth as a result of some struggle among the gods; Hesiod in his *Theogony* told of the emergence of Earth in the context of the genealogy of the gods. Perhaps the most influential account of the origin of the cosmos in the intellectual world that the early Christians inhabited—also called a myth—was the account given in Plato's *Timaeus*. But all these are accounts—either mythological or in terms of ancient science—intended to explain features of the world, how it all fits together. They are, very broadly speaking, concerned with the bringing of order out of chaos and darkness, and there are traces of this in the Genesis account which seems to speak

[1] For more detail on this, see my 'The Fathers on Genesis' in *The Book of Genesis, Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Craig Evans, Joel Lohr & David Petersen, Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

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of darkness and the abyss as the context or matrix in which God created heaven and earth ('The earth was unseen and unformed, and there was darkness over the abyss': Gen. 1:2a, according to the Greek LXX). But Christians—many of them at least—like Jews such as Philo read the Genesis account as telling of a radical creation of the cosmos, not just the introduction of order to a formless, abysmal darkness. Round about the time of Christ, we begin to find emerging a more precise notion of creation as creation out of nothing—ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, *ex nihilo*. The first mention of this in the biblical books occurs in 2 Maccabees, in the account of the martyrdom, at the hands of the Seleucid king, Antiochos IV Epiphanes, of the seven Maccabaean martyrs. Antiochos had tortured and killed six of the sons of their devout mother, by tradition called Salomina, and appeals to her to plead with her youngest son to eat pork, thus breaking the Law and saving his life. Instead, in Hebrew, which further infuriated Antiochos, she supported her son's resolve: 'My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb… I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that exist (οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων ἐποίησεν ὁ θεός). Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers' (2 Macc. 7:27–9). It is an enormously moving scene, but it is more than that. In making this first explicit confession of the doctrine of creation out of nothing, Salomina appeals to this doctrine to seal the martyrdom of her son, and to justify the doctrine of the resurrection, in which she is confident she will receive him back with his brothers. It is striking that it is in precisely the same context—of martyrdom and the conviction of the resurrection that inspired it—that we find Christians in the second century becoming more and more confident that what they believe about creation is that it is created out of nothing by God.

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So we find a belief in creation, not in the sense of simply bringing order out of chaos, but in the more radical sense that God created the cosmos out of nothing, 'not out of the things that are', as Salomina put it. Because it was such a radical belief, and, we may presume, because it is not explicitly affirmed in the Bible—2 Macc. 7:28 is the only clear text, when Christians later try to marshal biblical texts in support of the doctrine of creation, they are hard put to find them[2]—for both these reasons the doctrine of creation out of nothing developed slowly. Justin Martyr still seems to accept the Platonic doctrine that God created the cosmos out of pre-existent matter;[3] Origen's belief in creation out of nothing only seems to extend to the material creation.[4] Theophilos, in the second century, is perhaps the first to affirm creation out of nothing,[5] and by the beginning of the fourth century, the doctrine is firmly established among Christians, as St Athanasios' treatise *On the Incarnation* makes clear.[6] Nonetheless, the difficulty in conceptualizing such a radical belief does not detract from the fact that the fundamental intuition behind it—a conviction that there is nothing that falls outside the power of God—is firmly rooted in the Scriptures.

As Christians reflected on the doctrine of creation out of nothing by God, they found that the doctrine came to form what the early twentieth-century Russian philosopher and theologian, Fr Pavel Florensky, called an antinomy, that is two assertions opposed to each other, even contradicting each other, both of which have to be asserted. On the one hand, the doctrine of creation spoke of an absolute difference between God and all things created; there is nothing in common between the being of God the Holy

[2] Origen, appealing to Scriptural authority for creation out of nothing, quotes, beside 2 Macc. 7:28, from the *Shepherd* of Hermas (*Mand.*I. 1), and from Psalm 148:5 ('he spoke, and it was made').
[3] Justin Martyr, *Apologia* I. 59.
[4] Origen, *De Principiis* II. 1. 4–5.
[5] Theophilos, *Ad Autolycum* II. 10.
[6] Athanasios, *De Incarnatione* 3.

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Trinity and the being of created entities. On the other hand, the doctrine of creation meant that the creature—each creature—owes everything that it is to the Creator; there is nothing in being created that is intrinsically opposed to the Creator. Let us take each side of the antinomy separately.

The notion of an absolute difference between God and creation cut at the root of one of the convictions of what has been called the cosmic piety of late antiquity, which drew on both Platonic and Stoic notions. Both these strains of philosophical thought envisaged a world of gods and men—immortals and mortals—in which, though there was a difference, it was not absolute; in all sorts of ways the boundary between the divine and the human was porous—it could be breached. The realm of the gods was what humans could aspire to. Within Platonism, the distinction was seen more precisely as being between the realms of the spiritual and the material, of which Socrates had said, in the *Phaedo*,

> On the one hand we have that which is divine, immortal, indestructible, of a single form, accessible to thought, ever constant and abiding true to itself; and the soul is very like it: on the other hand we have that which is human, mortal, destructible, of many forms, inaccessible to thought, never constant nor abiding true to itself; and the body is very like that.[7]

A spiritual, immaterial world, where the soul belongs—and a material world where the body belongs: the ultimate purpose of the soul is to detach itself from the material world of the bodily and return to spiritual world, to realize its kinship with that world. As Plato put it in a much later dialogue, the *Theaetetus*: 'flight [from the world] is assimilation to God as far as this is possible'.[8] This vision of the soul's ascent to God

[7] Plato, *Phaedo* 80B; Hackforth's translation in *Plato's Phaedo*, Cambridge University Press, 1972, 84.
[8] Plato, *Theaetetus* 176B.

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had been, and was to remain, very attractive to many Christians; for Clement of Alexandria, writing at the turn of the second/third century, the phrase just quoted from the *Theaetetus* was one of his favourite quotations. But the doctrine of creation out of nothing posed problems, for it suggested that the fundamental division within reality was not between the spiritual and the material, but between the created and the uncreated. Indeed, it was even more radical than that, in that it suggested that the divide between God and creation was not a divide within any encompassing 'reality', but a distinction between two kinds of being that were incommensurate with each other, so that if one is called real, the other must be called unreal, and vice versa; as St Gregory Palamas put it, in the fourteenth century, '[God] is not a being, if the others are beings; and if he is a being, the others are not beings'.[9] There can be no question that the soul is 'really' divine, and finds its true being in union with God; that ascent to God is a kind of 'homecoming' as the soul returns whence it has come, abandoning the body, which has a different origin, for soul and body share a single origin in the creative will of God. This leads, first of all and notably, in St Gregory of Nyssa, to the notion that, as the soul draws nearer and nearer to God, it doesn't find itself on 'home territory', so to speak, rather, in drawing closer and closer to a God who is utterly different from it, it realizes more and more poignantly that God is utterly unknowable. Gregory expresses this in his treatise *The Life of Moses*, where he sees the life of the soul reflected in the progress of Moses' life, from his first encounter with God in the light of the burning bush, but leading up Mount Sinai through the clouds and darkness, into the impenetrable cloud at the summit of the mountain, where he finds, not God himself, but the place where God dwells. It is a progress from light to darkness, from understanding to a trust in the sense of presence that he

[9] Gregory Palamas, *Capita CL* 78 (ed. and trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz, Studies and Texts 83, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 1988, 173).

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cannot grasp or make complete sense of. For Gregory the contrast between created being and the Uncreated God is a contrast between what we can know—in accordance with the epistemological principle that 'like knows like'—and what is beyond our knowledge, between the finite, that we are familiar with, and the Infinite, which is beyond anything we can grasp.

The other side of the antinomy is that everything in the creature is from God, that there is nothing in the creature opposed to God. The creaturely experience of this is twofold, even antinomic. On the one hand, everything we are is good, 'exceedingly good', coming from the hand of the Creator; there is nothing at the level of being that is opposed to God, no irreducible evil in the created order. If we follow the grain of our being, as it were, we shall find ourselves in harmony with God. On the other hand, we bring nothing of our own to our being; we are 'out of nothing', our very nature is 'once not to have existed', as St Athanasios put it.[10] This 'nothing', from which we have come through God's creative act, is the only place to which we can turn, if we choose to turn away from the God who gave us being: this provides the dynamics of the doctrine of the Fall, to which we shall turn in another lecture. But the point now is rather different. The fundamental antinomy of creation can be expressed in a vivid image from a sermon by St Philaret, the great Metropolitan of Moscow in the nineteenth century who said that 'the creative Word is like an adamantine bridge, upon which creatures stand balanced beneath the abyss of divine infinitude, and above that of their own nothingness'.[11] It is an image, not of fragility, but of poise: poised between the divine infinite incomprehensibility above us, where the bridge, which is

[10] *De Incarnatione* 4.
[11] Philaret (Drozdov) of Moscow, *Izbrannye Trudy Pisma Vosponimaniya,* Moscow: St Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Institute, 2003, 268. It is quoted by both Lossky and Florovsky, but without any proper reference.

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the creative Word leads, and the abyss of our own nothingness, from which we have come, and to which we could condemn ourselves.

The notion of a fundamental divide between God and creatures is open to misunderstanding—an easy misunderstanding owing to the obtuseness of our imagination. It could easily suggest an infinite chasm between God and the creature, making God seem utterly remote from his creation. But that would be to take the image of a divide, or a gulf, in too physical a way. A physical gulf does separate, hold apart. But, as we have seen, God and creatures do not belong to some overarching category of reality within which they are separated from one another; God is beyond any creaturely categories, and so can be thought of as infinitely exalted, when we consider that his being is utterly unlike ours, but also infinitely close, for the same reason. He is, as St Augustine put it, *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*: more inward than my inmost self and higher than my highest self.[12] Creation out of nothing does indeed mean that the created order does not flow from within God's being, as it were, as some kind of extension or emanation of his being, but it does not mean that creation is remote from the divine.[13] On the contrary, God is intimately present to all his creatures. This is a fundamental intuition within the Orthodox tradition, which is sometimes fearful (maybe with good reason) that the Western Christian tradition has not preserved such a profound sense of God's presence to his creation. Both the idea of nature as independent of grace and

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[12] Augustine, *Confessions* III. 6. 11.

[13] The question of the meaning of creation *ex nihilo* has been a matter of debate in recent Orthodox theology. See the exchange between Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon and Philip Sherrard, printed in John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, London: T. & T. Clark, 2006, 270–85. The article by Zizioulas that provoked the correspondence is reprinted ibid. 250–69. For an exposition of Sherrard's own position, see his 'The Meaning of Creation *ex nihilo*', in *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition*, Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997, 232–44, to be read in conjunction with the immediately preceding chapter, 'Christianity and the Desecration of the Cosmos', pp. 200–31. Some of Sherrard's concerns are met, I hope, in what follows.

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supernature, as if creation itself is not a gracious gift of God, and the notion, widely accepted nowadays, that we live in a disenchanted world: both of these seem to the Orthodox tradition to be fundamentally wrong. Orthodox theology has developed several ways of expressing the conviction of God's presence to his creation; we might consider three of them: the notion of God's activities or energies, the idea of the *logoi* or principles of creation, and the doctrine of the Wisdom of God, Sophiology, that was popular in the Russian tradition at the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth century.

The distinction between God's essence and energies (this is the term used by most Orthodox theologians writing in English, though 'activity' seems to me a much better translation of the Greek ἐνέργεια) became an established distinction in the theology of St Gregory Palamas. He justified this distinction by appeal to earlier Greek theologians, such as Basil the Great and Maximos the Confessor, though the systematic use of the distinction seems to be Gregory's (and indeed he only gradually came to realize its value). The distinction essence/energies is a distinction between God in himself and God in his activity; God in himself, in his essence, οὐσία, is unknowable, but in his activities or energies he makes himself known. Gregory insists that these energies are not created effects of God's activity, but are the uncreated God himself: when we encounter God in his energies, we are not encountering God at one remove, as it were, we are encountering God himself. The context in which Gregory developed this distinction was in his defence of the monks of the Holy Mountain, called 'hesychasts', because of their commitment to silent prayer (the Greek ἡσυχία meaning quietness, tranquillity), who claimed in their prayer to experience God himself in the form of a transfiguring light. Gregory maintained, against their opponents, that this light was not a created phenomenon, still less an hallucination, but the uncreated light of the Godhead, one of God's energies,

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the light that radiated from Christ at the Transfiguration, and in encountering the uncreated light, the hesychasts were encountering God Himself, indeed finding union with God. But the distinction can be employed more widely: everywhere in creation, because everything comes immediately from the hand of the Creator, it is possible to encounter God in his energies. Some Orthodox theologians have been happy to use the word 'panentheism' ('all-in-God'-ness), in contradistinction from pantheism (in which everything is identified with God), and indeed Orthodox usage is amongst the earliest use of this term.

The notion of the *logoi* of creation is mostly associated with the great Byzantine theologian, St Maximos the Confessor, though one can trace the idea back to Origen (and indeed Plotinos and behind him the Stoics), and the notion was developed by Evagrios, on whom Maximos drew. According to St John's Gospel, all things were made through the *Logos*, or Word of God (John 1:3). The term *logos* is in Greek a key term, difficult to translate into other languages, because it has such a wide range of connotations: it can mean word, reason, meaning, principle, definition. So the *Logos* of God, through whom the universe has been created, is both the word, utterance, of God the Father, and also the meaning of the universe, and the meaning of everything in the universe. To say that the cosmos was created by the *Logos* of the Father is not just to say that it was created by God, but also to suggest that the meaning of the cosmos is to be found in the *Logos*. The Stoics had already thought in terms of the *logos* being the meaning of the cosmos, and also of many seeds of the *logos* as expressing the multiple levels of meaning found throughout the cosmos. In Maximos, we find the idea that everything in the universe has its meaning in its own *logos*, or principle, but that all these *logoi* form a coherent whole, because they all participate in the one *Logos* of God, the *Logos* or Word of God that became incarnate

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in our Lord Jesus Christ. Maximos is fond of repeating that 'the one *Logos* is the many *logoi*, and the many *logoi* are the one *Logos*'. This means that the meaning of the universe can be found in Christ; from which he develops a notion of the cosmic Christ, revealed and celebrated in the Cosmic Liturgy.[14] But Maximos is equally interested in the other side of the doctrine of the *logoi* of creation: his conviction that everything find its meaning in its *logos* of being, λόγος τῆς οὐσίας, which in turn participates in the *Logos* of God. Consequently, for Maximos, each being finds its meaning in its nature, in what it is intended to be, as defined by the *logos* of being, and this *logos* of being is inviolable: the meanings of all the created beings cohere, for 'the many *logoi* are the one *Logos'*. This notion of a coherence of interlocking *logoi* has attracted the attention of some scientists in the last century and this: here is a vision of the cosmos that takes seriously the integrity of natural entities, and sees their meanings as converging in a single coherent vision. Furthermore, the human has a pivotal role in the perception of this ultimate meaning, for Maximos sees the human as reflecting the cosmos in himself and the cosmos as reflected in the human, regarding the human as a microcosm, a little cosmos, and indeed the cosmos as a macranthropos, a large human. The human is seen as a bond of the cosmos, σύνδεσμος τοῦ κόσμου. These ideas were common currency in much of the philosophy of his time, but Maximos gives it his own twist by rooting the role of the human as bond of the cosmos in the doctrine of the human as created in the image of God. The idea of the human as the image of God is central to any patristic understanding of what it is to be human, and we shall return to it several times in future lectures, but here its importance is that the human, as the image of God, fulfils

[14] The title of an historic book on Maximos the Confessor by Hans Urs von Balthasar: *Cosmic Liturgy. The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003 (German original 1941; much expanded and re-written second edition 1961; Eng. trans. by Brian E. Daley SJ from the third German edition 1988).

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within the cosmos the divine role of providing meaning for the cosmos. This can be explored in various ways—and is central, as we shall see, for an Orthodox understanding of sin and the Fall—but the notion that the human is central for any grasp of the cosmic is an idea that has become important in many attempts by scientists to formulate some universal theory of the meaning of the universe. Maximos' doctrine of the *logoi* has seemed to some a powerful way of articulating some sense of how the universe can be seen as meaningful. Not only that, such a vision of the cosmos provides a basis for developing a response to the ecological problems that press upon us, for here we have a view of the cosmos that finds intrinsic meaning in the cosmos, and prevents any understanding of it as inert material there to be exploited by human ingenuity. Furthermore, the notion of the human as bond of the cosmos highlights human responsibility for the cosmos.[15]

Sophiology, the doctrine associated with the Russian religious philosophers at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries—especially Vladimir Solov'ev, Pavel Florensky and Sergii Bulgakov—can also be seen as an attempt to articulate a sense of God's presence to, and yet distinction from, the cosmos. For most of those who advocated sophiology, it was bound up with their own experiences—of nature, of human love. Bulgakov tells of an experience he had while still an atheist Marxist:

> One evening we were driving across the southern steppes of Russia, and the strong-scented spring grass was gilded by the rays of a glorious sunset. Far in the distance I saw the blue outlines of the Caucasus. This was my first sight of the mountains. I looked with ecstatic delight at their rising slopes. I drank in

[15] A concern for ecology, rooted in the tradition of the Orthodox Church, has been one of the distinctive features of Patriarch Bartholomew's mission as Patriarch: see *On Earth as in Heaven. Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, ed. John Chryssavgis, New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.

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> the light and the air of the steppes. I listened to the revelation of nature. My soul was accustomed to the dull pain of seeing nature as a lifeless desert and of treating its surface beauty as a deceptive mask. Yet, contrary to my intellectual convictions, I could not be reconciled to nature without God.[16]

For Bulgakov, to accept the delight of the natural world and to believe in God were to go together; only if God exists, can nature be seen as enchanted. It was that conviction that made sophiology so important for him. Although sophiology has experienced something of a revival in the last decade, especially among the movement in modern theology known as 'radical orthodoxy',[17] it is, nevertheless, still the case that in (authentically) Orthodox circles, sophiology is largely rejected, and even those willing to be sympathetic towards Bulgakov often take the line that everything that Bulgakov wants to say using the notion of divine Sophia could be said just as adequately without invoking the notion of Wisdom or Sophia (and Bulgakov's late work, *The Orthodox Church*, in which he gives an account of Orthodox beliefs without using the notion of Sophia, is cited in support of such an opinion). 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.

The fundamental intuition of sophiology is relatively easy to enunciate; it is that the gulf between the uncreated God and creation, brought into being out of nothing, does not put creation in opposition to God, rather Wisdom constitutes a kind of μεταξύ,[18]

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[16] From his *Autobiographical Sketches*; trans. in *A Bulgakov Anthology. Sergius Bulgakov 1871–1944*, ed. by James Pain and Nicolas Zernov, London: SPCK, 1976, 10.
[17] My awareness of this has been greatly enhanced by the work of Brandon Gallaher, and conversation with him. See his 'Graced Creatureliness: Ontological Tension in the Uncreated/Create Distinction in the Sophiologies of Solov'ev, Bulgakov and Milbank', in *Logos: a Journal of Eastern Christina Studies* 47 (2006), pp. 163–90.
[18] Palamas uses the same (Platonic?) term for the uncreated manifold participating in God, but not the divine essence itself: *Triads* III. 2. 25.

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'between': between God and man/creation, for Wisdom is that through which God created the universe, and it is equally through wisdom that the human quest for God finds fulfilment.[19] Wisdom, one might say, is the face that God turns towards his creation, and the face that creation, in human kind, turns towards God. Creation is not abandoned by God, it is not godless, for apart from God it would not be at all; it is not deprived of grace, for it owes its existence to grace. Rather creation is graced, it is holy; in creation God may be encountered. Bulgakov's account of his experience in the Caucasus, just quoted, and his magnificent account of standing beneath the dome of the Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in January 1923,[20] make clear how important this intuition was to Bulgakov. It also lay at the heart of what he perceived to be wrong with the Roman Catholicism he encountered in the West as an exile: the idea of an ungraced 'pure nature', a key term in the Thomism of the day, seemed to him fundamentally false. The relationship between God and the world, constituted by Wisdom, cannot be an arbitrary relationship, nor can it be a necessary one. Uncreated wisdom and created wisdom differ only in being uncreated or created. Why? Because if they differed in any other way, God would be severed from creation and creation from God. This line of thought indicates a further step involved in sophiology, which raises the issue: what must creation be, if this is true? What is creation like, if God indeed created it (through wisdom)? As we ask these questions, we find ourselves asking questions that have exercised Christians for centuries, and perhaps most acutely at the beginning, when, in the second century, Christianity faced the manifold challenges of Greek philosophy and gnosticism. Christianity was not consonant with just any view of the universe. Christians agreed with the Platonists

[19] For a longer account of my approach to Bulgakov's doctrine of Sophia, see 'Wisdom and the Russians: the sophiology of Fr Sergei Bulgakov', in *Where shall Wisdom be found?*, ed. Stephen C. Barton, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999, pp. 169-81
[20] In *A Bulgakov Anthology*, 13–14.

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over the existence of a transcendent divine, the co-existence of divine providence and human freewill, and adopted Platonist arguments against other Greek philosophers—Aristotelians, Stoics and Epicureans—who rejected one or other of these positions.[21] They felt a profound affinity with the Stoic notion of the cosmos as an harmonious unity. They completely rejected the view, held by most of those whom scholars now call 'Gnostics', that the universe was the product of a God or gods who were either malevolent or negligent. Sophiology was, for Bulgakov, a way of articulating what it means for the cosmos to be God's creation, both in the sense of what kind of world that must be—a moral universe in which human freedom is the key to the discovery of meaning—and in the sense that the pursuit of wisdom through exploring the cosmos—the physical cosmos, certainly, but also the moral and spiritual world opened up by human interaction with the cosmos—could lead to an encounter with the divine.

The created order consists of 'heaven and earth, things visible and invisible': the human stands at, or constitutes, the boundary, μεθόριον, between the visible and the invisible, the earthly and the heavenly, the material and the spiritual. The human is spiritual, but is embodied; is earthly, but aspires to heaven; he is a rational animal—part of the animal world, and yet participating in the Logos and therefore *logikos*, rational (though *logikos* is a much more suggestive word than 'rational'). But there are other rational, *logikoi*, beings: angels and, alas, demons. These, too, are part of the created order.

[21] See my 'Pagans and Christians on Providence', in *Texts and Culture in Late Antiquity: Inheritance, Authority and Change*, edited by J.H.D. Scourfield, Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2007, pp. 279–97

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It is perhaps in the Divine Liturgy that the sense of the presence of the angels is most keenly felt. As the holy Gifts are carried through the church from the table of preparation to the holy table, we sing the Cherubic hymn:

> 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. For we are about to receive the King of all, invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

And when we come to sing the thrice-holy hymn in the Eucharistic prayer, we recall the 'thousands of Archangels and ten thousands of angels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, six-winged and many-eyed, soaring upon their wings, singing, crying, shouting the triumphal hymn'. All this evokes the vision of the prophet Isaias, who

> saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the house was full of his glory. And the seraphim stood around him; the one had six wings and the other had six wings, and with two they covered their face, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And they cried out to each other and said: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Sabaoth; the whole earth is full of his glory. (Isa. 6: 1–3)

As we come into the presence of God, pre-eminently in worship, we are made aware of the presence of the angelic hosts that stand before God. It is as if the angels are the sparks that fly off as God and his creation encounter each other. It is in the temple, the place of meeting between God and humans, on those occasions when human encounter God, such as Abraham's encounter with God at the Oak of Mamre (Gen. 18) or Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:12–17), that we find mention of angels in the Old Testament. We have already seen the mention of angels in the temple, in Isaias' vision; Abraham encounters God in the form of three angels, and the chapter ends with the moving story Abraham pleading with God for the people of Sodom; Jacob in

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his dream sees a ladder set up from earth to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it—he wakes up, and exclaims: 'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it… How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' So in the New Testament: the Lord himself sums up the significance of the Incarnation to Nathanael by saying that he will see 'heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man' (John 1:51). At the Annunciation of the Incarnation to the blessed Virgin, there is an archangel, Gabriel; at the Nativity of the Lord, the angel announces the event to the shepherds, 'and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God' (Luke 2:13); as the Lord prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, 'an angel from heaven strengthened him' (Luke 22:43); in the Empty Tomb, it is an angel who announces to the women, 'he is not here, but is risen' (Matt. 28:6). And angels continue to appear throughout the life of the Church; several miracles associated with angels are commemorated in the liturgical year. As one reflects on all this, one has the sense of another world, an unseen presence, a sense that we are not alone. Two passages in the Scriptures seem to me to convey this with a peculiar force. In the fourth book of Kingdoms (2 Kings in Western Bibles), Elisha and his servant wake up one morning to find the Syrian army surrounding them. His servant is alarmed, but Elisha tells him, 'Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them'; and the servant's eyes are opened to see 'the mountain… full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha' (4 Kingdoms 6:16–17). And then in the first epistle of John: 'Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you in greater that he who is in the world' (1 John 4:4). We are like Elisha's servant; and the one who is with us is Christ himself.

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Orthodox Prayer Books also have prayers to our guardian angels. It is an ancient belief that we each of us, at our baptism, are assigned a guardian angel, whose duty is to look after us, to warn us if we seem to be straying from the path of discipleship to Christ. This is a further expression of the belief that, though much is demanded of us individually, we are not on our own: the saints pray for us, especially our patron saint whose name we were given in baptism, and the angels watch over us, especially our guardian angel.

As the church reflected on the ministry of the angels, it came to assimilate them to the beings intermediate between gods and men, whom the Greeks called *daimones*, which we transliterate as demons, a little unfortunately, as there was nothing essentially evil about *daimones*; like human beings, some were well-disposed, some ill-disposed. Somewhere it is commented that angels is the word the Scriptures use to designate those the Greeks called *daimones*. This notion of beings intermediary between God and humans comes to take the form of thinking of angels as created, rational beings, like humans, but bodiless (or at least with much more ethereal bodies); the visible forms ascribed to them are either symbolic or adopted in order to communicate with humans (or really both). Speculation about what was meant by the different terms used in Scripture of these celestial beings—angels, archangels, principalities and powers, authorities, thrones, seraphim and cherubim—was eventually settled by the near-universal acceptance of the picture of the celestial beings found in the writings of one who wrote under the name of Dionysios the Areopagite, the judge of the Areopagos in Athens converted by the apostle Paul (cf. Acts 17). According to him, the celestial beings are ranked three by three—at the top: seraphim, cherubim, thrones (in descending order); in the middle: dominions, powers, authorities; at the bottom: principalities, archangels, angels.

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The terminology—angels and demons—at first simply terms of different background for intermediary beings, came to develop in Christian usage into an opposition: angels became good beings, and demons bad. This was perhaps inspired by the use in the Gospels of the diminutive, *daimonion*, for the demons opposed to Christ, and perhaps also by the pagan theory that the gods manifest in sacred statues, or idols, as Christians saw them, were *daimones*, representing the immortal gods. By the fourth century, at least, angels and demons in Christian usage are opposed beings. Within the monastic and ascetic tradition, especially, demons are associated with the temptations that face Christians seeking to follow the Gospel, so that the struggle against temptation and sin is presented as warfare between humans and demons. It is too large a topic to treat here, but Christian experience has been that the struggle against sin and temptation is not so much like a struggle with one's own propensities, but more like warfare, in which we are pitted against a foe that seeks to outwit us.

Belief in angels and demons is not something that fits very well with the 'modern mind', but its place in traditional Orthodox thinking is not superficial. At the very least, openness to the reality of such beings might remind us that, in Hamlet's words, 'There are more things in heaven and earth,… Than are dreamt of in our philosophy'.

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