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***Towards A Personal Ontology Of The Church:  
The Church as Bride in the theology of Congar and Bulgakov***

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***A thesis submitted for the qualification of***

***Doctor of Philosophy***

***in the***

***Department of Theology and Religion***

***Durham University***

***2013***

## ***Towards A Personal Ontology Of The Church:***

### ***The Church as Bride in the theology of Congar and Bulgakov***

***RPC Brown***

#### ***Abstract***

The primary identity of the Church as ‘Body of Christ’ in her relation with God is questioned. Understood somatically, since the Logos is the hypostasis of Christ, it fails to give the necessary ontological space for Creation to respond to God’s love.

Congar’s ecclesial ontology, formulated as Body of Christ, is investigated. His hierarchical interpretation of the relation between church structure, whose ontos as visible Body derives apneumatically from the incarnate Logos, and the Spirit, which vivifies the mystical Body through faith and the sacraments, is drawn from the *filioque*, subordinating the Spirit to the Institution. Souls united with God are eschatological ‘brides’, the reality for which the institution temporarily exists. Christ, or the Spirit, is the ‘I’ of the Church, which is not a ‘person’. Ultimately, souls are to be catholic, transparent to each other and God’s love. There is no explicit relation of Church to Creation.

Bulgakov identifies humanity as the hypostatic centre of Creation. In creating, God kenotically gives away his own being (Sophia) establishing temporality and otherness. Humanity is spirit-embodied earth, hypostasising created Sophia, drawn, through deification by the Spirit, into communion with God. The Trinitarian communion of the Godhead is imaged in Creation as the kenotic, hypostatic transparency of the Church. The Incarnation is a synergism between the Logos and Mary, who thereby participates in the salvific activity of the Son and the Spirit, as Spirit-bearer. She is the ‘Bride’ in whom all others participate.

Congar’s eschatology and Bulgakov’s kenotically hypostasised Creation proffer an understanding of the Church as the invited ‘yes’ of the personalised cosmos, reborn from Christ through the Cross, eschatologically irradiated by the Spirit with the glory of God, unified in kenotic love, whose communion with the Trinity as the ‘fourth’ hypostasis, ‘the Bride,’ proceeds through her nuptial union with the Son.

(300 words)

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To Adèle

my bride

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Question

Andrei Rublev's famous 15<sup>th</sup> Century icon of the Trinity pictures three figures around a table. In the very centre, but pushed towards the front, is the Eucharistic cup of the body and blood of Christ, the lamb that was sacrificed, the cup of communion. This is the centre around which the perichoretic movement of the Three revolves. The serene joy on their faces, the position of the chalice, and the bodily orientation of the three towards the outside (the contemplator) exudes a welcome. This extraordinary icon depicts an invitation to join the communion of the Godhead. But to whom is the cup offered?



If this icon reflects a glimpse into the true nature and purpose of the Gospel, the answer to its question is not as straightforward as might at first seem. It is framed in the context of the perichoretic love of the Trinity. The Father, Son and Spirit are all present,

signified by their physical gestures, the colours of their robes, and their background motifs. The identity of the invited fourth figure, however, is not given. Nevertheless, the icon sets some parameters. It is someone other than the three already present, competent of responding (that is, free), and capable of joining the communion (that is, personal or hypostatic).<sup>1</sup> The most obvious answer is the one contemplating the icon, ourselves. However, this immediately raises the question of everyone else. What is the nature and mode of our participation in this perichoresis? More precisely, what is the relationship of the Church to God?

By framing it in the context of participation in the Trinitarian banquet, it will be noted that the question is at once eschatological, ontological, and hypostatic in nature. It concerns not only our relations with God, but also with each other, and with the rest of creation, which, St Paul claims, is groaning in labour, longing for its redemption and glorification *through us*.<sup>2</sup> Somehow, through the process of theosis, the whole of creation is invited to this table. We are thrown into the search for an eschatologically defined ecclesiology that reveals the true nature of the Church as the invisible fourth person. The great existential question behind the invitation, then, is ‘who are we, in relation to God, each other, and creation?’

Rublev’s (or more precisely, God’s) invitation to partake of the Eucharistic cup and join the perichoretic communion of the Three is reflected in the recent exploration of eucharistic and *κοινωνία* (‘communion’) ecclesiologies. As Metropolitan John Zizioulas puts it

The Church as a communion reflects God’s being as communion in the way this communion will be revealed fully in the Kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of our study is to offer a possible way of answering this question in the context of Trinitarian communion.

## **1.2 Trinitarian Ecclesiology**

Individualism...underlies the modern abolition of the other.<sup>4</sup>

Describing the Church in relation to the Trinity is not without difficulty. In particular, when the ontology of the Church is described in terms of *κοινωνία*, or ‘communion’, as

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1 George Herbert’s poem, Love III, is called to mind.

2 Romans 8:19ff

3 Zizioulas, ‘The Church as Communion,’p8

4 Gunton, *The One, The Three and The Many*, p187

a reflection of the *Κοινωνία* of the Trinity, John Behr sees several serious issues at stake. Firstly, the Church can become separated from God as its ‘reflection’. Put another way,

communion ecclesiology sees the Church as parallel to the ‘immanent Trinity’: it is the three Persons in communion, the one God as a relational being, that the Church is said to ‘reflect.’ This results in a horizontal notion of communion, or perhaps better ‘communions,’ without being clear about how the two intersect.<sup>5</sup>

The critical point for Behr is that Christ, as the link between the Church and the Trinity, is not obviously present in this description.

Secondly, to describe the relations within the immanent Trinity purely in terms of *κοινωνία* is an inappropriate abstraction that deviates from Cappadocian teaching by overemphasising the Three as hypostatic persons, isolated from the divine relations revealed in the economy.<sup>6</sup>

His proposal is to use three scriptural images of the Church each of which suggests a relationship with each person of the Trinity: People of God, Body of Christ, and Temple of the Holy Spirit. His principal point, however, is that understanding the Church in terms of the Trinity requires that we follow the economic revelation of the relations in the Trinity.

The Spirit, who proceeds from the Father, rests upon the Son, as a bond of love returned to the Father. It is in this specific pattern of communion (and not as imaging a communion of three divine Persons) that the Church, as the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit, has her being...The Church is not just a communion of persons in relation, but the body of Christ giving thanks to the Father in the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

In particular, he is critical of Zizioulas for stating ‘the Church as communion *reflects* God’s being as communion,’<sup>8</sup> because this, paradoxically, separates the Church from God since we are left with two, parallel communions. Consequently, ‘We have the Trinity *and* the Church.’<sup>9</sup>

*Κοινωνία*, even if an ontological category, concerns relations between persons. This is important to note – it concerns relations. Much of the confusion appears to arise in the lack of distinction about *which* relations are in mind when *κοινωνία* is being discussed. Behr is concerned about the *vertical* relation between the Church and God, whereas

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5 Behr J, ‘The Trinitarian Being of the Church’, p68

6 A typical example can be found in D Edwards, ‘The Church as Sacrament of Relationships’.

7 Behr, ‘Trinitarian Being’, p69

8 Zizioulas ‘Church’, p8

9 Behr, ‘Trinitarian Being’, p70

Zizioulas is speaking of *horizontal* relations within the Church: in his opening paragraphs he relates it directly to ‘the problem of church unity.’<sup>10</sup>

Behr’s concern is precisely that it is inappropriate to ‘map’ or image horizontal inner-Trinitarian relations directly onto the Church. Rather they should define the nature of the vertical relation between the Church and God. He insists we remain faithful to the economic revelation of the Trinitarian relations.

Behr’s point perhaps becomes clearer if we try to apply the economic Trinitarian relations to the ‘horizontal’ relations within the Church as Zizioulas claims we should. If the Church is to reflect the relations of the Trinity, in what way should ‘the Spirit, proceeding from the Father, resting upon the Son, as a bond of love returning to the Father’, shape the relations *within* the Church? For Zizioulas, who, or what, is the image of the Father in the Church, who is the Son, and who the Spirit? Such a conception would lead to entirely inappropriate and confusing hierarchical distinctions between persons within her.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, Behr, in seeing Zizioulas’ *κοινωνία* ecclesiology as resulting in a *separation* between Church and God, and his method of relating the three descriptors of the Church to a different person of the Trinity, shows he has misunderstood Zizioulas’ concern with church unity. Although he is right in saying that the nature of the processional relations within the Trinity cannot be directly used within the Church, Zizioulas is also right to say that the *unity* of the Church finds its source in the *unity* of God – of Trinitarian circumincession (Jn 15:11,22; Gal 4:4-6).

At the heart of this discussion is the nature of the Church’s relation with Christ. The Son is the Second Person of the Trinity, but the Son has also united humanity to himself. What, then, is the relation of this humanity to the Trinity, i.e. to the Son? For Zizioulas, the ontology of *κοινωνία* deriving from the Trinity means that persons are constituted by their relations, and therefore Christ is ‘a “corporate person”, an inclusive being. The “head” without the “body” is inconceivable.’<sup>12</sup> This, in turn, implies the nature of the Church’s relation with God through Christ as his ‘pneumatological’ body.

However, and this may be where the difficulty lies, Zizioulas is unclear about the precise nature of the Church’s relation to the Trinity. He says that ‘the genitive “of

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10 Zizioulas, ‘Church’, p3

11 Nevertheless, it is Ignatius who, in the context of the Eucharist, says ‘See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father.’ Smyrn. 8

12 Zizioulas, ‘Church’, p6

God” shows clearly that the identity of the Church derives from her relation with the Triune God’,<sup>13</sup> which has many aspects. These he goes on to list, the first being to ‘reflect in her very being the way God exists, i.e. the way of personal communion.’ But this is *not* a description of the Church’s relation with the Trinity; merely that she is called to be an image of it.

The second aspect relates to her being ‘of Christ’, which, he says, means she ‘cannot be a reflection of God’s way of being apart from the “economy of the Son,” i.e. the sonship given to us in Christ.’ However, what he has in mind here is the incorporation of the whole of creation into the redemptive order: ‘in the sense of serving and realizing in herself God’s purpose in history for the sake of the entire creation.’<sup>14</sup> Neither is this a description of the Church’s relation to the Trinity.

So we are left without a clear understanding of what Zizioulas considers to be the nature of the Church’s communion with the Trinity.

This, however, is what Behr is trying to elucidate with the three descriptors of the Church as ‘people’, ‘body’, and ‘temple’. Tantalisingly, he always speaks of the Church using the feminine pronoun, ‘she’, and even refers to her as the bride in his exposition on the role of the Spirit in the Church as the body of Christ.<sup>15</sup> But he does not develop the connection between ‘body’ and ‘bride’ any further.

Behr’s insistence throughout his article is the primacy of ‘the body of Christ’ as the appropriate description of the Church. This is to be understood organically, as, indeed, described in various of Paul’s letters, and ontologically:

The identity is complete; it is not a loose analogy or metaphor: ‘You are the body of Christ and individually members of it,’ all, that is, who ‘by the one Spirit were baptized into the one body’ (1 Cor 12.27, 13). Christians are called to be ‘the one body,’ by living in subjection to the head, Christ, allowing his peace to rule in their hearts (Col 3.15). As members of his body, they depend for their life and being upon their head, and also upon one another: ‘we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another’ (Rom 12.5).<sup>16</sup>

Yet for all this, a question remains as to whether the ‘Body of Christ’ metaphor was ever intended to describe the Church’s relation *to God*, or is even adequate to do so, given that it is not a *personal* metaphor. There is little that could not be applied in Behr’s assessment to an understanding of the Church as the second Eve, being built up

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13 Zizioulas, ‘Church’, p7

14 Zizioulas, ‘Church’, p8

15 Behr, ‘Trinitarian Being’, p74

16 Behr, ‘Trinitarian Being’, p72

from the second Adam's (Christ's) body. Most references to Christ as the head of the body can be perfectly understood as bridegroom-bride references, but using head/body language alone fails to capture the complete Edenic dependence of the bride's creation from the bridegroom. Furthermore, Paul's letters are almost exclusively written to address issues of 'building up' the body, that is, with the creation of the bride, in preparation for the future wedding. Much language of 'the body' therefore remains applicable in the bridal metaphor; its complete dependence on Christ's body, belonging to him, and obedience to him, can be understood in this context.

### **1.3 Why 'Bride'?**

The New Testament describes the Church variously as fruit of the vine, flock, body, temple, bride, city and kingdom, among others. These are always in relation to Christ: he is the true vine, the shepherd, the head, the cornerstone, the bridegroom, the sun and the king. These metaphors, which are all singular nouns, provide clues to the nature of the Church's being.<sup>17</sup>

The papal encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943) made the Body of Christ the primary way of referring to the Church. Indeed, in 1963 Afanassieff stated

Such a concept of the Church [the Body of Christ] has become a habit of thought and we never question it; we are more inclined to use it to furnish premises on which to build all theological discussions about the Church.<sup>18</sup>

Vatican II, while endorsing the cyclical, modified the description of the Church to prioritise 'The People of God'. To these two, many (including Bulgakov, Congar and Behr) have added a third, 'The Temple of the Holy Spirit', as a descriptor relating the Church to the third person of the Trinity, complementing the others.

#### **1.3.1 'The People of God'**

The description of the Church as 'The People of God' is, perhaps, the most ambiguous. Notwithstanding its primacy of place in *Lumen Gentium*, there is no corresponding relation to Christ in this mainly Old Testament (OT) descriptor, which only occurs three times in the New Testament (NT).<sup>19</sup> In fact it rarely occurs in this form in the OT either, although clearly it forms a primary motif. *Lumen Gentium* implicitly acknowledges this

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17 Congar makes exactly this point, *Diversity and Communion*, p11. See, also, for example, Tait 'The Two shall become One'.

18 Afanassieff, 'The Church which presides in love', p58

19 (Heb 4:9, 11:25; 1Pe 2:10, one of which is a historical reference to the OT nation of Israel)

by deferring to the description of the Church as the Body of Christ in the chapter (2) on ‘The People of God’ when relating it to Christ.<sup>20</sup>

In a Trinitarian context, Behr defends its use as a means of relating the Church to the first person of the Trinity.<sup>21</sup> The designation ‘of God’ relates to the Church’s being ‘called out’, as in the etymology of *ekklesia*, and has its ground in the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. That covenant, for the Church, is specifically made anew in the body and blood of Christ (Lk 22:20). The Church is therefore called ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own people’ (1 Pet 2.9). For the Church, the designation has a christological foundation. The ‘unity’ of the Church is implicit in the singular collective noun, ‘people’. Moreover, because it derives from the OT, it provides a continuous narrative that can be taken back into Genesis and the creation of Adam, in which the work of both Christ and the Spirit in the new creation are foreshadowed.

However, the designation itself gives little of this away, and is equally, even primarily, applied to Israel – it has no intrinsic relation to Christ. Furthermore, it lacks ontological specificity, saying nothing about the nature of new creation, its relation to God, or relations between the members of the new covenant. Crucially, however, it fails to fulfil adequately Behr’s claim of relating the Church to the first person of the Trinity. Jesus taught his disciples to call God, ‘Father’. But to describe the Church as ‘of God’ is simply to relate her possessively to the Godhead, not specifically the Father.

Given that the Church cannot be properly described without reference to Christ, it is questionable as to whether it is an adequate ontological title for her at all. Indeed, Congar identified these shortcomings himself and counterpoised it with the more complete descriptor of the Church as bride.<sup>22</sup>

To describe the Church as Bride fulfils all the notions inherent in ‘People of God’, while remaining visibly christocentric.<sup>23</sup> It designates the Church as belonging to Christ, and his new creation (taken from his flesh), provides continuity with the bridal motif in the OT narrative, including the creation story of Genesis, and intrinsically unites the ‘people of God’ to each other as a coherent ‘one’. But most importantly, it has the

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20 *Lumen Gentium*, §14

21 Behr J, ‘The Trinitarian Being of the Church’, p3

22 Congar, *This Church that I Love*, pp29-34

23 The title of Bride or Spouse is the second title used to describe the Church in *Lumen Gentium* (§4). The first is ‘the kingdom of Christ’ (§3).



ontological potential that allows her to respond to her calling, her ‘invitation’, with one voice, and name the first person of the Trinity ‘Father’, as the bride of the Son.

### 1.3.2 ‘The Body of Christ’

The Body of Christ is by far the most common designation for the Church, both theologically and, at least within the Church of England, liturgically.<sup>24</sup> A deeply ambiguous word, ‘body’ has many layers of semantic meaning: a biological unit of life; a physical entity; a corporate institution; a state or empire; an expression of catholicity; a sexual icon; a collection (of works or items); a piece of bread. It forms an intrinsic part of the description of the Church as bride, as well as body of Christ.

In the context of the Church, ‘the Body of Christ’ is normally understood in an organic and universal sense. For the last fifty years, it has also been the focus of two closely related interpretations in particular: *κοινωνία*, and eucharistic.<sup>25</sup> In fact Afanassieff contends that *all* ecclesiologies of the Body of Christ can be reduced to two mutually exclusive types – universal (the organic conception), and eucharistic.<sup>26</sup> The former derives from the theology of Cyprian, but the latter, he says, is the earlier, present in the apostolic age and expressed in St Paul’s letters.<sup>27</sup> He goes so far as to claim the notion of a universal church is alien to the NT. However, Afanassieff is concerned with church structure and inter-church relations. He has little to say directly concerning the Church’s relation to God. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the primary differences he sees between the two ecclesiologies.

Cyprian’s concept of the universal church as a body takes Paul’s image of the (local) church in which the individuals comprise its many members. Based on the model of the Roman Empire as a body, it redefines the image so that, instead of individuals, *each local church* is a member of the Body of Christ. In this way the Catholic (i.e. universal) Church is a direct parallel to the Empire, with each area (congregation) comprising a part of the whole. Each member of the body (local church) is tied into the Catholic body by its bishop. Therefore each local church must have its own bishop to be part of the Body of Christ. If it becomes cut off from the whole, it is no longer a part of the body.

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24 Its first formal use in *Lumen Gentium* occurs in §7.

25 The latter is associated with de Lubac (*Corpus Mysticum*), the former with Zizioulas (*Being as Communion*), although Zizioulas’ ecclesiology is also strongly eucharistic. In fact Khomiakov was the first to develop a full ecclesiology based on *κοινωνία*, or ‘sobornost’ in Russian.

26 Afanassieff, ‘The Church’, p82. He appears not to consider Khomiakov’s non-organic, non-eucharistic communal ecclesiology.

27 Afanassieff, ‘The Church’, p58, p73

The corollary is that the body is the less for this loss. Afanassieff argues that this understanding requires a visible primacy to complete its internal logic.<sup>28</sup>

‘Eucharistic ecclesiology’,<sup>29</sup> he claims, is the original theology of the church and offers a completely different interpretation of the meaning of ‘Body of Christ’. Working from 1 Corinthians he concludes the ‘body’ is the eucharistic body of Christ, and

the faithful become members of His Body by virtue of communicating in the Body of Christ. The indivisibility of Christ’s Body implies the fullness of the Church dwelling in each of the ‘local’ churches.<sup>30</sup>

He goes on to argue that by virtue of this each congregation is wholly the Body of Christ, and is therefore autonomous and autocephalous. Nevertheless, there remains only one Body: ‘One plus one is still *one*’.<sup>31</sup> Christ’s manifestation in each local place is always complete. The universality of Christ’s Body, its fullness and its unity, is present in every Eucharist, which is presided over by its bishop. Therefore universality of the Church is an interior quality, which cannot be increased or diminished: ‘Where the Eucharist is, there is the fullness of the Church; *vice versa*, where the fullness of the Church is not, there no Eucharist can be celebrated.’<sup>32</sup>

De Lubac had already identified this early eucharistic, Ignatian ecclesiology in 1944, but not its structural implications. McPartlan notes that ‘strong elements’ of it were included in Vatican II, with the implicit acknowledgement that ‘a communal structure of local churches’ is required,<sup>33</sup> posing something of a challenge not just to the ‘hierarchy’<sup>34</sup> of the Roman Church, but also its definition of universality.<sup>35</sup>

De Lubac’s expression ‘the Eucharist makes the Church’,<sup>36</sup> and still more, Afanassieff’s ‘Where the Eucharist is, there is the fullness of the Church’, both recall the first ever use of the term ‘Catholic Church’ in patristic writing by Ignatius, but altered. In the context of bishops and the Eucharist he says, ‘wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.’<sup>37</sup>

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28 Afanassieff, ‘The Church’, pp60-66

29 A term coined by Afanassieff, ‘The Church’, p73

30 Afanassieff, ‘The Church’, p74

31 Afanassieff, ‘The Church’, p75

32 Afanassieff, ‘The Church’, p76

33 McPartlan, ‘Ressourcement’, p401

34 A term used by Congar to describe the juridical preponderance of the Church in earlier years, *Lay People*, p44

35 Tavad GH, ‘Considerations’, p43

36 De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, p88

37 Ignatius, Smyrn. 8 (90)

Ignatius' argument is against docetism, insisting on the bodily resurrection of Jesus, which gives reality both to Christ's presence in the Eucharist and to the bishop as the centre of unity in the church. But the alteration by Afanassieff from 'Jesus Christ' to 'Eucharist' is subtle and profound, at a stroke delimiting the Church and turning it into a hierarchical congregation gathered around a mediating bishop: there is no church without a bishop. Although Ignatius insists on remaining united with the bishop, and the bishop is the guarantor of a 'proper' Eucharist, this is not the same as saying the Eucharist (and hence the bishop) make the Church. Christ's presence makes the Church, one form of which is in the Eucharist. Afanassieff's reinterpretation raises further difficult questions about the nature of the church when it is *not* congregating around a bishop or his (or her?) delegate for a eucharistic celebration.

Irenæus' description of the Church maintains a more balanced pneumatology, 'Where the Church is, there is also the Spirit of God and where the Spirit of God is, there are also the Church and all grace.'<sup>38</sup> For him it is the presence of the Spirit that guarantees communion and Christ's presence ('where two or three are gathered...', Mt 18:20), not a bishop or the Eucharist.

Notwithstanding Afanassieff's statement that there are only two fundamental 'Body of Christ' ecclesiologies, and Ratzinger's claim that '*eucharistic* ecclesiology is fundamentally the same thing as *communion* ecclesiology',<sup>39</sup> both Johann Möhler (1796-1838, German Catholic) in his early work and Alexei Khomiakov (1804-1860, Russian Orthodox) developed 'communion' ecclesiologies in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that most certainly were *not* eucharistic, but Spirit-derived: *Gemeinschaft* or *sobornost* ontologies.<sup>40</sup> Möhler maintained the body of the Church (its visible offices and structure) was the visible expression of the invisible unity of love, deriving from the activity of the Spirit.<sup>41</sup> Khomiakov is much more ambiguous, although the sacraments are closely linked with the Church's visible manifestation.<sup>42</sup> For neither is the Eucharist the ontological centre of the Church. Rather it is the activity of the Spirit within believers that engenders love and holiness, leading towards the catholicity of each person. This is where the unity of the Church is to be located.

Turning to the question of the ontological implications of describing the Church as the 'Body of Christ', de Lubac identifies three meanings of term: the historical body; the

38 Irenæus, *Against Heresies*. III.24.1 (68)

39 McPartlan's words in 'Ressourcement', p402

40 See, for example, Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, pp66-72

41 Möhler, *Unity*, pp209-215

42 Bolshakoff, *Unity*, p154; Romanides, 'Khomiakov', p66

sacramental body; and the ecclesial body, all three of which are intimately related.<sup>43</sup> It is the third that concerns us here.

Paul uses the ecclesial definition of the body in two distinct but connected senses, each with its own purpose. Firstly, the emphasis is on the genitive, the Body *of* Christ. Here the Church is described possessively – it is *his* body; it belongs to him as a body belongs to a head, as a bride to a bridegroom. He is its ἀρχή, its source. It is primarily used as a means of speaking about Christ's authority over the Church.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, the emphasis is on the noun, the *Body* of Christ. In this sense it is usually used to denote the nature of dependency in the relations of members *to each other* within a local church.<sup>45</sup> It is sometimes also used to portray an organic relationship between Christ and his members.<sup>46</sup>

Finally there are several instances where both these meanings are in view, and in most of these marriage or sexual union (which is the same thing, biblically) is part of the hermeneutical context that links the two together.<sup>47</sup>

There is a vitally important reason for recognising these distinctions: Paul's description of the Church as the Body of Christ, and Christ as her Head, can be, and often is, nuptial language (probably in more cases than is usually recognised). This being the case, Christ's 'Body' is often, in Paul's view, his bride. That is, implicit in adamic theology is the background of the Edenic creation story as prophecy, with Christ as the second Adam and, of necessity, the Church as the second Eve. Christ's Body, then, has a personal quality to the extent that Christ's relationship with her is personal – he is her bridegroom (head) as she is his bride (body).

In terms of the Church's eschatological relationship with God, this is significant. If the nuptial ontology of the Church as the Body of Christ is not recognised, her relationship with God becomes highly obscured. If 'body' language is only taken to mean 'organic' or somatic, what is the nature of the Church's relation with the Father? Certainly, it is through Christ in that he remains the Son, but in what sense can the 'body' respond to its calling, to its invitation? The nature of love requires both freedom to respond and the ability to love in return. The Son, as God-man, *is already an intrinsic person in the Godhead*. He was sent to save the world because of the Father's great love (Jn 3:16),

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43 De Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*

44 E.g. Rom 7:4; Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18-19, 2:9, 3:15. 1 Cor 11:3ff is based on the same idea.

45 E.g. Rom 12:4ff; 1 Cor 12:12ff; Eph 2:16; 3:6; 4:4ff

46 E.g. Eph 4:15-16; Col 1:24; 2:19

47 E.g. 1 Cor 6:15ff; 1 Cor 10:16-17; Eph 5:23-30;

and although he became fully human, he never stopped being the Second Person of the Trinity. Indeed, it is through his humanity that the created order is brought into participation in God's presence. But this participation is not and cannot be mechanical, which is all the somatic 'Body of Christ' language offers us. Where, then, is there personal and ontological space for the world's response to God's love if it is 'organically' part of the Son, his 'body'? Either we must say that the language of 'Body of Christ' is analogical (not metaphorical), in which case it is simply a useful tool, but has no ontological content. Or we can recognise its nuptial significance that allows the Church, through the Son, and in the Spirit, to respond to the Father, as the Son's Bride. This is precisely why, when referring to the Church's relation with God, Paul so often translates into bridal language.

Thus describing the Church as the Bride of Christ reveals the ontological content of her depiction as Christ's Body. The latter remains fundamental with respect both to her generation, and to her eschatological 'completion' in which Christ is her head in the mystical marriage of the great wedding banquet. In both cases the Edenic creation narrative remains the prophetic context.

### **1.3.3     *'The Temple of the Holy Spirit'***

We will consider this description later.<sup>48</sup> For now it is important to note that, like 'People of God', on its own it bears no relation to Christ. Implicit in the genitive 'of' the Holy Spirit is the 'not of' Christ, even though he is the chief cornerstone. In New Testament usage the temple is almost always 'of God'. Only once it is described as 'of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor 6:19), where it is, in fact, a reference to the body as belonging to Christ's bride, and not to a prostitute. In this case the indwelling Holy Spirit is the bridal gift that lays prior claim on the bride, who has been 'bought with a price'.<sup>49</sup>

Neither is there any eschatological element in the description, which is arguably the most important aspect of the Holy Spirit's activity and presence in creation.

Again, the description of the Church as Christ's Bride not only overcomes the absence of any relation to Christ. It also implies the Holy Spirit as the hypostatising and vivifying gift, the down-payment guaranteeing Christ's return, the promise of the future wedding, and as Christ's presence in his absence. Eschatology and pneumatology combine together in the bridal metaphor.

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48    See Section 3.6.1, below

49    See Section 4.4, below

## 1.4 *Metaphor as Ontology*

### 1.4.1 *Metaphor*

A common misunderstanding arises in the usage of language, particularly in relation to the function of ‘mere metaphors’, which are often interpreted simply as illustrations of some other, albeit complex, and to a certain extent potentially self-fulfilling, reality.<sup>50</sup>

Speaking of the way in which metaphors work in the ancient world, Preston shows how the image participates in the reality to which it alludes. In the narrative world, a word brings its referent into the present reality. In our own culture, stories still have the power to induce ecstatic joy and excruciating pain through participation in the narrative. Referring to the description of the Church as Bride Preston states:

For the ancient world, or that part of it we are concerned with, an image was not an illustration of some reality to which one had access independently of all images. An image was the reality itself expressed and represented.<sup>51</sup>

He goes on to illustrate the idea that words expressed do not *contain* thoughts, they *are* the expression of the thought, and this is reflected in the OT notion that God created through speaking words, and ultimately in The Word.<sup>52</sup>

Gunton contends that the modern misunderstanding of metaphor, often betrayed by the use of a diminutive adjective before it, such as ‘mere’ or ‘loose’, derives from Enlightenment rationalism, which attempted to subordinate language to reason. But ‘metaphor is an intrinsic feature of all human language’ in allowing the *imagination* to participate in knowledge.

It [metaphor] enables not simply a human response to reality...but also dimensions of reality to come to human expression. That is to say, I would hold that metaphor is at the center, and perhaps is the chief vehicle of, human rational relation with reality.<sup>53</sup>

Metaphors achieve this by juxtaposing surprising concepts that allow new meaning, not originally present in either, to emerge and transcend themselves. Elsewhere, Gunton quotes Steiner:

We have histories of massacre and deception, but none of metaphor. We cannot accurately conceive what it must have been like to be the first to compare the colour of the sea with the

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50 Eg. Dulles, *Models*, p18; Best, *Body*, p182; Behr, ‘Trinity and Church’, p3; Flynn, *Vision*, p93

51 Preston, *Faces*, p76

52 Preston, *Faces*, p77

53 Gunton, ‘Sacrifice’, p212

dark of wine or to see autumn in a man's face. Such figures are new mappings of the world, they reorganise our habitation in reality.<sup>54</sup>

This 'new mapping', because it involves the imagination, allows knowledge to be experienced, and thus changes our participation in reality. It enables us to ask new questions of the reality before us.

This dynamic understanding of metaphor, that allows reality both to be questioned and to provide answers, has at least two fundamentally important consequences. First, it allows for the possibility of encounter with the transcendental. That is, the being of reality that is otherwise beyond rational explanation can be perceived precisely because of its obliqueness.

To seek for a transcendental is to seek for those features of our language and experience by means of which reality at its most fundamental makes itself known to us: features that might be called 'necessary notes of being,' 'the forms through which being displays itself.'<sup>55</sup>

The second follows on from the first. If the metaphor is competent to bear ontological weight, albeit indirectly, that is, the truth about a being's being, then it cannot be something other than the reality itself: it must, at some level, participate in that being's being. But it does so through 'a combination of openness and mystery, speech and silence'.<sup>56,57</sup>

Thus, metaphors are not 'models'. Rather, they perform an ontological function.<sup>58</sup> A model is always an *approximation* that seeks to explain certain attributes or replicate the behaviour of an entity or system. It is an aid in understanding, but always an external one. Unlike metaphor, it does not participate in the ontology or being of that system or entity.

### **1.4.2      *Ontology***

To speak of ontology implies the search for a timeless or eternal truth about the nature of being, a transcendental myth 'uncontaminated by time or becoming'. But as Macquarrie states, Christianity requires *faith*, understood as a creative *freedom*, in the historical event of Jesus Christ:

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54 Steiner G, *After Babel*, p23, quoted in Gunton, *Actuality*, p50

55 Gunton, 'Sacrifice', p214

56 Gunton, *Actuality*, p38

57 Flynn, describing Congar's approach to the Church, concurs on the necessity of metaphor in theology, although, somewhat surprisingly does not mention Gunton in his discussion, *Vision of the Church*, pp97-98

58 Cf. Dulles' approach in *Models of the Church*, eg. p21

Christianity thus becomes the religion of fallen man, that is to say, of man who is irremediably identified with history and who has been driven out of the paradise of eternally recurring archetypes.<sup>59</sup>

Both Hebrew and Christian scriptures continually assert that God constantly acts irreversibly in history, and this is the chosen medium of revelation of the Eternal to humanity. History, itself, appears to be validated as the only legitimate location for Truth, for revelation of the Eternal.

This apparent dichotomy between history and ontology is, however, an expression of the antinomy inherent in the Incarnation: the eternal becomes present in time, infinity adopts particularity, love dies on a cross. Theological endeavour must therefore also necessarily reflect this antinomy in its method and character if it is to remain true to its task of faith seeking understanding.

His dialectic between being and history, ideal and real, Absolute and nature, was what made Schelling attractive to a number of romantic theologians in the early nineteenth century. In particular, his identification of revelation as a synthesis of the two, the mode in which the ideal becomes present in history, greatly influenced the young German Catholic, Möhler.<sup>60,61</sup> Participation in this revelation, and thus the ideal, is achieved through consciousness, experience, or spirit, made accessible by the presence of the Holy Spirit. In Russia, his thought was also deeply attractive to the Slavophiles, although Khomiakov rejected his pantheistic tendencies and saw the Absolute as the Rational Will, creative activity, not an Idea.<sup>62</sup>

Unity of society, nation, or Church was a topic of widespread romantic interest. It was conceived in organic terms whereby different aspects were united to each other through organic metaphors.<sup>63</sup> The nature of the Church's unity was a major theme for both Möhler and Khomiakov. For Möhler the ultimate source of the unity of the Church was its history as experience, since it is only through *experience* that participation in the ideal as revealed in history can occur.

[H]istory...is an *experiential* science...The idea of the Church herself is the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth. Therefore the history of the Church in the objective sense can be nothing other than the history of the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth...This is the principle that preserves unity in diversity for us.<sup>64</sup>

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59 Macquarrie, *Religious Thought*, p223

60 O'Meara, 'Revelation and History', p26ff

61 He was also influenced by Schleiermacher. See Bolshakoff, *Unity*, p222 and Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, p88

62 Bolshakoff, *Unity*, p54, p59

63 Erb in Möhler's *Unity*, p51

64 Möhler, *Unity*, p34



It is a history of love, achieved in the Church through the leading of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus.

For Khomiakov, who was familiar with, and borrowed much from, Möhler,<sup>65</sup> it derived from the grace of God, dependent on the unity of God, but realised only in those who choose to submit to it. 'Grace is given also to them that are disobedient and that make no use of it...but these are not in the Church.' This unity is 'a real and substantial unity, like that of many members in a living body.'<sup>66</sup>

In both cases the ultimate unity of the Church is grounded in *participation* in the Divine: For Möhler it is the Divine Idea of the Kingdom of God; for Khomiakov, Divine Grace. Because they were both strongly pneumatological and made the Holy Spirit the mediator of Christ's presence, it gave rise to an ecclesiology that, today, would be recognised as based in *κοινωνία*, communion or love. For Möhler in particular, the bishop is in essence the visible embodiment of the unity of love.<sup>67</sup>

The principal difficulty with both of these theologies, however, is the very close identification of the Church with the Divine, blurring the distinction between created and creator. The consequence is that attributes applicable only to God, such as infallibility and absolute holiness, can become transferred to the Church in an unqualified manner.<sup>68</sup> Any sober and honest history of the Church, even when viewed from within, clearly shows this is not the case: a good theology of the Church has to be true to both her ontology and her history. It is a theme to which Congar gives space in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*.

Möhler's emphasis on the duality of structure and experience as a way of relating history and spirit, time and eternity, real and ideal, is the basis for Congar's own ecclesiology. We will see this exact replication, where structure and institution are fundamental for temporal continuity with the historic Incarnation, but the Holy Spirit makes the *experience* the ultimate present and eternal reality in which believers participate. For Congar, Institution has replaced, or is the ongoing manifestation of, or is the historic link with, Revelation.

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65 Bolshakoff, *Unity*, p231

66 Khomiakov, cited in Bolshakoff, *Unity*, p142

67 Möhler, *Unity*, p218

68 This was certainly true for Khomiakov (Bolshakoff, *Unity*, p146), less so for Möhler who believed more in the unfolding of truth in time. It is interesting to note that Bolshakoff believes Khomiakov developed his position polemically, partly in reaction to the Anglican Prayer Book's claim that the General Councils of the Church have erred. *Unity*, p147

Both Institution and Spirit are intrinsic to the (temporal) Church, since access to the Divine is only achieved through the historically ordained institution as mediator of the Revelation of the Divine in the Incarnation, but the relationship between them is sometimes ambiguous. By making the Institution bear the ontological weight of the Revelation, there is a particular difficulty when dealing with the eschatological reality of the Church, in which, Congar admits, the historical and institutional aspects fade from relevance; it begs the question of their ontological significance.

Bulgakov's approach to the problem of the intersection of time and eternity, real and ideal, is fundamentally different. Rather than seeing the Institution as the train in which the historic revelation is made present, he builds on Solovyov's notion of Sophia. In this case the cosmos, itself, is the Divine Idea thrown into temporality, which thereby becomes a created Idea: Divine and creaturely Sophia. The two are still bound together, particularly in the Incarnation, which is an act of both the Son and the Spirit. But instead of history being the corridor of temporal reality that links the present to the past, Bulgakov finds it in the existence of the cosmos, or more precisely in that which directs the cosmos, and from which it emanates – creaturely Sophia. History is still important, but its importance derives from its manifestation of the underlying teleologic character of creation. Thus for Bulgakov, the Spirit draws us into the Divine, not through history, but through materiality, whose nature has been essentially transformed by the Incarnation.

One of the powerful advantages of the description of the Church as the Bride of Christ is that it establishes a continuing hypostatic metaphor of the relation between God and humanity from the opening creation narratives of Genesis to the closing sentences of Revelation. That is, it unites both ontology and narrative in a single metaphor in a way that few other descriptors can. It opens up an ontological and theological vista that encompasses the whole of the Church's existence, temporally, cosmically and ontologically, identifying her with God, while maintaining the necessary ontological distance between creator and created.

The covenantal relation of Israel with Yahweh in the OT, and the very notion of 'love' in the first commandment, is interpreted as a bridal metaphor by many of the OT prophets, with the Promised Land as the dowry gift to the bride, prefiguring the redemption of creation.<sup>69</sup> In the NT many of Jesus' sayings, parables and actions take on a new and revealing light, including the two great sacraments of baptism and eucharist,

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69 eg. Jer 2:1,7

when seen in the context of first century wedding and bridal customs, and many other metaphors receive a more dynamic interpretation, especially those of the vine, body, temple and city. There is compelling evidence to suggest that this was the underlying metaphor behind much of the early church's understanding of her relation with God and the development of her christology, in particular both the union of the Church with Christ and her otherness in relation to him.<sup>70</sup>

But if the Church is truly, that is, metaphorically, Christ's bride, called to participate in the communion of the Godhead, in what sense can she be said to be a person? And if a 'person' over against Christ, does this threaten either the centrality of Christ, or our existence as 'persons' within her?

## **1.5 Theologians and Their Historic Background**

Several major works cover the context and background of the lives and writings of both Congar and Bulgakov.<sup>71</sup> A skeletal overview is presented here.

Yves Congar (1904-1995) and Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944) were two of the pioneering ecumenists of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, respectively, of the Twentieth Century, each in their own unique way. The theology of both has its intellectual roots in the romantic German Idealism of the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries, especially that of Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854).

For Congar this influence came primarily through his work on the early Nineteenth-century German Catholic and romantic idealist, Johann Möhler (1796-1838). Himes claims Möhler 'is the most important Catholic figure in the formation of ecclesiology as a field of systematic theology.'<sup>72</sup> As a young man in his mid-twenties, already with a strong sense of ecumenical mission, Congar was encouraged to study Möhler's

70 There is extensive literature on this subject, which cannot be explored here. For the numerous biblical themes indicating the pervasiveness of the metaphor see, for example, entries under 'adultery', 'apostasy', 'banquet', 'bed', 'betray', 'body', 'bride, bridegroom', 'church', 'covenant', 'daughter', 'feast', 'food', 'forsake', 'garden', 'garments', 'head', 'husband', 'idolatry', 'marriage', 'promised land', 'prostitution', 'sex', 'vine', 'virgin', 'wedding', 'wife', 'woman' in the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (1998). Other important and relevant images, such as 'love', 'jealousy', 'unfaithfulness', 'building', 'temple' are either not listed in the Dictionary or have not considered the bridal dimension to these aspects. For Jewish marriage customs see Burrows M, *The Basis of Israelite Marriage*, 1938; Epstein LM, *The Jewish Marriage Contract*, 1927; Lewittes M, *Jewish Marriage*, 1994; Peterson G, *The Everlasting Tradition*, 1995; Satlow, ML, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 2001; Showers, RE, 'Behold, The Bridegroom Comes', 1990; Wight FH, *Manners And Customs of Bible Lands*, 1953.

71 On Congar see e.g. Nichols, *Yves Congar*, 1989; Flynn (ed), *Yves Congar*, 2005; Famerée, *Yves Congar*, 2008. On Bulgakov (in English) see e.g. Evtuhov, *The Cross & the Sickle*, 1997; Nichols, *Wisdom from Above*, 2005; Williams, *Sergii Bulgakov*, 1999.

72 Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation*, p2

ecclesiology. Undoubtedly he had a profound effect on Congar,<sup>73</sup> although the latter was not uncritical of Möhler's later heavy christocentricity.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless Möhler's early vision of the Church continued to shape Congar's understanding of her nature throughout the rest of his life.<sup>75</sup> His theology of the church is widely recognised to have undertaken significant development over the course of his life. His early ecclesiology, prior to Vatican II, is characterised by a heavy christocentricity, itself, and subordinate pneumatology that gave rise to a certain priority of Institution over communion. After Vatican II, the person and work of the Holy Spirit became increasingly important in his ecclesiology, tending to a much more integrated understanding.<sup>76</sup>

Bulgakov's idealism was distilled from many sources, not least Khomiakov's *sobornost* ecclesiology<sup>77</sup> (credited as the first modern Russian theologian), Vladimir Solovyov's (1853-1900) cosmic sophiology,<sup>78</sup> and Fyodor Dostoevsky's (1821-81) personal freedom,<sup>79</sup> as well as directly from Schelling.<sup>80</sup> He was one of the most important Russian theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup> After becoming disillusioned with Marxism he rediscovered his childhood faith, was ordained, and brought his immense intellect to bear on exploring and explaining the positive content of the theology of the Orthodox Church to the West. His great theme is the exploration of Creation's relation and response to its Creator, much of which he expresses in terms of 'sophia.'<sup>82</sup> In 1930s this led to him becoming the focus of a fierce dispute concerning the role of 'sophia' in his theology, which in some circles still continues today.<sup>83</sup>

Congar was a key figure in the *Ressourcement* movement within Roman Catholicism.<sup>84</sup> The Twentieth Century was one of great turmoil, socially, politically, and intellectually, which both lead to the two world wars, and was driven by them. The Church was not immune in either the East or the West. The movement grew out of an impassioned

73 See O'Meara, 'Beyond "Hierarchology"'; Flynn, *Vision of the World*, p91

74 Congar, *I Believe I*, p154

75 Eg. O'Meara, 'Revelation and History'

76 E.g. Groppe, *Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 2004

77 Eg. Nichols, *Light*, pp122-123

78 Eg. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, pp237-240

79 Eg. Pain J, 'Introduction' in Bulgakov S, *A Bulgakov Anthology*, ppix-xiii

80 Eg. Williams, *Bulgakov*, p176

81 See, for example Nichols, *Wisdom From Above*.

82 So, for example, Thomas Hopko on Bulgakov states 'He was certainly convinced that a main reason for the disasters he witnessed was truly heretical Christian teaching which split the Creator from His good creation, and surrendered the world – which God so loved that He sent his Son for its salvation – into the hands of the godless.' <http://www.monachos.net/forum/showthread.php?8463-Sergius-Bulgakov> (15 July 2011)

83 See, for example, Holy Trinity Orthodox School, NY, [http://www.holytrinitymission.org/books/english/orthodox\\_church\\_s\\_bulgakov.htm](http://www.holytrinitymission.org/books/english/orthodox_church_s_bulgakov.htm) (15 July 2011)

84 For an introduction to the life and work of Congar see, for example, A Nichols *Yves Congar*, and Famerée and Routhier *Yves Congar*

desire to respond to the intellectual, ethical and social issues thrown up in the milieu of Modernism, particularly in the wake of the Second World War, although its roots belong in the Nineteenth Century.<sup>85</sup> It moved away from what it saw as the aridity of the neoscholastic tradition to return to the sources of faith: scripture and the early church fathers, seeing this as the heart of Tradition rather than a shrill repetition of dogmatic statements. It was a Modernist movement, itself, in that it advocated historical investigation over scholasticism, and thereby initially drew the ire of the establishment, which perceived it as a threat to dogmatic truth. It encompassed liturgical reform, ecumenism, a renewal of ecclesiology, Tradition, mission and ministry, and affirmation of the laity, all of which, despite the original antagonism of the establishment, ultimately found expression and validation in the Second Vatican Council.

These were the themes driving the *Ressourcement* theologians, not least Yves Congar.<sup>86</sup> But their endorsement was not won without great personal cost. Several of the leading theologians of the movement, including Congar, found themselves at the centre of bitter controversy, lost their academic posts, had their publications withdrawn from libraries and were banned from teaching. Congar, himself, although now acknowledged as ‘a pioneer of church unity and a champion of the laity’, and that ‘careful study of his contribution to church reform shows him to be an architect of the contemporary church,’<sup>87</sup> found himself exiled and stripped of his teaching responsibilities. However, he always saw himself as a servant of the Truth and the Church, with a deep and unquenchable, although often tried, love of both.

If central Europe continued in a state of upheaval, Russia had been no less so in the earlier part of the century. Russia saw herself as the last bastion of the free Orthodox Church after most of the remaining Orthodox countries had fallen under Ottoman, and hence Muslim, rule. On the other hand she had an ambiguous relationship with central Europe. As Louth explains, she remained separate from, and critical of, the modernity sweeping across central Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, while at the same time wanting to engage with it.<sup>88</sup> It was for this reason that Tsar Peter the Great, the archetypal ‘Westerniser’, uprooted the Russian capital from Moscow and defied nature by conquering the ‘hostile and inhospitable’ environment of the ‘swampy shores of the Baltic’ to build his surreal ‘artificial city’ in a ‘secular assertion of divine power’.<sup>89</sup>

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85 See Flynn’s ‘Introduction’, *Ressourcement*, pp1-19

86 See Famerée and Routhier, *Yves Congar*, e.g. p7

87 Flynn, ‘Yves Congar and Catholic Church Reform’, p99

88 Louth, ‘French *Ressourcement* Theology and Orthodoxy’, in *Ressourcement*, p497

89 See Shragin’s ‘Introduction’ in *Landmarks*, esp. ppxii-xviii

Part of the reaction against this abandonment of Russian tradition found expression in the Slavophile movement, which developed between 1820s-40s, of whom Khomiakov was a central figure.<sup>90</sup> Nichols summarises the essence of this ecclesiology as *sobornost*, or communality, found preserved in the pure culture of the Russian peasants, whose society, as communes, or *obshchina*, derive, it is held, from the untainted synthesis of biblical Judaeo-Christianity and the Byzantine church.<sup>91</sup>

The different streams of Russian thought inevitably clashed in the early 1900s, in the midst of which Sergei Bulgakov emerged as one of the most important Marxist thinkers. But Bulgakov embodied the different streams in himself:<sup>92</sup> he was not only influenced deeply by the German Idealism of Schelling, but also by the slavophilism of Khomiakov,<sup>93</sup> and the sophiology of Solovyov.<sup>94</sup> The latter two, Macquarrie maintains, were both fundamental conceptions of the Orthodox church introduced by Bulgakov to Western theology.<sup>95</sup>

In his early thirties Congar met Bulgakov, then in his mid sixties, in Paris in 1936 for a series of conversations.<sup>96</sup> However those conversations proceeded, there is little evidence of any substantial impact of Bulgakov's sophiology, or the cosmic vision it encapsulates, on Congar's theology until much later in his life, unlike Bouyer who was greatly influenced by it.<sup>97</sup> Congar's passion in his ecclesiology, which derives from a deep drinking of the Scriptures and the Early Church Fathers as well as Aquinas, is to affirm the importance of people, individual human beings, as the objects of God's grace and love. This is the end for which the Church exists. His concern led him into a form of ecumenism that was at all times generous and understanding and aided towards the openness observed in Vatican II.

The other principal theologian included in this dialogue is Claude Lionel Chavasse, a relatively little known Irish Anglican clergyman, contemporary with Congar, but publishing at the same time as Bulgakov. Chavasse was the eldest of four boys, born in 1897 in County Cork, Ireland to Henry Chavasse and Judith Fleming.<sup>98</sup> After serving as

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90 Bolshakoff, *Unity*, p37

91 Nichols, *Light from the East*, pp115-118

92 See Meerson, 'Personality' in *Russian Religious Thought*, p139

93 Khomiakov's statement 'The cosmos is the creation, the thought of God, and in itself it is the complete and perfect harmony of beauty and bliss' (cited in Bolshokoff, *Unity*, p132) could have been written by Bulgakov.

94 See, for example, his comments cited by Kornblatt in *Divine Sophia*, p4

95 Macquarrie, *Religious Thought*, p205

96 Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians*, p17

97 Although he is still referring to Bulgakov in 1980, eg *I Believe*, Vol 3, p62

98 <http://www.thepeerage.com/p36472.htm#i364717>, last viewed 27/02/2013

a Lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery during the Great War he studied at Exeter College Oxford, graduating in 1922. He went on to study at Sorbonne University Paris and St Stephen's House Oxford, before graduating again from Exeter College in 1925. He was ordained priest in 1929, married in 1932, had two daughters, and was a friend of CS Lewis.<sup>99</sup> He served in a number of incumbencies in both Ireland and England and published at least eight books on subjects including local history, prayer, liturgy and biblical studies. His best-known publication is *The Bride of Christ: An Enquiry into the Nuptial Element in Early Christianity* (1940), which is referred to by Congar and is considered by many as the standard defence for the biblical case for a nuptial theology of the church. He died in 1983.

## 1.6 Secondary Literature

In 2003 the Librarian of the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir could find no comprehensive or up-to-date bibliography for Congar beyond the late 1980s.<sup>100</sup> Nichols confirmed nothing had been written on his ecclesiology of the Church as 'Sponsa Christi'.<sup>101</sup> Since then, writing on Congar has proliferated, although still little has been written on his ecclesial ontology. For example, Flynn's edited collection of papers on Congar, entitled *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, appeared in 2005, but it contains nothing on his ontology of the Church, despite its title. Similarly, in the recently published *Ressourcement* (edited by Flynn and Murray, 2012) the theme of ecclesial ontology is mostly absent, although there is an article by Saward on the 'personality' of the Church in the writing of Journet.<sup>102</sup>

In his relatively brief introduction to Congar Nichols makes the point that in his early ecclesiology, as exemplified in the collection of articles in *Mystery of the Church*, he introduced a distinction, which some found over-schematic, between 'structure' and 'life'.

If the first [i.e. 'structure'] is bound up with the founding activity of the Son, and his continued activity in his signs and offices, the second [i.e. 'life'] depends more closely on the Spirit.<sup>103</sup>

The principal criticism is the distinction this introduces between clergy and laity, with the latter being poor reflections of the former. It is certainly a similar assessment to that

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99 Green and Hooper, *Lewis*, p132

100 Personal communication, 20 February 2003

101 Personal communication, 22 February 2003

102 Saward J, '*L'Église a ravi son cœur*'

103 Nichols, *Yves Congar*, p55

found in this thesis. However, our investigation explores the implications of this christocentricity on the ontology of the Church. The disastrous ontological distinction this introduces between clergy and laity, incidentally not present in the early Möhler, is not in view here. Rather it is the nature of the Church's relation with Christ and the Trinity, and with time and creation.

In the first systematic account of Congar's ecclesiology, MacDonald (1984) claims this distinction between structure and life forms a constructive dialectic that remains throughout his writings. Indeed it was fundamental to Congar's project of church reform by enabling him, through *ressourcement*, to balance tradition and communion.<sup>104</sup> However, while this schematisation has been widely recognised, MacDonald has been criticised for imposing it too rigidly onto Congar's theology, not least by Congar himself in his forward to the thesis.<sup>105</sup>

Kizhakkeparampil (1995) claims that these two aspects derive from Congar's trinitarianism, whereby the structure continues the mission of the Son and the sacraments and life promulgate the mission of the Holy Spirit. The two are therefore inseparable. This, he says, is the heart of the ecclesiology of Vatican II.<sup>106</sup>

Flynn's monograph on Congar's ecclesiology, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief* (2004) recognises that Congar was not a systematician, and that his writings were occasional, yet proposes a unity to it. The theme of unbelief provides the foil for this unity. Particularly in terms of 'the relations of the spiritual with the temporal' in the Church, Congar was reluctant to be pinned down, since it was, by definition, a mystery. Flynn, however, states that 'the mystery of the Church is understandable since a mystery is neither mythical nor incomprehensible.'<sup>107</sup> He goes on to say that 'the provision of an adequate definition of the Church is in fact fundamental for Congar's theology' and that 'it concerns the essential nature of the Church; its structure; mission; ministry; relationship to the world and to other Christian communities.' Further, he considers 'new evaluations' are necessary 'because of profound shifts of perspective in these areas of Church life which are not unaffected by rapid changes in modern society.'<sup>108</sup>

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104 MacDonald, *Ecclesiology*

105 MacDonald, *Ecclesiology*, pxxii

106 Kizhakkeparampil, *Invocation*

107 Flynn, *Vision*, p87

108 Flynn, *Vision*, p88. The fact that he considers 'other Christian communities' to be outside the 'essential nature of the Church' is telling.



While the theme of unbelief might provide a unifying motivation for Congar, it has no ontological significance for ecclesiology. And why something should remain a mystery, if it is fully understood and comprehended, is a mystery in itself! It is apparent from Flynn's somewhat transient and limited scope of 'the essential nature of the Church' that his interest is not in the Church's relation with God, which, arguably, is unchanging and defines her *esse*, but rather, as he clarifies, with a definition 'on the anthropological plane.'

On the other hand, Groppe's impressive study (2004) on the developing role of pneumatology in Congar's ecclesiology does touch on issues of ecclesial ontology. Referring to his 1963 collection of papers, *Sainte Église*, she maintains that even Congar's early understanding of the Mystical Body is *not* ontological, but precisely *mystical*, and the relationship between Christ and his body should be understood in terms of 'espousement'.<sup>109</sup> English translations, she says, misrepresent Congar, when, for example 'un seul l'Aimant' is translated as 'a single being', or 'une seule réalité' (sic) as 'a single entity'.<sup>110</sup> Notwithstanding the language of head and body, 'Jesus Christ and the church are analogously related' and 'the church is united to Jesus Christ only operationally (*per operationem, in operatione*)'.<sup>111</sup>

Like everyone else Groppe recognises the disruption in Congar's ecclesiology between the hierarchy and the mystical body. Following Famarée, she points out that the operation of grace, which is causal for the Church, is exercised by the apostolic hierarchy through the delegated authority of Christ, thereby giving her the power of self-constitution. 'This exercise of power stands in pronounced disjunction from the indwelling of the Spirit in the human person, disjoined from any consideration of pneumatological anthropology, for members of Christ's body can never cause grace.' Given that these powers operate through ordained men, and are external to them, 'there is significant incongruity between the anthropology and the ecclesiology of the mystical body theology'.<sup>112</sup>

Groppe is right to point out this 'incongruity'. Nevertheless, she misrepresents Congar's ontology of the Mystical Body in denying its existence. Considering Möhler's ecclesiology, he describes the Church as 'Mystical body of Christ and living spiritual organism'.<sup>113</sup> And the language of 'espousement' she uses instead requires the

109 Groppe, *Yves Congar*, p117

110 Groppe, *Yves Congar*, p117, p120 footnotes

111 Groppe, *Yves Congar*, p120

112 Groppe, *Yves Congar*, p120

113 Congar, 'Sur l'évolution', p212, translated by Flynn in *Vision*, p92

subjectivity of two parties. This is echoed in the phrase ‘un seul l’Aimant dans le Christ’, which, even if mistranslated as ‘a single being’, certainly implies ‘a single One who loves’. In fact Groppe appears to interpret ‘espousement’ in terms of individual brides for she immediately continues, ‘this language emphasizes that the life of the mystical body is a life of communion among free persons.’<sup>114</sup> By reducing the language of head and body to the level of analogy she not only denies an important aspect of Congar’s own ecclesiology, but also robs the Church of one of her most important terms of self-identification: the Church is not *like* the Body of Christ, she *is* his Body (Bride).

Groppe’s assessment of the structure/life duality in Congar’s early ecclesiology is that the Church becomes a *tertium quid*, neither human nor divine: ‘the church thus appears as an autonomous entity – it is not Jesus Christ, nor the Holy Spirit, nor, strictly speaking, the human persons who compose it.’<sup>115</sup> She denies that this is a consequence, as claimed by Famarée, of Congar’s christocentrism and incarnationalism. Rather, it results ‘from the incomplete convergence of the anthropological and ecclesiological dimensions of Congar’s approach at this time.’<sup>116</sup>

This may well be true in terms of a lack of systematisation, but Famarée is nevertheless right *theologically*. Congar is quite explicit in saying that the apostolic hierarchy has its authority and power directly from the Father through the incarnated Son, without reference to the Spirit, as we shall see.<sup>117</sup> There is, therefore, despite Congar’s claims to the contrary cited by Groppe, an apneumatic ontological foundation to the Body as identified by Famarée.

Beal’s is the most recent study of Congar’s ecclesiology (2011). She suggests that the pursuit of a ‘total ecclesiology’ is an appropriate interpretive lens for a comprehensive reading of Congar’s ecclesiology.<sup>118</sup> This phrase refers to the peculiarly Roman Catholic problem of trying to find a way of including Christians in the definition of the Church. However, it does little to address the relation of the Church to God.

There is a paucity of literature published in English on Bulgakov’s theology, most of which is on his sophiology. The few ecclesiological studies focus on his ecumenism: there is almost nothing on his ecclesial ontology, even though it is now over ten years since *The Bride of the Lamb* was published in English translation (2002).

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114 Groppe, *Yves Congar*, p117

115 Groppe, *Yves Congar*, p122

116 Groppe, *Yves Congar*, p122

117 Eg. Congar, *Mystery*, pp148-149

118 Beal, *In Pursuit Of A "total Ecclesiology"*, 2011

One of the earliest defences of Bulgakov's sophiology in English is Barbara Newman's sympathetic but critical paper in 1978, in which she demonstrates the patristic and biblical background to his 'innovation'. Catherine Evtuhov's *The Cross & The Sickle* (1997) is the definitive biography of Bulgakov's life up to 1920, shortly after his ordination to the priesthood, tracing his intellectual development through these formative years. Rowan Williams' excellent *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology* (1999) includes the earliest translations of some key Bulgakov texts, with keen introductory commentary. The focus is on his earlier writings although there is a significant section on the first book of his great trilogy, *The Lamb of God*. This was followed in 2000 by Valliere's examination of *Modern Russian Theology*, almost half of which is devoted to Bulgakov. He also looks at Bulgakov's political development before sympathetically exploring the ontological and ecclesiological implications of his sophiology, particularly its relation to creation, in his great trilogy. Several of his observations are echoed in this study, but he does not examine the ontology of the Church. Gallaher's MDiv thesis (2003) explored Bulgakov's integrity as man, priest, and theologian through his ecumenical ecclesiology. Nichols provides a useful overview of his life and particularly his thought in 2005, but, not surprisingly for a primer, there is nothing on his ontology. Complementary to this, in 2006, was Arjakovsky's *Essai sur le père Serge Boulgakov* exploring Bulgakov's appeal as a person among those that encountered him. Also in 2005 a special edition of *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (49, 1-2) was published with an exclusive focus on Bulgakov. This included a fresh translation of his difficult paper 'Hypostasis and Hypostaticity', and a paper by Plekon on his ecumenism. In 2007 Nikolaev produced a thesis comparing the ecumenism of Bulgakov and Florovsky. Seiling's thesis (2008) explores the place of Bulgakov's sophiology as a development of Solovyov to address critically the inherent weakness of pantheism in German Idealism. Gallaher's second thesis (2010) investigates the 'problematic' of freedom of God to create, and yet the need of love to go beyond itself in Bulgakov, Barth and Balthasar.

## **1.7 Method – Systematic Theological Conversation**

This study uses a comparative method to advance a discussion in systematic theology concerning the relationship of the Church to God, and specifically whether the Church needs to be considered as a person in that relationship, distinct from the persons of the

Godhead. It is not a discussion primarily concerned with historical context and development either of particular theologians or of their theologies.

The texts for this study have been chosen because they theologically engage with the topic of interest, namely the ontology of the church. They are not the only texts published by these authors that do so, or even necessarily the most comprehensive. Indeed, Congar's writing is not systematic but occasional. Because of this any attempt to develop an understanding of his 'total ecclesiology' must consider not only the extraordinary expanse and multi-faceted approaches he adopts in his vast array of different articles and books, but also the significant development of his thought through time. Particularly in Congar's case, this means the investigation in hand will *not* arrive at a definite 'position' that reflects his ecclesiology.

However, as Congar, himself, says, referring to Aquinas, theology is 'participation in eschatological knowledge'. It is therefore always partial, provisional, or in Gadamer's words, 'proleptic' in character.<sup>119</sup> John Behr says the same in his contribution to the US Lutheran/Orthodox Dialogue in 2003:

The full, perfect, identity of the Church, therefore, is not something located in the ecclesial bodies and structures of the past, to be recovered by archaeology, but, as Florovsky intimates, in the future, in the eschaton, where Christ will be all in all, an orientation maintained by remaining in faithful continuity with the 'faith delivered once for all to the saints' (Jude 3) regarding Christ, the coming Lord.<sup>120</sup>

This is a crucial point. Because ontology is future oriented, so is theology. This does not mean theology is ahistorical. On the contrary, it *only* progresses by 'standing on the shoulders of giants' that have gone before. But theology is not a branch of social science. It seeks the truth that confronts it in the person of Christ, who is both the origin and destination of the Church, to answer the questions of today. If theological conversation can *only* be conducted with a thorough knowledge of the socio-historic background to each author, and the circumstances in which they wrote each text, *no* conversation could take place. Similarly, if, before engaging with a text, it has to be located at a particular moment in a theologian's pilgrimage, we would have to wait until the author was dead before responding.<sup>121</sup> Even if we could achieve a perfect knowledge of this background, how would it advance our *theological* task? In fact, theological conversation has been taking place for millenia without this modern pre-condition.

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119 Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, p169

120 Behr, 'Trinitarian Being', p80

121 Indeed, this was the late Professor Colin Gunton's belief (Personal conversation, 1998)

The proleptic nature of theology means, however, that, while historical circumstance can to a certain degree inform us of the author's original intent, their reason for writing, and some of the influences being exerted upon them, we are by no means constrained by that history in our engagement with a given theological text. This is particularly the case when the investigation is systematic, rather than historical, in character, and the subject ontological, rather than phenomenal, in nature, since we are seeking revealed 'eschatological knowledge'. It is therefore always a legitimate task to enquire and engage with the *text* before us in an open theological conversation of faith seeking proleptic understanding: theological enquiry is an eschatological task concerning the fulfilment of historical revelation.

The texts chosen for engagement have not, therefore, been selected as 'representative' of a particular stage or time in the authors' thinking. Of course they do sit within a historical context, and are the product of the authors' experience, learning, and theological journey so far. However, the primary interest in this study is not to form a view of a *person*, or to chart their development, or even circumscribe their theology. It is, rather, to engage in a systematic manner, and draw out the ontological implications, with what has been written. History and circumstance, where they are known, of course allow more direct access to the author's original intention. However, once a text is written down it acquires a life of its own, as it always has done throughout history, and its meaning is no longer under the control of its author. Macquarrie cites Gadamer:

Not occasionally only, but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely reproductive but a creative act as well.<sup>122</sup>

## **1.8 Thesis Outline**

Congar's principal metaphor for the Church is 'the Body of Christ', which he takes in an almost exclusively organic or somatic sense, even when referring to the Mystical Body. In the first section of Chapter 2 the ontology of the Church as Christ's 'body', as expressed in his early theology in *The Mystery of the Church*, is questioned, particularly in its relation with God and consequent relation between hierarchy and people.

He also addressed the question of the Bride of Christ in its relation to the Body metaphor, as developed by von Balthasar, but was much more nervous about this description. The second section of Chapter 2 explores this nervousness in his 1970 paper 'La personne, *Église*'.

122 Gadamer HG, *Truth and Method*, p264, cited in Macquarrie, *Religious Thought*, p385.

Congar later revised his pneumatology, giving it a much more prominent position in his ecclesiology in the 1979-80 trilogy, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. As part of this process he rehearsed his ontology of the church, but was inconsistent in doing so. The third section of Chapter 2 investigates this revision as he applies it to his christology and then ecclesial ontology.

Bulgakov entitled the third volume of his systematic theology, on the Church, *The Bride of The Lamb*. However, his approach is tangential. He begins by exploring the concepts of creation, personhood (hypostasis) and freedom in relation to God. He then develops his incarnational and soteriological theology as the ground for his ecclesiology, which culminates in his description of the Church as Christ's bride. Because the notions of creation and personhood are so central to this thesis, Chapter 3 follows Bulgakov's programme of development.

Ultimately, the foundation for any ecclesiology must be grounded in Scripture. Chapter 4 questions the easy modern dismissal of the bridal metaphor as underlying much of 'body' metaphor usage in the NT. This is done through a critical engagement with the work of Claude Chavasse.

Chapter 5 draws the study together and presents an outline for the possibility of a personal ontology of the Church in her relation with God.

Chapter 6 recapitulates the main findings and concludes the study.

## **Chapter 2 Congar's Ontology of the Church**

### **2.1 The Church as Body of Christ**

#### **2.1.1 Introduction**

Yves Congar published a collection of studies in the book *The Mystery of the Church* written over a period spanning 20 years between 1937 and 1956.<sup>123</sup> His ecclesiology is widely recognised as being more christocentric before Vatican II, and more pneumatic after.<sup>124</sup> Although these articles come from the prior period, they nevertheless represent a comprehensive apologetic on the nature of the Church as 'the Body of Christ'. Concerning the second study of the book, entitled 'The Church and its Unity', Congar states:

Our intention in reproducing this study is to present, mainly for Christians separated from us, a comprehensive view of the mystery of the Church, in which the different elements of the mystery are justly proportioned, those which are derivative or secondary being set forth in the light of the primary and principal ones from which they proceed.<sup>125</sup>

Here we explore Congar's ontology of the Church as the Body of Christ in these articles, particularly in its relation to God, and consider this ecclesiology as he uses it to draw out the reality it represents.

#### **2.1.2 The Body of Christ**

If Congar was asked to describe the Church in a single sentence, he may well have given this answer:

The glory of God is the Church, mankind united to Christ by faith and love, become his body by Baptism and the Eucharist, a single body bound together in filial obedience and self-giving, living in holiness by his Spirit.<sup>126</sup>

This statement contains all the major strands of Congar's understanding of the Church: the Mystical Body united to Christ, brought into being and sustained through faith and love; the sacraments which form the link between the Visible Church and the Mystical Body, establishing the latter; unity achieved through submission to a hierarchy acting on behalf of the Son; and the presence of the Holy Spirit giving life to the whole.

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123 Congar, YMJ, *The Mystery of the Church*, 1960

124 Eg Nichols, *Yves Congar*, p61; Famerée and Routhier, *Yves Congar*, p149

125 Congar, *Mystery*, p.vii.

126 Congar, *Mystery*, p20

His description of the Church revolves almost exclusively around the term ‘body’. Primarily this is seen as the Body of Christ, that is, as the single, organic body of which Christ is the head.

This Church is, in the first place, the Body of Christ; it forms, with him, a single entity, a single beneficiary of the good things of God.<sup>127</sup>

Deriving from the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* of June 1943, he defines the Church as a body made up by an alliance of two distinct and necessary components.

The first of these is the external and visible structure of the Church. This element comprises the continuity of the physical apostolic succession, and hence authority, of Christ’s apostles. It is analogous to the physical component of an organic body. This is ‘the Church of law’.<sup>128</sup>

The second element is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Congar describes the Holy Spirit (as does Traditional Catholic theology) as the ‘soul’ of the Church, acting as the life-giving principle of the body.<sup>129</sup> This is ‘the Church of love’.<sup>130</sup>

Thus the Church is ‘constituted by a double mission’, one deriving from the historical Christ, the other from the experienced Holy Spirit.

The presence of the Holy Spirit, according to Congar, is inward and invisible, working in the souls of people. This inward and invisible working gives rise to a third element in the Church: the Mystical Body of Christ. We shall explore of these components in turn: the visible body, the Holy Spirit, and the mystical body.

### **2.1.3      *The Visible and External Body – the Apostolate***

The visible and external body of the Church comprises the Church as hierarchical institution. It derives from Christ’s historical selection, appointment, and institution of the Twelve, and the delegation of his own authority to them, in order to continue his work as his agents after his physical departure. This delegation of authority and mission is continued through the Apostolate. It forms the temporal link with the Incarnated Christ of history. The Church as Institution is therefore necessarily hierarchical, which constitutes the ground of unity of the Church. The Spirit works with the Apostles, but has a separate and distinct, although closely related, mission.

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127 Congar, *Mystery*, p68

128 Congar, *Mystery*, p185-186

129 Congar, *Mystery*, p34

130 Congar, *Mystery*, p185-186



The Church is an institution prior to a community of believers for the reason that it only exists because Christ, ‘in the time of his earthly life’, instituted it to bring salvation to humankind.

It comprises three fundamental elements, from which it derives its structure:<sup>131</sup>

1. the deposit of faith, passed on directly from Christ, himself;
2. the deposit of the sacraments of faith instituted by Christ, primarily those of baptism and Eucharist;
3. the apostolic powers, as delegated by Christ, that bring both faith and the sacraments of faith to the people.

These elements do not constitute the Church apart from the role of the Spirit – indeed the Spirit vivifies them within the Church. However, the Institution is not constituted by or founded upon the Spirit.

The importance of the visible institution derives from its historical connection with Christ in his earthly ministry. That is, it forms the continuous link with the Revelation of the Divine in history.

The real meaning of the apostolate and the hierarchy is that they ensure, in the visible order in which we live and where the Body of Christ is to be realised, that all comes from the one single event of the Incarnation and Pasch of Christ.<sup>132</sup>

Thus the Institution is called upon to bear the ontological weight of the Divine Revelation through time. It is possible because Christ invested in them the same *authority* the Father invests in Christ. This authority is the authority of God, himself, and is directly related to Christ’s Incarnation, and not to his baptism. It is an important distinction, because, despite the Incarnation being an event of the Holy Spirit, Congar sees it as an act of the Word as distinct from the Spirit.

The apostolate is closely linked with Christ’s life for us in the flesh – with his visible presence of those days, his powers and activities. It belongs to the sphere of the Incarnation, of the coming of the Son of Man, whose own mission it continues. Christ, in the discourse after the Last Supper, emphasises this important aspect, saying that he now sends his apostles as the Father had sent him... In fact, from the Father to him and from him to them, it is one and the same mission that flows and, in consequence, also the powers belonging to the mission... – the same mission which is, in the same degree, a mission of love.<sup>133</sup>

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131 Congar, *Mystery*, p154

132 Congar, *Mystery*, p159

133 Congar, *Mystery*, pp148-149

Note there is no mention of the Spirit in the activity of Father – Son – Apostolate. It is this fundamental distinction of the Incarnation from the work of the Spirit that leads directly to his distinction between the historic, visible Church and the invisible, Mystical Church. Congar's christology can be seen at work here, for, although he is at pains to relate the work of the Spirit to the visible Church, and indeed sees the two as necessary for the life of the Church, yet, because Christ himself is not constituted by the Spirit, neither is the apostolate:

The mission of the Holy Spirit...is *not a consequence*, like that of the apostles, *of the Incarnation*, the coming of the word in the flesh, which it was to continue, but is bound up with Christ's redemptive acts, with his passage to the Father and particularly with his glorification in heaven...It is a distinct mission; he himself is another Paraclete, a Person distinct from Christ and one sent on a new mission which cannot be equated with that of the Incarnate word, though in close connection with it. (*italics added*)<sup>134</sup>

The distinction between Christ – apostolate – history, and Spirit – experience – mystery inevitably results in the dualism of visible/invisible Church.

So there are, at work in the Church, activities performed, as it were, vicariously for that of Christ – the action of the Spirit, invisible and interior, and that of the apostolic body, visible and exterior.<sup>135</sup>

The christological emphasis in Congar's theology of the Incarnation implies Christ's being sent is independent of the Spirit. If the Spirit is not involved in the sending of the Son, Christ's authority as one sent by the Father is also passed on to the apostles without reference to the Spirit.

The one sent represents the person of his master and has the same authority; he is to be received in the same way as the master himself, from whom he has a power of attorney and whose function he exercises in his absence. This is, undoubtedly, the whole idea of the apostolate instituted by Christ.<sup>136</sup>

The purpose of authority is to wield power within the body. It is no surprise, therefore, to find this also passed on directly to the apostles. He states that 'Christ was endowed by God with his power, in order to reconcile us and reunite us with him, in one body consisting of all the redeemed.'<sup>137</sup> This *power* of reconciliation vested in Christ is, again, independent of the Spirit. Indeed, although he has 'accomplished in himself our redemption' and sent his Spirit 'along with' the apostles, 'he acts in the Church only through his apostles or jointly with them.'

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134 Congar, *Mystery*, pp149-150

135 Congar, *Mystery*, p79

136 Congar, *Mystery*, p149

137 Congar, *Mystery*, p79

First there took place the imparting to Christ of the fullness of the Godhead and of Christ's fullness to the Church and, corresponding to this, there is another process, the visible mission...: the Father sends the Son, the Son sends the apostles. So we must always bear in mind that Christ's promise to be 'with you all days even to the consummation of the world' (Mt. 28:20) is fulfilled in two ways: he is in the Church by his Spirit, his *Πνεῦμά*, and he is present by his power. He is in his Church as animating it, by a spirit of holiness, to eternal life; *he is there as acting in it through the agency of men invested with spiritual powers for the purpose of bringing his work to fulfilment.* (italics added)<sup>138</sup>

The Spirit does have a role in the economy in animating the Church and in appropriating Christ's reconciliation to the 'souls of men'. Indeed, Congar goes to great length to stress that the presence of the Spirit is vital to the Church's existence, as we will see in the next section.

Visible and external *unity* resides in the Institution by virtue of the historical continuity of the apostolate. If all comes from the single event of the Incarnation, and the incarnate Son delegates his authority to his apostles, then unity resides strictly in their continuation throughout the Church's existence. It is essential, therefore, to demonstrate that this was, indeed, the case in the NT. Here Congar sees the apostolic college of the church in Jerusalem as the original seat of authority, and hence unity.<sup>139</sup>

The conception of the visible body connected to its head via history finds expression ultimately in the primacy of the Pope as the vicarious representative of the absent head, to whom authority and obedience are therefore due. The unity of *this* body derives not from communion, but obedience to the See of Peter.<sup>140</sup>

For Congar, the Church as the organic or somatic body of Christ must be visibly, that is objectively, connected to him in history. The temporal linearity of apostolic succession is precisely what connects the body to its head. If this succession is broken, the body becomes disconnected from its head since there is no longer a continuous channel of authority and power to mediate the Divine Revelation from the Father to the Son to the apostolate through history.

One important question this raises concerns the nature of temporality. Nothing comes from God that is not ontological, since he is life and love. By tracing the authority and power of the apostolate back through the Son to the Father Congar is endowing the *Institution* with an exclusive ontology of its own. Famerée identifies the same concern but relating to the self-propagating nature of the apostolate in its causal dispensation of

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138 Congar, *Mystery*, p79

139 Congar, *Mystery*, p83

140 Congar, *Mystery*, p84, p95

grace.<sup>141</sup> This ontology persists through time in the form of apostolic succession commencing from the Incarnation. Of all that the Incarnation encompasses, history, or rather strict chronology, is being made to bear the ontology upon which the existence of Christ's body *as the visible body in the created realm* is dependent. Chronology, historical continuity, is the fundamental aspect of created order assumed in the Incarnation that effectively ensures the salvation of the rest of creation. The crucial point being affirmed is the temporal embeddedness of the Revelation accomplished in the Incarnation, and hence the affirmation of the goodness of creation.<sup>142</sup>

The question remains as to whether this backward-looking approach ultimately succeeds if that which is temporal is, in the future, found to be temporary. It is *not* the same as the 're-membling' of *historical* events through participation, in which time is transcended through the Spirit, such as Passover, baptism and the Eucharist, which are thereby not eclipsed but fulfilled in the eschaton. If the visible Body, dependent as it is on chronology, ultimately has no permanence, where, then, is the affirmation of createdness? By investing the material significance of the Incarnation, that is, the visible body's ontology, in a Spirit-independent conception of history it risks jeopardising the salvation of the entire created order.

The absence of the Spirit from this process creates further difficulties: it gives rise to two strains of ontology in the Church, one originating from the Son and residing in the apostolate, independently of the Spirit, and the other originating in the Spirit's activity within the (already instituted) Church. These ontologies are reflected in the different modes of unity in each. The unity of the visible body derives from authority and obedience. That of the mystical body derives from the Spirit and charity.<sup>143</sup>

But why should there be one ontology for the visible, historical world, and another for the invisible spiritual realm? This is, perhaps, the greatest difficulty with Congar's ecclesiology. He claims that both reflect the theology in the economy yet there appear to be two economies at work, one of which, that of the visible, historical world, is temporary. Furthermore the ontological continuity from Father to Son to apostolate is,

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141 Famerée, *L'Ecclésiologie*, pp414-5

142 A point noted by Webster, 'Purity and Plenitude', p50

143 Williams recognises the presence of a duality here but sees them working in parallel. Indeed, she advocates seeing Congar's dualities of 'laity and clergy, hierarchy and communion, church and world' as antinomies. However, she does not press any further to question the implied ontology of such a view. 'Congar's Theology of the Laity', p144, p154

as Webster implies, in danger of too close an identification between creator and created, between Christ and his Church.<sup>144</sup>

Underlying Congar's ecclesiology of the visible body is a fundamental conception of the nature of the Trinity. The relationship of the Spirit to the Son, is reflected in the relationship of the apostolate to the Spirit. As the Spirit has no role in sending the Son, and is purely subservient to him, the implication is that the Spirit is not involved in this aspect of the Father's relation with the Son. Apart from the Scriptural problems this raises, it becomes difficult to see the nature of the Spirit's relation with the Father and the Son in the immanent Trinity: in what way is the economy reflecting the theology? The danger here, of course, being that if the Spirit's role in the Trinity is only in relation to the economy, then the Spirit (and therefore the nature of the Trinity itself) is contingent upon creation.

A further aspect of this relation is the nature of the unity of God. Unity in the visible body derives from obedience to the authority of the Pope as head of the apostolate. That authority derives from Christ, who receives it from the Father. Unity in the Godhead therefore derives from the *authority* of the Father, rather than the communion of the Trinity.

However, if the Son reveals the Father's nature as one of love and *κοινωνία*, giving up his Son for love of the world through the Holy Spirit, and as the Son lays down his life for the world out of love and in the power of the Spirit, then a very different view both of the Father's wielding of authority, and the nature of Trinitarian unity emerges. Here the *κοινωνία* of the Trinity reveals the unity of God as one of perichoresis or circumincession. In this case the Church's unity would not be defined through obedience to a Vicarious Head, but in communion around the Pope as a living icon of the catholicity of the Bride. That is, as an icon of Mary.

### **2.1.4      *The Invisible and Interior Soul – the Holy Spirit***

The institution of the Church resides in the office of the apostolate. It is the work of the Spirit to impart the spiritual benefits of the visible sacraments ministered by the hierarchy.

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144 Webster, 'Purity and Plenitude', pp62-63

The Spirit does not only join in with the ministry in its work, but intervenes to establish and consecrate it, or rather to bring about interiorly and in reality the consecration imparted in a visible manner by the ministers already instituted.<sup>145</sup>

#### **2.1.4.1    *The Spirit of Christ***

The unity of the body deriving from obedience is an external and visible unity. However the Church has an interiority that is invisible. The Spirit of Christ is the single spirit that animates the Body of Christ and is the source of unity or singularity in the invisible body in Christ.<sup>146</sup>

Congar sees Pentecost, the sending of the Spirit, as the culmination of the work of Christ, the conclusion of the Pasch.<sup>147</sup> The Spirit is sent by Christ to indwell the Church, animating it and being its very life force. However, he is clear that the Church precedes the giving of the Spirit, although almost as an as-yet inanimate body. His description, with the language of building up and finally giving the breath of life, is reminiscent of the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, although this is not a connection he makes explicit.

The Lord had settled the elements which were to make up the Church in the course of his public life. He instituted the apostolic office and made choice of the Twelve, giving the primacy to Peter. He made known the mystery of God as proclaimed in the Gospel; he instituted the sacraments. Thus, gradually, the structure of the Church was built up. Then, at the end of the Paschal fifty days, he gave it its living principle, the Holy Spirit.<sup>148</sup>

The Spirit brings to the Church, or rather *is* for the Church, both its soul and its law. By this, Congar means both the Church's animation, or source of life, and its principle of life. He does not mean, with respect to the law of the Church, law in any juridical sense – that is the domain of the Apostolate.

What is the law? It is the order authoritatively decreed by the head of a community, and giving it its form of life, its rule of collective living; and so it harmonises and adjusts the conduct of individuals to make of them a social unity. It is at once clear that when, as is the case with the Church, we are dealing with a community whose aim is salvation, whose life is of the spirit, the law is much more than something imposed by external force. As regards Christians, this law is chiefly the Holy Spirit in their hearts.<sup>149</sup>

Here we see the non-institutional role of the Spirit, whose activity is at the level of the individual, working in each one to bring about a single entity, a community of salvation.

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145 Congar, *Mystery*, p161

146 Congar, *Mystery*, p69

147 Congar, *Mystery*, p10

148 Congar, *Mystery*, p21

149 Congar, *Mystery*, p22

Thus, by ‘law’, he means law in terms of the pattern of life, of being, like the soul to the body.<sup>150</sup>

‘Law’, here, might be described in much the same way as the means by which the form and growth of a human body are determined by the genetic information stored within it. Although Congar does not use these exact terms, this is certainly the idea he has in mind.<sup>151</sup>

We might press this analogy further, and say that, in much the same way that each individual cell contains the identical genetic information as every other cell within the body, yet those same genetic data inform each cell as to its own particular form, function, and place within the body. So it is with the Holy Spirit, who enters the heart of every individual within the Church, distributing gifts to enable each to perform his or her own unique function, and making the body one.<sup>152</sup>

The pattern of this genetic information, one might say, or DNA, derives from Christ himself. It is according to the pattern of Christ that each individual is growing, and it is into Christ’s Body that the entity called the mystical Body is growing. It is the interiority of the Spirit in each individual that, for Congar, is essential to the unity, or *κοινωνία* of the Body.

First of all, he [the Holy Spirit] distributes to individuals and imparts to them interiorly the numerous gifts flowing from the riches of Christ, our Head. St. Paul, describing the work of the Holy Spirit in forming the mystical Body, enumerates the different and complementary gifts he distributes (1 Cor 12: 4-11).<sup>153</sup>

This ‘genetic blueprint’ might be seen as being the grace of Christ. In his exploration of the ecclesiology of Thomas Aquinas, Congar describes Christ’s grace, and our in sharing in it, in explicitly Platonic terms.

[I]n the world of grace a kind of Platonism is valid for Christ contains in Himself the fullness of the species grace, in a way similar to that in which the archetype of Man, in Plato, contains the fullness of the human species. So that if other individuals are to receive grace too, they may only do so in dependence on Christ and, if these be men whose unique Saviour is the God-given Christ, they may only receive it from Christ and in virtue of sharing, participating, in His own grace.<sup>154</sup>

He attributes this sharing in grace directly to the work of the Spirit, but this ‘species grace’, as he refers to it, is **not** the same as the work of the Holy Spirit. Grace may be

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150 Congar, *Mystery*, p23, p32

151 Congar, *Mystery*, p23

152 Congar, *Mystery*, p23

153 Congar, *Mystery*, p23

154 Congar, *Mystery*, p104-105

given or bestowed by the Spirit, but as a gift of Christ coming from outside, as it were, almost as an entity, or series of entities, with its own existence, ontology even.<sup>155</sup>

All graces come, as from their first and proper cause, from God, and from God the Holy Ghost by ‘appropriation’; our fashioning is in the likeness of God, of His Holy Trinity, the heart of which is our end and goal and the work of the same God in us; because a work of love, it is in a special sense said to be the work of the Holy Spirit and it likens us to Him.<sup>156</sup>

The distinction Congar makes between the fullness of grace in Christ and the fullness of the human species in Plato’s archetype of Man is illuminating in its difference: Christ is *not* presented as the archetypal Man, in whom dwells the fullness of humanity. Instead he contains the fullness of ‘the species grace’ as if it is an attribute or property naturally alien to humanity.<sup>157</sup> This begs the question as to what, then, Congar means when he refers, above, to the *imago Dei* in the context of grace: what is ‘the likeness of God’ in which all humanity is fashioned, and how does it relate to this ‘grace’ that is only available in Christ?

#### **2.1.4.2 The Indwelling Spirit and the Members**

The action of the Spirit is to bring Christ’s ‘grace’ to individuals. Christ, in his humanity, is the true cause or pattern of grace because it is only in him, as a person, that divinity and humanity are joined together. ‘Grace’ is a *divine* attribute made available to humanity only through the conjoining of the divine and human natures in Christ, the God-man, the *communicatio idiomatum*, but appropriated to us by the Holy Spirit.<sup>158</sup>

The Spirit thus ‘appropriates’ the grace of Christ to each individual, distributing gifts and causing the whole to be built up into a unitary body. Referring back to the genetics analogy one might say that the Spirit acts as the DNA molecule for each cell (person) in the body (church), while Christ is the ‘genetic fingerprint’ carried by the DNA. This building up is of love.

This communion, brought into being by charity, which unites men in the very degree in which they are united to God, is, undoubtedly, what constitutes the Mystical Body. Charity makes Christ live in us and unites us, one to the other, all together, in God.<sup>159</sup>

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155 Congar’s anthropology of grace here is completely at odds with that of Bulgakov, explored later. The alien nature of ‘the species grace’ to human nature, as something that comes to it from outside, stands in direct contrast to Bulgakov’s understanding of ‘god-manhood’ in which humanity, reflecting the image of God, is therefore the proper recipient of grace. He explores the ‘ontology of grace’ in an extended passage in *The Bride* (pp294-314).

156 Congar, *Mystery*, p108

157 Congar, *Mystery*, p105

158 Congar, *Mystery*, p108-109

159 Congar, *Mystery*, p128



Like history, materiality, or physicality, is implicitly excluded from the realm of the Spirit, for that is the realm of the apostolate. The Spirit's work, for Congar, is entirely spiritual in the interior sense. Indeed, he describes the Kingdom of God in such spiritual language that there appears to be an almost Platonic dualism behind his thinking in which the material world does not participate, is extraneous.

We speak of the Holy Spirit in particular as dwelling in us, of man as the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:1); in fact, he is so deeply present in the depths of the soul as the indwelling God that, in a manner, he works within us our most personal and inward acts, he prays in us (Rom 7:26). The really fervent soul desires that God himself should make himself its prayer, joy, peace, and love to such a degree that it should no longer be the soul that acts, but God. This presence of God and his all-embracing action is promised to us at the very end, in the Kingdom of God which will be wholly interior and where God will be 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28); that will be the work of the Holy Spirit finally perfected.<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, this interiorisation belies a deep-rooted individualism in Congar, despite his insistence on both the institutional Church and the mystical Church as the body of Christ. Indeed it is, perhaps, *because* of his heavy emphasis on the description of the Church as a *body* that the interiority of the Spirit in the individual tends to lead to the submergence of the *person* into an impersonal entity.

This 'disappearance' of the soul, in terms of personal action, can be detected in other places, for example where Congar describes the nature of loving.

If I love with the heart of God, my love proceeds from a source where there is no question of myself and another, but of the Father, of Christ, and of the members of his Body; it is an image of the love Christ himself bears for his Church. Strictly speaking, it is no longer a matter of another person, but of members of a single body.<sup>161</sup>

The tendency in these passages is a subsuming of the person into something else, against which Congar's spiritual individualism has no power to mitigate. It is the single 'body' that is the ultimate *ontos* of his ecclesiology, of which individuals are but members. Although he wants to convey the reality of communion, the difficulty lies precisely in the inability of the language of 'body' to do so. Communion requires the participation of persons, but the description of the Church as 'body' fails in this regard, as evidenced by Congar's own summary: 'strictly speaking, it is no longer a matter of another person, but members of a single body.' Here the 'person' is precisely what ceases to exist.

Thus, despite his intention, the Holy Spirit is in danger of becoming the agent of depersonalisation under the burden of the 'body' metaphor. The members of a body

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160 Congar, *Mystery*, p24

161 Congar, *Mystery*, p128

serve functional roles, not personal ones: there is not the space is such a metaphor for inter-personal relations.

### **2.1.4.3    *The Animating Spirit and the Body***

The functional role of the Holy Spirit indwelling individuals is one aspect. The Spirit is also the Church's soul: the gift of God's own life to enable the body to live.<sup>162</sup> Here, Congar follows Augustine in identifying in the Spirit two discrete and complimentary functions – not only is the Spirit the *indwelling* one, but also *animating* the one.<sup>163</sup>

He finds the same two-fold action of the Spirit in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, where the Spirit is the principle or matrix of unity since it not only acts within the interior of each individual, but also indwells the Church.

The Church is one living body, not only because a single soul [the Holy Ghost] dwells therein and makes a temple of it, but also because a single soul, namely, the theological virtues, which are divine life immanent in men, quickens its members inwardly.<sup>164</sup>

It is at this point that Congar senses danger in the analogy between human body and soul and the Church and the Holy Spirit – continuing the analogy would lead to an identification of the Church with God, since soul and body comprise a single being. It is important to note that this is precisely the context, exploring the relationship between God and the Church, in which he introduces, almost for the first and last time, the idea of the Church as the Bride of Christ, as a means of separating the Church both from Christ and the Spirit.

St Augustine's comparison is, however, not to be pressed too far... Though the Holy Spirit is the soul animating and indwelling the Body of Christ, he does not make up, with this Body, a physical and substantial whole, as does our soul with our body. It is more a matter of a union between two realities, the Spirit and the Church, each having its own subsistence – a kind of marriage as if between two persons. In Scripture, the description of the Church as the Body of Christ is completed and, in a sense, corrected by its being also spoken of as the Bride of Christ. The two form one flesh, not by physical union – for then the Church would be strictly identical with Christ, impeccable even in its individual members and, like him, worthy of adoration – but a spiritual union. The Church is the mystical Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is its intimate guest, ever faithful, really given to it, close and enduring. He works in it without ceasing. It is not substantially united to him as Christ's humanity, taken from Mary, is united to the Word of God. The coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost was not, strictly speaking, an Incarnation. The Church has the Spirit, but it is not itself the Spirit. Yet the Pentecost gift is so entire, so perfect and complete, the Church is so dependent on the Spirit for all that it is, that the Fathers looked on the two passages of the Creed, [*credo*] *in Spiritum Sanctum* and *Sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam*, as forming in reality one single article.<sup>165</sup>

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162 Congar, *Mystery*, p32

163 Congar, *Mystery*, p34, p35

164 Congar, *Mystery*, p101

165 Congar, *Mystery*, p35-36

In distancing the Holy Spirit (and Christ) from the Church he acknowledges ‘each having its own subsistence.’ Extraordinarily he describes the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Church as ‘a kind of marriage as if between two persons’. The subsistence of the Church, defined in its relation to Christ and the Spirit, is essentially personal.

‘The coming of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost was not, strictly speaking, an Incarnation.’ Elsewhere, Congar is even more emphatic that the institutional Church, however much indwelt by the Spirit, is not an Incarnation, or even a continuation of Christ’s Incarnation. Again, it is in exploring the relation of the Church to the Spirit that the need to distance them arises and the personal nature of the Church is introduced. He refers to her as ‘spouse’, a ‘collective person’, a ‘subject in its own right’, a ‘quasi-person’, and as having ‘an intersubjective ontology.’<sup>166</sup>

It should be apparent from this need to switch metaphor that the description of the Church as the somatic body of Christ is incapable of making sense of her relation to the Trinity. In the quotation above, Congar acknowledges that, in this context, the ‘body’ language must be understood in sponsal terms: ‘the mystical Body of Christ’ explicitly means the union of the Church with Christ as his bride, where ‘the two form one flesh, not by physical union...but a spiritual union.’ That is, when speaking of the *relation* of the Spirit *to* the Church, rather than the *function* of the Spirit *in* the Church, the metaphor has to change: in relating the Church to the Third Person he names her as the spouse of the Second.

The basis for this personal relation between the Church and the Holy Spirit is that of the inner Trinitarian relationships.

The foundation of the union between the Holy Spirit and the institutional Church is the union between the Holy Spirit and Christ. This union, deriving from the mystery of the divine being, of the eternal relations in God, of the consubstantiality and circumincession of the divine Persons, was proclaimed, as regards Christ, at his baptism and, as regards the Church and the apostolate, at Pentecost, their baptism by the Holy Spirit.<sup>167</sup>

It is worth spending a moment considering the theological implications of the body and bride metaphors here, as Congar resorts naturally to the somatic body relation. The perichoretic understanding of the inner Trinitarian relations initially appears to stand at odds with his interpretation of the Father’s relationship with the Son in his institutional ecclesiology, in which the Spirit plays no role. However, it is important to note that he identifies the ‘eternal relations in God’ between the Spirit and the Son as proclaimed at

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<sup>166</sup> Congar, *Mystery*, p170-171

<sup>167</sup> Congar, *Mystery*, p169

Christ's baptism, not the Incarnation. At his baptism the Spirit descends on the already incarnated Son, just as at Pentecost the Spirit descends on the already-instituted apostolate – 'the institutional Church'. For Congar, 'apostolate' and 'institutional Church' are the language of the somatic body extending from Christ as its head, even though the Acts 2 account implies the presence of others, including women, in the house at Pentecost. This apneumatic identity between Christ and his visible body, and thus the relation of the already-instituted apostolate and the Spirit, is, he says, a reflection of the inner Trinitarian relations between Christ and the Holy Spirit. The institutional Church is still prior to the Spirit, just as the Son is in the Trinity. Behind the scenes a subordinationist interpretation of the *filioque* is at work.

However, the nature of the union between the Church (apostolate) and the Spirit is still not clear. Congar talks of the Spirit as being the communication of life within the Trinity, which constitutes the Trinity:

[H]is *role* in regard to us is explained by *his own nature*, the 'economy' by the 'theology'. The Holy Spirit as he is, in God, the final term of the communication of life from the Father – which communication constitutes the Trinity – is also God's innermost communication to man.<sup>168</sup>

Concerning the Church as Christ's somatic body this makes little sense. If the Church is *not* a continuation of his Incarnation, but nevertheless the body of which he is the head, what is relationship of that body to the Spirit, and why should it be defined by the inner Trinitarian relations? These relations are between persons, however that term is construed. But if the Church is a body, it is not a person. Christ is the personal head with whom the Holy Spirit interrelates. The Church's relation with the Holy Spirit must therefore be *mediated* through Christ if it is to be a reflection in the economy of the theology. Yet Christ *sends* the Holy Spirit upon his Church. Indeed the Holy Spirit mediates Christ to the Church, not *vice versa*. Neither can the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Church be purely somatic-functional (i.e. one that only vivifies and engifts) if he is to be understood in some sense as a Person, albeit one who always detracts from himself to reveal the other (Christ, and through him, the Father).

So Congar's theology here is quite different from the institutional theology of the apostolate. If the Spirit is the one who communicates life from the Father, thus constituting the Trinity, then the Son is the one who receives the Father's life through the Spirit. This is the reason that the Spirit's role in the economy is to communicate God's life to us, since in the economy the Church, as the body of Christ, is equivalent to

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168 Congar, *Mystery*, p24

the Son in the inner-Trinitarian relations. However, if the Son is constituted by the Father's life communicated through the Spirit, then what is the Spirit's role in the Incarnation, if not the same? Yet despite his own 'theology', Congar does not give the Spirit a constitutional role with respect to the Son in the 'economy'. There appears to be an incoherence between his theology of the perichoretic relations in the Trinity and his economy of the Incarnation, and hence his ecclesiology.

The reason for this appears to be an inconsistency in his (Orthodox) interpretation of the inner relations of the Trinity and the *filioque*. Despite his assertions, his ecclesiology is dependent on a hierarchical christology and Trinity, in which the Spirit proceeds from the Son *as well as* the Father, and hence is subordinate to both. It is precisely for this reason that the Spirit's role with respect to the institutional Church (deriving from Christ's Incarnation) is non-constitutional and only works in the Church through the hierarchy.

The institutional Church, the Church in its outward structure, is wholly dependent on, and continuous with, the Incarnate Word and the messianic energies in which the apostolic powers share. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Son, sent by him and *proceeding from him*, gives force and efficacy to these powers both when exercised in proclaiming the faith and in celebrating the sacraments of faith. (*emphasis added*)<sup>169</sup>

Nevertheless, the Spirit of Christ, as the soul of the body, is also the mode in which Christ, himself, is present to the Church.

Our Lord...founded it [the Church] by giving its very being and life, promising it his Spirit to animate and assist it. He announced that, in virtue of living within it, we would have in it truth and life, because he would live in it himself, who is the way and the truth, by his Spirit.<sup>170</sup>

The Spirit is the source of all the actions of the Church, and the source of its unity. The purpose of the Spirit is to do the work of Christ, and hence his gifts must come under the rule of the hierarchy, the latter being Christ's vicarious presence.

Just as the Holy Spirit has no radical autonomy, but is sent to do the work of Christ, to bring to mind what he said, the gifts imparted by the Spirit have no other end than to build up the body of Christ. Consequently, they have to be assimilated to the rule of apostolicity, which is that of continuity with the work done by the incarnate Word, under the double form of apostolicity of doctrine and apostolicity of ministry.<sup>171</sup>

So the Holy Spirit is both God giving himself to dwell within the Church as its soul, and also the animating of the Church through the interior life of each individual, in order to build the whole into one body, the Body of Christ. The Spirit has no 'radical autonomy',

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169 Congar, *Mystery*, p182

170 Congar, *Mystery*, p91

171 Congar, *Mystery*, p175

and ultimately all its works must be subject to the rule of the apostolate, or hierarchy, since the Spirit proceeds from Christ and the hierarchy is Christ's vicarious presence in his somatic body.

### **2.1.5      *The Mystical Body***

The Mystical Body exists in the spiritual (invisible) dimension and is that which is, ultimately, the real Body of Christ. This is the Body that the institutional body exists to build up. Congar's concern is to arouse and enable faith and love of God, and to see this love expressed as the corporate response of humanity to God's love for us.

All this, organisation, laws and customs, rites and sacraments, works and joint efforts of every kind, has but one end, to further, beyond all human possibility or likelihood, a life of faith and love hidden in God with Christ. All this ceremonial observance, the whole build-up, exists for no other cause than to arouse in the world faith and love for Christ and God. The claims made by the Church...all [have] one aim, to unite souls to God by making them, through faith, the sacraments of faith, and love, living members of the mystical Body of Christ.<sup>172</sup>

So what, then, is the Mystical Body? What does it comprise and what is its goal? It is the work of Christ appropriated to individuals by the Holy Spirit, both invisibly in their hearts, and visibly through the sacraments. It is the return of the first Adam, through recreation, to the image of God in Christ, although if we listen attentively we will not hear anything about the redemption of the created material order, itself, other than as a temporary means (in the sacraments) of ministering the Holy Spirit's presence.

The purpose on which he [Christ] is henceforth engaged is to recapitulate in himself, for the glory of the Father, all the world he has gained over, the *populus acquisitionis* (1 Peter 2:9), to take up into himself all that pertains to the first Adam, so that, made to the image of God and re-created to that of Christ, it may return to the model after which it was fashioned. Now, this work of recreation is performed by Christ through his Spirit in an invisible manner, but he does it also by visible means, by the sacraments, as we have seen, and by the ministry of men.<sup>173</sup>

'All the world' that Christ has gained is identified with 'the *populus acquisitionis*,' and the purpose of the work of Christ is a 'return' to the first model. There is little of the Orthodox vision of growth in wisdom, maturity, and divinisation. Furthermore, it is 'invisible' *because it is a work of the Spirit*. Here lies one of the great weaknesses of Congar's pneumatology – the realm of the Spirit is invisible. Recreation is visible only in the sacraments 'and the ministry of men'. He seems to be unable or unwilling to accommodate the free work of the Spirit outside the Institution and in the transfiguration of the material world.

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172 Congar, *Mystery*, p95

173 Congar, *Mystery*, p79

However, this is not to say that the Mystical Body is something *different* from the visible Church, rather, it *is* the visible Church itself, he insists.<sup>174</sup>

The mystical Body, however, being the ontological reality of the visible Church, gives the latter its ground of being, and it is from this that the sacraments derive their reality.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, ‘the Church is, of its essence, sacramental.’<sup>176</sup>

While the Mystical Body gives the Visible Church its ontological reality, the Visible Church exists to build the Mystical Body. So there exists a kind of mutual co-dependence of the one upon the other.

The principal aim of the Church is to nourish and maintain the Christian life. This is ‘union with Christ, which is the interior life of the individual soul.’ However, it is lived and acquired socially in the Church – it is a spiritual life ‘of a social and strictly ecclesiastical nature.’<sup>177</sup>

This ‘life in Christ’ is an ‘ecclesiastical communion’ that has ‘three chief elements’ that are ‘served and directed’ by the hierarchy:<sup>178</sup>

1. Faith – which is expressed and nourished in dogma and liturgy
2. Sacraments of faith – especially baptism and the Eucharist
3. Love – which is strengthened and sustained by submission to law.

A corresponding threefold power is invested in the hierarchy, namely: the magisterium (faith), the priesthood (sacraments), and pastoral governance (love).

The first two of these elements are the activation of the first two components that constitute the institutional church, which acts as their repository.<sup>179</sup> To these Congar has added a third – ‘love’ – which, interestingly, has no apparent counterpart in his institutional composition of the Church.

The Mystical Body is established through faith (plus sacraments) and love. Congar uses these two components to express the constitution of this body, explaining the statement of Ignatius:

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174 Congar, *Mystery*, p85

175 Congar, *Mystery*, p76

176 Congar, *Mystery*, p78

177 Congar, *Mystery*, p87

178 Congar, *Mystery*, p87

179 See p40, above

Faith, which is the flesh of the Lord, and love, which is the blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>180</sup>

If the flesh and blood of the Lord are seen to refer to the Mystical Body, the ontological Body, then this statement begins to make sense, since it is by faith that the Mystical Body is established.

Now it is by faith that we open up and deliver our lives to Christ and that his life begins to develop in us... The Mystical Body is, from beginning to end, a re-creation of humanity in Christ, a re-creation of humanity to the image of God.<sup>181</sup>

This results in more than a life led in accordance with Christ's, more than the realisation of a life led on his account. For Congar, it is 'the continuation of his life in ours, and therein lies the whole mystery of his Mystical Body.'<sup>182</sup>

Faith is the entry into this body and Christ's entry into us: it is 'God's outlook engrafted onto us'. Charity, then, is how Christ lives in us: 'through charity, his heart beats within us.'<sup>183</sup> From here it can be seen how charity is 'the blood of the Lord', according to Ignatius.

Nevertheless, despite his insistence that the visible and mystical bodies are one and the same, in fact they remain different:

[T]hose who are truly the friends of Our Lord are the most living members of his Mystical Body. For the same reason, the Mystical Body does not consist in exterior manifestations or ceremonies, however valuable or striking they may be. But it is when a small child, a humble lay-sister, a working mother whose life is taken up with ordinary daily chores, when people like this, unnoticed by the world, love God with all their heart and live a life of ardent charity, then the Mystical Body is realised and increased in stature.<sup>184</sup>

Congar's pastoral passion for people is apparent here. In view is the sanctification of the Holy Spirit in the lives and actions of ordinary people, a recognition that the Spirit transcends the boundaries of the visible and institutional Body – the Mystical Body is actually something different from the visible Body. It 'does not consist in exterior manifestations or ceremonies, however valuable or striking they may be' – the Visible Body does require such manifestations, since these are the continuation of Christ's earthly ministry, instituted by him; the Mystical Body is 'realised and increased in stature' by acts of love and charity, 'unnoticed by the world.' Unfortunately this compounds the dualism he is trying to overcome.

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180 Ignatius, *Ad Trall.*, viii. 1

181 Congar, *Mystery*, p123

182 Congar, *Mystery*, p125

183 Congar, *Mystery*, p125

184 Congar, *Mystery*, p127



Thus the Mystical Body has a substance other than that of the visible Body, and, being derived from the work and presence of the Spirit, 'God himself', has an ontology derived from the Spirit's presence which the visible Body does not. This is reflected in Congar's eschatology, to which we will turn in the next section.

Nevertheless, the fact that the indwelling of Christ, the transformation of souls, is all achieved by the singular Holy Spirit causes it to be a single Mystical Body.

If we form a single body and, as it were, a single being who loves in Christ, that is so ultimately, because we are all interiorly animated by one and the same soul; and, at a deeper level still, because the same charity, animating the whole body, is spread abroad in it and upheld by a single living Being who is the Spirit of Christ, the ultimate principle of the unity of the Mystical Body – 'one body and one Spirit' (Eph. 4:4).<sup>185</sup>

Once again Congar comes close to making the Church a subject, 'a single being who loves in Christ.'<sup>186</sup> But what is the relation between this 'single body' and the 'single being'? Are they the same description of the Church? That is, is the 'single body', with Christ as its head, the 'single being', a corporate Christ? Or is the 'single being who loves in Christ' in some sense other than Christ, himself?

This unity is different to the unity of the Visible Church which, as noted above, is achieved through submission to the apostolic hierarchy. The unity of the Visible Church derives from physical continuity with Christ in his earthly ministry: the unity of the Mystical Body derives from the Spirit's indwelling the hearts of individuals and love. The two are related through the sacraments, and it is at this point that Mystical Church and the hierarchy are seen as co-dependent.

The Mystical Body itself is not a reality in all respects spiritual, invisible and inapprehensible to sense. It is brought into being in intimate and organic connection with a visible Church, something institutional and social in character. The 'sacrament' is the point at which the two aspects meet and unite, the category wherein is expressed the necessary conjunction of the Mystical Body and the visible Church. The latter, throughout its whole being, is but the sacramentality of the unique mediation of Christ dead and risen.<sup>187</sup>

It is not just that the sacraments form the link between two entities – the Church Visible and the Mystical Body. Commenting on the ecclesiology of Thomas Aquinas, Congar identifies two aspect to the relationship.

(1) the Church-as-Institution is the very mode of being of the Mystical Body and of the new life in Christ; (2) she is the Sacrament of the ministry, that is, the instrument of realisation of the Mystical Body.<sup>188</sup>

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185 Congar, *Mystery*, p128-129

186 See discussion on p33, above

187 Congar, *Mystery*, p130-131

188 Congar, *Mystery*, p110

The visible Church is the physical form of the spiritual reality, which is the Mystical Body. In this sense, the visible Church is itself actually a sacrament.<sup>189</sup>

[T]he Church-as-Institution is the sacrament of the Cross, the sacrament of the unique mediatorship of Christ Crucified. Again, she is the sacrament, the effective sign and giver of the gift of new life and of union of men in Christ their Saviour.<sup>190</sup>

Although the visible Church is the sacrament of the Mystical Body of Christ, a sacrament is temporary and does not exist for itself – it is a means to an end. For Congar, the visible body ultimately exists only for the purpose of building up the Mystical Body, which is wholly interior, within individual souls.<sup>191</sup>

At several points Congar gives to the Mystical Body a sort of quasi-personhood. This he does primarily, as noted earlier, when separating the Church from the Spirit, and refers to the Church as a ‘her’, the Spouse of Christ.<sup>192</sup> In referring to her in this way he is aware there is an ontological issue related to the personhood of the Church, for he continues ‘this is not the place to try and work out what is the inmost reality of this body or quasi-person which is the Church.’ Indeed, he explicitly states that the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Church implies the existence of an inter-subjective ontology.<sup>193</sup> Some years later he returned to address the nature or ‘inmost reality’ of this ‘quasi-person.’<sup>194</sup>

For Congar, the ‘aim’ of the Church is to unite souls with God, but the restriction of the Spirit to the invisible realm results in its absence from the visible. He is careful to balance the interiority of the ‘Christian life’ with its social dimension, but this, with its ‘three chief elements’ of faith, sacraments and love, remains ‘strictly ecclesiastical’ and under the auspices of the pneumatic hierarchy. Apart from the temporary sacraments uniting the visible to the invisible, there appears to be no role for the Spirit in the material. One is left wondering, what has happened to the physicality of the resurrection and its relation to the Holy Spirit, and the promise of the transformation of our bodies along with the rest of creation (Romans 8)?

A further difficulty arises directly from the somatic interpretation of the body metaphor whereby the individual soul becomes subsumed as an ordered ‘member’ into the overarching ‘body of Christ’. The purely functional and structured nature of each

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189 Congar, *Mystery*, p111, p114

190 Congar, *Mystery*, p115

191 Congar, *Mystery*, p78, p96, p127, p128-129

192 See p49, above

193 Congar, *Mystery*, pp170-171

194 See Section 2.2

member's relation the other bears down with an almost tyrannical ordering in which each person is ultimately valued only for their place in the body. It is seen most clearly, although in a different context, in Groppe's criticism of the incongruity in Congar's anthropology in which 'the exercise of power stands in pronounced disjunction from the indwelling of the Spirit in the human person.'<sup>195</sup> The 'body' metaphor is not competent to bear the ontological nature of personal relations that reflect the love of God. There is no space for freedom, no sense of personal release, of the fulfilment and the protection of each one's personhood, for love, all of which are ontological aspects of the Church's and each person's being. There is no necessary place for the subjectivity of each 'person' as a reflection of the subjectivity of God. Nor is it clear how any such personal subject could relate to the impersonal 'Body of Christ', the supposed bearer of their identity in their relation with God.

### **2.1.6 Eschatology and The Church**

Eschatology, although present, is not a dominant aspect of Congar's ecclesiology. His key theme is the consummation of all humanity into Christ. He understands this to be the meaning of Christ's title as Alpha and Omega. In his Incarnation, Christ is the Alpha. He is the new Adam, and he alone, through his death and resurrection establishes the Church. Thus, he is the first, and the head, of the Church. But he is also the Omega, in that the whole of the Church, which constitutes his body, is united to him. Thus Christ as the Omega includes the whole Church.

Christ is, at once, the Alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:8; 21:5; 22:13), and this well expresses the unity of the term with the beginning. But he is the Alpha himself alone, although he is so for our sakes, whereas he is the Omega together with us or we are so together with him, as forming a single body with him who is its origin.<sup>196</sup>

The Church, as she exists temporally in the physical realm, is, as we have seen, built up by the two agents who act on Christ's behalf in his absence:

Christ...builds up his Church by means of *his* apostles and *his* Spirit. These might also be called the agents whom he has empowered to execute his work in the time of his absence, his 'vicars', in fact.<sup>197</sup>

The institutional aspect of the church, the apostolate, is the human agent continuing the mission of the Incarnation. The nature of 'agency', of executing Christ's work 'during

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<sup>195</sup> Groppe, *Yves Congar*, p120

<sup>196</sup> Congar, *Mystery*, p159

<sup>197</sup> Congar, *Mystery*, p154

his absence', indicates that the apostolate, and therefore the hierarchy of the Church, is temporary.

[The relationship of these two agents (apostles and Spirit) to the Incarnation itself and its end] may be expressed in two propositions: (1) what brings to pass the work of Christ proceeds from Christ himself in his Incarnation and (2) connects the seed with its fruit, the source to its fullness, the Alpha that is Christ acting alone for our sakes to the Omega which we are to be with and in him, from him and for him. Thus, the agents of Christ's work have a backward-looking relationship (if we may so express it) to his Incarnation in time and a forward-looking one to its consummation at the end of the world. They function in fact, throughout the whole of the interval between the two comings of Christ and this is, precisely, the time of the Church.<sup>198</sup>

By the term 'Church', here, we are to understand the visible Church, as opposed to the Mystical Body of Christ. This interval between the two comings of Christ, the time of the Church, the time of agency, implies that such agency will no longer be required. Although Congar describes the Holy Spirit as an 'agent' and a 'vicar' of Christ, the Spirit will nevertheless remain on Christ's return:

[The apostles] were set up, in every respect, by the mandate given to them and, once they have discharged it, they will have nothing more to do as regards our access to God. The Holy Spirit and Christ, on the other hand, always retain their role in our regard. In heaven, Christ remains our high priest for ever. The Holy Spirit is always the living water; he is not merely a 'vicar', he does not simply exercise a 'ministry' of the Incarnate Word, he is not an 'instrument'...his agency is very different from that of the apostles.<sup>199</sup>

This temporary nature of the institutional Church is one of the keys to understanding why the reality of the Church does not lie with the visible Church, however much it is bound up with it. Congar's ontology of the Church is ultimately defined as eschatological, and lies with the Mystical Body of Christ. All the physical aspects of the Church's existence, the sacraments and the hierarchy, will pass away leaving only souls interiorly indwelt by the Holy Spirit who binds them together into the one Mystical Body of Christ.

This leads to an important criticism in his ecclesiology: the absence of the Spirit's role in the Incarnation leads directly to his absence from the created order in his ontology of the Church. By locating the eschatological reality of the Church in the mystical union of each individual soul with Christ Congar exposes himself to the charge of docetism, since the materiality of the Incarnation appears to be, ultimately, irrelevant.<sup>200</sup>

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198 Congar, *Mystery*, p154

199 Congar, *Mystery*, p158

200 Cf. Hanvey J, 'In the Presence of Love', who believes Congar *does* bring creation into the eschaton. However, he claims too much for Congar by reading his later pneumatology into his earlier work and placing insufficient emphasis on Congar's eschatological ontology. There is no explicit place for creation in his ecclesiology or eschatology *per se*; he rarely mentions it and it is difficult to reconcile with an ontology of interiority without a much more robust anthropology, such

### **2.1.7 Conclusions**

The primary description of the Church, for Congar, is the Body of Christ. In *The Mystery of the Church* it takes two forms: visible and institutional, and invisible and mystical.

This dualism derives philosophically from the influence of German Idealism through Möhler, and theologically from his apneumatic christology. History is the mediator of the objective (visible and exterior) Revelation of the Son of God, carried in the apostolate. The Spirit is the mediator of the subjective (invisible and interior) experience. The subjective Spirit is subordinate to the objective Son, and therefore the apostolate.

The hierarchy has its ontos as the visible Body of Christ. It derives its authority and institutional nature from its institution by Christ and the continuation of his earthly ministry. It is seen as prior to the indwelling of the Spirit, and, as Christ's vicarious representative, is to be obeyed. It exercises juridical power and authority, and is the causal channel of grace, independently of the Spirit, and, through this authority, maintains the unity of the Body of Christ.

The Mystical Body of Christ is realised by the Spirit. It is invisible and interior and is linked to the visible Body primarily through the sacraments. The strong emphasis on the interiority of the work of the Spirit in the hearts of individuals and the temporary nature of the visible Church seems to leave little room for the rest of creation. It appears to relegate Christ's createdness to the level of instrumental, implying the ultimate irrelevance of God's creation. One is left wondering if there is in Congar, in his early theology at least, a hidden docetism.

The priority of the institutional Church over the Spirit can be traced back, ultimately, to Congar's interpretation of the *filioque* clause. The hierarchy envisaged in the Trinity, where the Spirit is seen to proceed from, and hence is subordinate to, the Father and the Son, translates into the Church, where the Spirit is subordinate to (although exceptionally not always limited by) the apostolate, Christ's vicarious representative.

This hierarchy is temporary, awaiting Christ's second coming when its vicarious action will no longer be required. The Spirit's action, however, will continue to communicate God's life to the individuals who make up the Mystical Body of Christ, and it is this, rather than the hierarchy, that will remain. The Mystical Body is therefore the true body

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as Bulgakov's.

of Christ. It is where the ontology of the Church is to be found, although it is only built up, and realised, through the visible, institutional Church in this age. The building up is achieved through the sacraments and the action of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of individuals under the auspices of the hierarchy.

There are several consequences to this understanding of the procession of the Spirit from the Son relating, in particular, to the constitution of personhood, or hypostaticity. Firstly, Congar states that the Spirit is the communication of the Father's life to the Son in the Trinity. If true, each Person in the Trinity is involved in the constitution of the two Others. But it is not at all clear how this is reflected in his interpretation of the procession in the economy.

Secondly, if the Spirit does not play a role in the Son's constitution in the theologia (which is his interpretation of the Spirit's procession from the Son), neither can the Spirit take the role of establishing 'personhood' in the economy. This is reflected in Congar's almost exclusive description of the Church as a 'body,' the functional role of the Spirit as the one who joins individuals together for the purpose of creating that single Body, and, at the same time, indwells this Body as its soul. One of the most important deficiencies in the metaphor of the Church as 'Body' is that there is very little room for the establishment of persons as particular, hypostatic, free beings. The identity of the Church with Christ as his body leaves no space for the 'I-Thou' relationship necessary for personal freedom: with a single head-body there is only an 'I'. This failure to safeguard personal hypostatic space in the Church can be seen as a direct consequence of the non-hypostatic role of the Spirit in the economy, itself deriving from the non-hypostatic role of the Spirit in a *filioque*-based interpretation of the inner-Trinitarian relations.

Thirdly, it is difficult to see how Spirit's present 'functional' role in the Mystical Body of Christ translates into the 'personal' nature of the Church as Bride on Christ's return. The fact that, scripturally, the Spirit communicates God's life (as seen at Christ's Incarnation as well as his baptism) strongly suggests that the Spirit **does** play a constitutional and hypostatic role in the Trinity, and hence in the relation of the Father with the Son, and must therefore also do so in the economy, both in the present and eschatologically. It would appear, then, that the implications of Congar's interpretation of the *filioque* clause, in which the Son's relation with the Father is *not* subject to the Spirit, do not make sense of his assertion that the Spirit constitutes the Trinity as such.

For Congar, then, the Church is the *Mystical* Body of Christ. ‘Body’ is to be understood in a somatic, rather than a sponsal, sense. But ultimately the somatic identity fails to allow the Spirit ontological space to hypostasise either the Church or her ‘members’: it is incompetent to bear the ontological markers of personhood: love, freedom, subjectivity. It is for this reason, when relating the Church to God, he resorts to the description of her as Bride, not only in relation to Christ, but surprisingly also to the Spirit.

The Mystical Body persists into the eschaton but here his primary description changes to ‘Bride’. Nevertheless we are left with no clear understanding of what it means to name her thus. We know she is eschatological, we know she is distinct from the Holy Spirit, and by definition, from Christ. We know she will not be hierarchical, at least in a structural sense. However, if her ontology is eschatological, this *must* inform her present reality. But in Congar’s own admission, we do not know the Church’s inner *esse*, what is the ontology of the Bride of Christ.

## 2.2 *The Church as Bride of Christ*

In 1970 Congar entered the then current debate in the Catholic Church concerning the question of the nature of the personhood of the Church. His contribution, entitled *The person 'Church'*, reviewed the question chronologically starting with Fathers, particularly Augustine, moving on to Aquinas, then through the early modern theologians Cajetan, Bellarmine and Nazarius, and so into the contemporary scene.<sup>201</sup>

The earliest discussions, beginning with Origen, centred on Christ's declaration to Paul in Acts 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting'. These discussions reflected on the identity between Christ and his ecclesial body. Affirmation of this identity, or more exactly this unity, is frequently found in the Fathers at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century: Hilary, Gregory of Nyssa, Chrysostom, and Augustine.

Augustine, through the application of Tyconius' first rule concerning the transferability of Scriptural reference between Christ and the Church, identified the two as the same *person*. His argument revolved around the Church as the Body of Christ, and Christ being the 'I' of the Church as its head, together forming a single 'mystical person'. This identity was developed in the West, particularly by Aquinas, was founded primarily in the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ, and was soteriological in nature: that is, Christ's merits are passed on to his body because he is its head. The place of the Spirit in this discussion of christology, soteriology and the Church was not generally considered.

In reviewing the historical development of the personhood of the Church, Congar continually questions the apparent moves to describe the Church, or the Body of Christ, as a person *other* than Christ, for in this case, how could Christ be described as the hypostasis of the Church?

Despite the fact that Chardon, in 1647, postulated the idea that *grace* formed the subsistence of the Church, giving it a quasi-personal unity,<sup>202</sup> it was not until more recently that the role of the Spirit was explored in relation to the Church's subsistence. Cathala, in 1912, described the Holy Spirit as the bond that unites the Church into a truly divine-human whole, prefiguring the later writing of Maritain. The first recent attempt in Roman Catholic theology to define the hypostasis of the Church was

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201 Congar, 'La personne "Église"' 1971

202 Congar, 'La personne', p623



undertaken by Mura in 1936. However Journet, in 1969, undertook the most extensive investigation of the personhood of the Church to date. He spoke of a parallel between the relationship of the Word and Christ, and the Spirit and the Church, which is, at its highest, a dialogue between the Word and the Spirit. Congar describes Journet's thesis:

Journet attempted to harmonise the Augustinian theme of *Caput et corpus, Sponsus et sponsa = uno caro, Christus totus = una persona*, and the Thomist usage of *una persona mystica* to explain, soteriologically, how Christ's merits count for all men, and finally the theme of the subsistence of the mystical Body formulated by Cajetan, Nazarius, etc. One thus ends up appropriating, either the Holy Spirit, or perhaps Christ, as a subject with attributes or the transcendent support of the Church. But more than this, in relying on these classical authors, Journet has clearly specified in which sense one is able to speak of a proper and constitutive personhood of the Church herself, owing to an abstraction which differentiates her from her divine sources. She is thus a collective, supernaturally created person, which only exists in her members and which, nevertheless, is not reducible to them and represents a *reality* having specific properties such as unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity, indefectibility, and in certain of its acts, infallibility.<sup>203</sup>

Although Congar describes Journet here as predicating to the Church a form of proper personhood, he does not concur with his assessment. Instead, he addresses the question 'who is the Church?', rather than 'what is the Church?', by turning to the thought of Urs von Balthasar, where the Church is described as the person whom Christ has called his Bride.<sup>204</sup>

### **2.2.1 Summary of Balthasar's 'Who is the Church?'**<sup>205</sup>

Like Congar, Balthasar's eschatology is personal in the individual sense: each soul will be united with God. This individuality defines the ontological nature of the Church, which, institutionally, although prior, exists temporarily for this end. Also like Congar, the institutional 'body' metaphor takes precedence over the personal nuptial one because it extends directly from the Incarnation. Again, like Congar, the Spirit is subordinate to Christ because 'spirated' by him, operating within the already constituted Church.

Unlike Congar, Balthasar gives a central role to Mary as co-redemptrix, in whom all participate to receive grace, and whose consciousness all must come to share. In this sense she is the central focus of the bride. Also unlike Congar, he defines the hierarchy in masculine terms as seed-bearers (able to confect the seed of the Eucharist) and the rest of the Church (laity) as feminine seed-receivers. Based on the ancient usage of the

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203 Congar, 'La personne', p627

204 Balthasar, 'Who is the Church?', 1991

205 Summary of an unpublished 12,000 word essay, 'Balthasar and the Spouse of the Word'.

bridal metaphor to refer both hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ and to the Church, he gives to the Church a mediatorial between God and the World.

Balthasar recognises the importance of the bridal metaphor in giving personal space to creation in its response to God. However, the ‘body’ metaphor, because incarnational, carries more weight for him. So the ‘I’ of the Church, ontologically, is the ‘I’ of Christ, not the ‘I’ of Mary.

For Balthasar, ontologically there are brides, not a bride. They form a single bride to the extent that they share in Mary’s consciousness and grace. But the presence of the Spirit, whose role in the Trinity is to be the opposition (love) that distinguishes them as persons, is the guarantee that the personhood of each individual will be protected.

### **2.2.2 Congar’s Response to Balthasar**

In his summary of Balthasar’s thought, Congar’s concern is to understand *how*, and to what extent, the person-Church is a single entity that the Holy Spirit can then, as in the Trinity, unite with Christ as his Bride.<sup>206</sup> The Spirit is primarily, for Congar, the bond uniting the Father and the Son. And, as in the *theologia* so in the *œconomia*, the Spirit is the bond uniting the Bride to Christ. However, in order for the Spirit to unite two such persons, they must already be constituted as persons: their union presupposes their distinction as different persons, even as in the case of husband and wife.

The Church must therefore be a single entity capable of being united with Christ. The question then is ‘how is the Church a single entity?’ What is the basis of the unity of believers that enables it to act as a person? The union that takes place between distinct believers, as explored by Balthasar, is based on the reception of grace and the exercising of obedience after the manner of Mary. It is in this common reception and response that the union between individuals is established, and thus the body of Christ realised:

The unity of the person-Church as Bride...is realised as an imitation and a prolongation of the attitude originating in Mary by a multitude of people who participate in Christ by grace and thus form his body.<sup>207</sup>

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206 Congar, ‘La personne’, p629. Cf. the current Catholic catechism in which the Church, as a type of Mary, produces ‘sons of God’ through union with the Holy Spirit in baptism: ‘At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church: “the Church indeed . . . by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and Baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse.”’ In *Catechism of the Catholic Church*., p128, #507, quoting *Lumen Gentium*, 64, cf. 63

207 Congar, ‘La personne’, p629

It is on this already-constituted body, or person-Church, that the Spirit then acts to complete this attitude by making it a response to Christ's invitation, thus uniting the Church with him. It is unclear from Congar's interpretation here whether he sees the Spirit as the agent in the initial reception of grace by the individual believers, or whether 'grace' is received as something separate from the activity of the Spirit. It is clear, however, that the major activity, or at least the most explicit activity, of the Spirit is in bonding the Bride with Christ as it bonds the Father with the Son.

If this analysis of the situation is correct, that the unity of the Father and the Son is established by the presence of the Spirit as the bond or 'love' between them, we are faced with several difficulties. Firstly, the *relationship* between the Father and the Son has, itself, an ontology: that of the Spirit. The Spirit in this case *is* the *ecstasis* of the Father and the Son towards each other. There is no relationship between the Father and Son without the Spirit. To say that the Father loves the Son is to say that the Spirit unites them.

Secondly, since the union between Father and Son implies their distinctiveness as persons, the hypostasis of the Spirit, who appears not to be united to either *as a person*, is unclear. If the Spirit is hypostasised as a person, then, given the ontological nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son, the question arises as to the nature of the 'bond' that unites the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit and the Son *as persons*. In what sense is it possible to say that the Father *loves* the Spirit, or that the Spirit *loves* the Son? Is it true to say that the *relationships* within the *theologia* are ontological, or does the ontology rest with the *persons* comprising the Trinity, the relationships being the *consequence* of the ecstatic movement of each person towards the others? And if this latter is the case, then what is the nature of the unity of the Godhead? Is it based on the relationships or the perichoresis of the Three, or in the *ousia* of God? In what sense can the oneness of God be said to be properly ontological? These are questions that, on the whole, remain unaddressed in Congar's thesis, but are important because the answers will define the nature of human relationships, and the role of the Spirit both within the Church and between the Bride and Christ. Although Balthasar does speak of the role of the Spirit within the Church, and its involvement in the relationship between Christ and his Bride, and bases these formulations on the role of the Spirit in the Trinitarian relations, Congar does not apply them to his own analysis.

### 2.2.3 The 'Personhood' of the Church

In going on to consider the nature of the personhood of the Church, Congar engages with two contemporary Catholic thinkers: J Maritain, described as a Christian philosopher, and Louis Bouyer, a theologian who was greatly influenced by Bulgakov's sophiology.<sup>208</sup> Both published works in 1970 addressing this question,<sup>209</sup> and both came to similar conclusions, although from different perspectives. Congar cites Bouyer's own explication of the nature of the Church's person and unity with reference to the unity and persons of the Trinity:

We can and must stress that this personality attributed so often to the Church in Scripture only exists in our human persons arriving at their perfection, a bit like the personality of God himself only exists in the three divine persons. This explanation of the personality of the Church helps us to understand that our persons, in entering the Church, far from being blended into one another altogether in Christ, prepare to find in their union with him and their unity in him, brought about by the Holy Spirit, one supernatural super-existence, and as such, eternally, not only in the sense of perpetual duration, but in an effective participation in the actual life of the divine persons.<sup>210</sup>

Bouyer's 'personality' of the Church is eschatological, but also, in its affirmation of participation in the communion of the godhead, strongly Orthodox, reflecting the influence of Bulgakov. On the face of it, he appears to be saying that the personality attributed to the Church resides, and remains, in its individual members, in the same way that the 'personality' of God resides in the individual members of the Trinity. We can be confident, therefore, that our 'personhood' will not be lost through 'blending' with Christ and others.

On the other hand, however, he does appear to be endorsing the existence of a single 'personality' for both the Church and God. Furthermore, it is not entirely clear whether this 'personality' remains in the individual ('only exists in our human persons'), or whether it comes into existence eschatologically, i.e. does he mean 'only exists *when* our human persons arrive at their perfection'? It is also not clear whether 'personality', as he is using it, refers to 'personal characteristics' (i.e. behaviour, personality traits etc.), or whether he has the more ontological concept of 'personhood' in mind. From the line of his argument, it would appear that the persons of the Godhead remain distinct (therefore we as persons in our unity with Christ and the Church will remain distinct), but the 'personality' (behaviour) of God results from the summation of those of the persons of the Trinity. In taking this line, he would be arguing against the existence of

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208 McPartlan P, 'Who is the Church?', Fn 52, p286

209 Maritain J, *De l'Église du Christ*, 1970; Bouyer L, *L'Église de Dieu*, 1970

210 Bouyer L, *L'Église de Dieu*, p603

some aspect of God superior to, or prior to, the persons of the Trinity. The corollary is that there is no aspect of the Church superior to its members. Nevertheless, he goes on to refer to the ‘one supernatural super-existence’, which is a unity with Christ, lifted into the divine life of God, but whether this unity is merely attributed a collective ‘personality’ or it has some ontological basis (and hence may be considered in some sense to be a ‘person’) remains ambiguous.

Bouyer sees the Spirit as the agent of unity in the Church, but his reference to ‘the three divine persons’ as the fundamental basis of the Godhead suggests that he finds the unity of God in the perichoresis of the distinct persons of the Trinity, again reflecting Orthodox influence. The Spirit is the one responsible not only for the Church’s union with Christ but also for its unity in him. The purpose of the Church, and its ‘personality’, is ‘in an effective participation in the actual life of the divine persons’.

However, there are difficulties in mapping the nature of Trinity directly onto the nature of the Church. Firstly, the Church only exists in and through the second person of the Trinity, and of whom he is the head, and who is, himself, the image of the invisible God<sup>211</sup>. It is therefore not quite so straightforward to correlate the nature of unity in the Godhead directly to the nature of unity in the Church.<sup>212</sup> Secondly, while the Trinitarian God may be assigned a single ‘personality’ (e.g. God is kind, loving, just, generous, merciful etc.), the Trinity has never been spoken of as a single person in the way that the Church is in the NT. The Trinity is rather spoken of as one God in three persons. If the principle of the unity of the Church is the same as the principle of unity in the Trinity, then, although a ‘personality’, in the sense of personal characteristics, may be assigned to the Church, it could never be constituted as a single ‘person’ as such, for the same reason that the Trinity could not be said to be a single person.

Personalities are not the subjects of relationships: only persons can be that. Bouyer is clear that the single ‘personality’ of God does not constitute God as a single person, since he says that the personality ‘only exists in the three divine persons’. So if all that can be said of the Church is that it has unity and a personality in the same way as the Godhead then that is insufficient to constitute it as a person who can be the subject of a relationship. The analogy between the unity of the Church and the unity of God thus poses a problem for the Church’s relationship with God, for the Church is not called to have a single relationship with ‘the Trinity’, despite the latter being *homoousios* with a

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211 Col 1:15-18

212 Although cf Eph 4:3-6

‘personality’. Rather, it is called to have relationships with the *persons* of the Trinity, to be the Body and Bride of Christ, thus to call God ‘Father’, and to have this through the Spirit. This multiplicity of relationships indicates a multiplicity of persons, one of whom is the Church. To have a single personality, and base the unity of the Church on the unity of the Trinity, is therefore insufficient to explain the reality of the relationships to which the Church is called. It also begs the question of terminology: what is a ‘personality’ if it can be possessed by an entity (e.g. the Godhead) that is not, in itself, a ‘person’? The difficulty of the question is compounded because the French term *la personnalité* is used to mean both ‘personality’ and ‘personhood’.

Congar summarises Bouyer’s understanding of the Church in terms of ‘a single being’ (*un être unique*). He identifies Bouyer’s insight into the eschatological ‘completion’ of each faithful person through their participation in the Church without threatening their identity in any way. In this sense, the analogy with the persons of the Trinity is helpful:

The person ‘Church’ is therefore constituted by the gifts of grace made to people, but in such a way that they make them all participate in a single being that transcends the individuals without detracting from them: quite the opposite, it completes their personal being. Further, Fr Bouyer sees in this whole, as such, the fruit of God’s intention. It is this that we will become. But this design of God, he says, is his Wisdom, which is identified with the Son of God and yet is distinct from him in so far as it concerns *us* and recovers the realisation of the mystery of Christ *in us*. Fr Bouyer attempts to assimilate here the great sophiological insight of the modern Russian Orthodox theologians.<sup>213</sup>

The ‘modern Russian Orthodox theologian’ with the ‘great sophiological insight’ is, of course, Bulgakov.

Congar’s description of Bouyer’s conception of the constitution of the person ‘Church’ starts with ‘the gifts of grace,’ and this reception of grace is the foundation of the unity to which the individuals are raised. Once again, the question of the relation of this grace to the Spirit is not unveiled.

Although Congar refers here to Wisdom, and touches upon its role in the Church, it goes no further. He does not take up the ‘great sophiological insight’ into his own exploration of the nature of the Church, despite his own conversations with Bulgakov held in the winter of 1936.<sup>214</sup> However this was still very early in his theological career.

Maritain’s concern, on the other hand, is to ground the full truth of expressions such as: ‘the Church is the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:23f), the Church is holy, the Church renders worship to God, the Church speaks, teaches, “do not look at our sins, but at the faith of

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213 Congar, ‘La personne’, pp632-633

214 Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians*, p17

your Church.”<sup>215</sup> The fact that these acts and properties are attributed to the Church, Maritain maintains, *requires* her to have a created personhood (*personnalité*) that is properly her own. This personhood is something God confers on the Church *in response* to the grace that animates her and through which she carries the image of Christ, which he sees in the hearts of the individual members.

In her unity and universality, or other similar property through which the invisible grace of Christ animates his vast human organism, the Church carries in her the image of Christ, and offers it before God who sees the invisible and discerns the grace within the depths of the hearts. Through this image the immense multitude of the members of the Church who live in his life, is clothed by an individual configuration, in such a way that, in consideration of the individuality of the image of Christ, she is able to receive a subsistence of her own as if she were an individual.<sup>216</sup>

The nature of personhood conceived by Maritain is substantial and ontological. It is different to the nature of an individual, and is something conferred on an individual by God’s calling the individual into existence as a subject or person. Maritain uses the example of Peter and Paul as ones called to life by God, presumably through their calling by Jesus, although this is not explicitly stated. It is in this calling by God that the individual is made a subject or person, and thus receives a subsistence that constitutes them as such:

The individuality of the image of Christ carried by the Church is an *analogue* of the individuality of the substantial nature possessed by each one of us; and just as in calling Peter or Paul to life (*à l’existence*) God confers on such individual nature the subsistence which constitutes it as a subject or person, in the same way, in calling the Church of his Son to life God confers on her, by this image which he sees in her, a subsistence which constitutes a whole multitude of human beings as a subject or person.<sup>217</sup>

Maritain uses the calling of God to define the basis of the nature of personhood. Peter and Paul were called by God out of death, and thus non-existence, into life (this is the meaning of *à l’existence*) and, as part of this birth, were given new names by God. Thus, it is the naming by God that constitutes the existence of a being as a ‘person’ (as in the sacrament of baptism). Such an understanding is a long way from Balthasar’s ‘spiritual centre of consciousness of free and rational acts,’ but is an image that draws directly from the biblical nature and history of personhood.

Maritain, however, goes beyond the simple ‘calling’ to identify ‘personhood’ in terms of a subsistence that is conferred upon a nature, thus endowing it almost as an entity that is transferable. The Church, however, is not an individual upon which such a

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215 Congar, ‘La personne’, p631

216 Maritain, *De l’Église du Christ*, p44

217 Maritain, *De l’Église du Christ*, p43-44

subsistence can be conferred. Instead, the grace in the hearts of the individuals reflects the image of Christ, and it is this reflection of the singular image of Christ that God sees. It is on this basis, this singular reflected image of Christ, that God then confers the subsistence of personhood on the Church. Congar summarises it thus:

Maritain knows very well that the Church is not an individual substance, but a communion of persons, and that its unity is therefore that of a multiplicity. But charity and the fact that, by it, each faithful one reflects the single image of Christ Jesus, confers on this multiplicity a supernatural unity sufficiently real for it to play the part of an individual spiritual nature, on which God confers the seal of personhood (*personnalité*), such that she is able to say 'I'.<sup>218</sup>

However, Congar is hesitant about the ontological nature of personhood as described by Maritain. More precisely, he remains unconvinced that there is an ontological *subsistence* that defines an individual as a subject or person beyond that of the existence of the physical, real individual. He describes Maritain's view of the ontology of personal reality and subsistence in these terms:

J Maritain works with a certain analysis of the structure of a personal reality in which an individual human nature must, in order to become a personal subject, receive an ultimate determination that one calls subsistence, an abstract term to which J Maritain gives as a very vivid equivalent 'liberating actuation'. The subsistence is the ontological foundation of personhood (*la personnalité*). In fact, this notion of subsistence plays a role in Maritain's position on the person-Church. It is in effect a distinct principle of the individual substance of rational or spiritual beings from which the multitude forms the Church. It is thus able, uniquely, to bring to an end the plurality of these substantial beings and found one original person (*personnalité*).<sup>219</sup>

Congar's two concerns are that, firstly, there appears to be no safeguard to the personhood of the individual 'substantial beings', in that they are subsumed in the subsistence of personhood endowed upon the Church to make her a person. Secondly, this notion of the subsistence of personhood, as something distinct from the individual substance, was one of which Aquinas was unaware. It was introduced as a concept at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century but resisted by Thomists at the time because they would not allow any distinction between an individual rational substance and a personal subject. Individuals are created as such by God, and they are thus inherently subjects. Congar is explicit in working with the Thomist definition of a person, which itself is derived from Boethius:

St Thomas followed the definition of person given by Boethius: *naturae rationalis individua substantia* (an individual substance of rational nature). The subject adds nothing to the individual substance. It is nothing other than the concrete individual who, among material beings, carries, more than simply its essence, the principles that comprise an individual: its incommunicability follows from this individuation of form, its life (received) enabling an

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218 Congar, 'La personne', p631

219 Congar, 'La personne', p633



individual substance endowed with ‘accidental’ properties: such a being is able to subsist by itself (*un tel être peut subsister par soi*).<sup>220</sup>

The concrete, material individual is thus the substance of a person, and the life of such an individual has already been received from God in order for it to exist. There can therefore be nothing added to it that will change its subsistence. Its subsistence as a subject is already defined in the fact that it has been given its existence by God. This act in itself, it is held, constitutes the individual as a subject, and hence a person. A person is defined materially, and anthropocentrically, as ‘any individual substance of rational nature’.

There are two aspects to this definition of person that need further consideration. The first, and most important, is that Congar seems to be working exclusively with an understanding of ‘life’ (*l’existence*) as temporal, in the here and now: individual beings subsist by themselves in the present. The existence of the *naturae rationalis individua substantia*, that is, a person, is sufficient for him to define the presence of ‘life’, even life received from God. The fact that such a ‘person’ will die, will be subject to eternal judgement, does not seem to have a bearing on the definition of ‘life’, or of ‘person’, thus begging the question of the role of baptism.

However, Maritain makes it plain that he is referring to the change that takes place when an individual is ‘called’ by God. The calling of Peter and Paul to life, to which Maritain refers, could possibly refer to their creation as individuals in their mothers’ wombs. However, in this case there is nothing different between the created individual and the ‘subsisting’ person, since they would both come into existence through the same creative act of God. Rather, it is much more likely to refer to their calling by Jesus Christ through reception of the Holy Spirit and baptism. In being called by Christ and receiving the Spirit, they are recognised, and called by God to ‘life’.

This recognition by God has clear implications for the *eschatological* existence of the one being called, rather than merely the temporal existence. Bouyer, too, refers, in the passage cited earlier, to the eschatological completion of the members of the Church as persons. Recognition of this change in the eschatological status of a being has ontological implications since ‘life’ is being conferred through the Spirit, and, while it may not be correct to refer to such a change in terms of ‘receiving a subsistence’, the concept of an ontological change conferred at baptism must be right. Bouyer describes

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220 Congar, ‘La personne’, pp633-4

this 'life' as eternal, 'not only in the sense of perpetual duration, but in an effective participation in the actual life of the divine persons.'<sup>221</sup>

The ontological difference is identified from its soteriological effects: the 'faithful' will pass through the judgement of God and sin will cease to exist. The call to eschatological 'life' thus confers on the subject an eschatological ontology that they did not have prior to baptism, which is associated with the presence of the Holy Spirit as the down-payment guaranteeing that which is to come (2 Cor 1:22, 5:5; Eph 1:14). It is this ontological change in the nature of the life received that Maritain links to his concept of person. In order for a subject to be defined as a person, they must have been called to receive the eschatological life. In other words, for Maritain, it is their *eschatological* existence, not their temporal existence or their ability to receive attributes, that qualifies them as a person.

The second aspect that needs further consideration relates to this, and concerns the definition of 'subject', or more pertinently 'person'.

Congar does not want to trace the complex history of the meaning of the word 'person'. However, early in his paper he identifies in Augustine two senses of the word when speaking of Christ and the Church as one and the same 'person'. One meaning refers to personification, to condition or role (Tyconius speaks of 'office'); the other refers to a real subject with attributes.<sup>222</sup> He introduces the discussion by quoting Augustine's description of the first rule of Tyconius:

The first is about *the Lord and His body*, and it is this, that, knowing as we do that the head and the body – that is, Christ and His Church – are sometimes indicated to us under one person (for it is said to believers, 'Ye then are Abraham's seed,'<sup>223</sup> when there is but one seed of Abraham, and that is Christ), we need not be in a difficulty when a transition is made from the head to the body or from the body to the head, and yet no change made in the person spoken of. For a single person is represented as saying, 'He hath decked me as a bridegroom with ornaments, and adorned me as a bride with jewels,'<sup>224</sup> and yet it is, of course, a matter for interpretation which of these two refers to the head and which to the body, that is, which to Christ and which to the Church.<sup>225</sup>

He notes that, whereas Tyconius speaks in terms of 'body', Augustine is resolute in his use of the term 'person' in describing both Christ and the Church, although the 'I' of both is always the same 'I' of Christ. It is the nature of the unity, as conceived by Augustine, of Christ and his Church as *una caro, unus homo, Christus integer (totus)*,

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221 Bouyer L, *L'Église de Dieu*, p603

222 Congar, 'La personne', p615

223 Gal 3:29

224 Is 61:10 (LXX)

225 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, III.31.44

*una persona* that enables him to speak of the two as one, and thus transfer the attributes of one to the other. This unity is mystical, that is to say ‘spiritual-real’, and is the reason that Augustine does not speak of two persons.<sup>226</sup> The ontological quality with which this person is identified as ‘real’ is its ability to have attributes.

Much later in his discussion, and as previously noted, Congar uses Boethius' definition of person, *naturae rationalis individua substantia*, as employed by Thomas. And, as with Balthasar's definitions of person and of marriage, it is an anthropocentric definition: that is, it makes no explicit reference to dependence upon God, but instead relies on nature and reason. The concrete individual substance forms the ontological basis for the existence of a person: ‘its [the individual's] incommunicability follows from this individuation of form’, and ‘such a being is able to subsist by itself’.<sup>227</sup> The theological integrity of this definition derives from the dignity of distance and independence bestowed on the creature by the Creator.

For Congar ‘the Church is a living organism, animated and governed by the Holy Spirit’.<sup>228</sup> It is singularly thus *not* able to subsist by itself, it is not an individual substance, and it does not have a rational nature. According to this natural definition, therefore, the Church cannot be construed as a person, or even a subject.

The reliance upon nature and reason for theological categorical definitions, however, has its own weaknesses. The greatest of these lies precisely in its anthropocentricity: it remains closed to the possibility of theocentric categories, which nevertheless may impinge upon the same realities the natural definitions are attempting to describe: the distance between creation and Spirit is in danger of becoming too wide.

‘Personhood’ is one such example. The question concerning whether the Church constitutes a person, as such, could be asked in these theocentric terms: is she one that is addressed as a ‘thou’ by God? Is she ‘named’ by God? Has eschatological life been conferred upon her? Is she an object of God's love? Has the Spirit been given to her? Does she respond to God's call and does she address God as ‘Father’? If we can answer ‘yes’ to these questions, then we must hold the possibility that she is recognised, and thus constituted, *by God* as a person. This may raise other difficulties, such as the nature of the unity of the Church, and the members' own existence as persons in relation to the

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226 Congar, ‘La personne’, p615

227 Congar, ‘La personne’, p634

228 Congar, *Mystery*, p.xii

Bride, but these difficulties in themselves cannot be used to deny the existence of another reality.

#### **2.2.4      *The Church as ‘One’***

The foregoing discussion addresses questions around personhood, but the second part of the Thomist definition of ‘person’, requires that a substantial unity, an individual substance, must be demonstrated. The creedal formula confesses the Church as ‘one’, but does this mean a substantial unity? Congar therefore goes on to address the question: in what sense is the Church one? If the idea of an accidental ‘subsistence’ is to be avoided, what constitutes the unity of the Church? What is the relationship between the faithful and the ‘person’ of the Church? The question is important for him because there is still a sense in which ‘she [the Church] constitutes a certain person, irreducible to the pure sum of her individual members.’<sup>229</sup>

In addressing these questions, Congar refers to the nature of created humanity. Grace plays a pivotal role here, but grace, according to Aquinas, is not a ‘created substance’. Rather it is the ‘supernatural form *according to which man* is created’.<sup>230</sup> All humanity is created, and even re-created, according to this supernatural form, which is ontologically ‘accidental’, but by which all are ontologically constituted. Grace, then, effectively constitutes the *imago dei*, as Congar implies when he says:

This supernatural form of existence [i.e. grace] has its exemplary and efficient cause in the Holy Trinity and in the holy humanity of Christ (who is the instrument or organ of the Godhead).<sup>231</sup>

However, although all humanity is created according to this supernatural form called ‘grace’, there is a ‘new and supernatural form of divine sonship, “in Christ Jesus”’ by which the faithful exist. It is this latter, also brought about by the ontological action of grace, that forms a ‘profound unity’ known as the Body of Christ, but not because it receives a personal ‘subsistence’.

According to Congar, grace acts at the level of the individual. It is the action of grace in us that enables ‘each individuated substance that is a human person’<sup>232</sup> to exist in a new, supernatural way. But we are not the proper or adequate subjects for this grace – we only have grace ‘accidentally’: we only participate in it as it is communicated to us, by

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229 Congar, ‘La personne’, p634

230 Congar, ‘La personne’, p634. Note how similar this is to Bulgakov’s concept of *Sophia*

231 Congar, ‘La personne’, p634

232 Congar, ‘La personne’, p635

the Holy Spirit, through its proper and adequate subject – Christ. We have, perhaps residually, just what is sufficient to allow this grace to attach itself to us, such that it is able to enliven our own, individual actions, and divinise them, or make them supernatural. Thus, even though we only have grace accidentally, it constitutes the ontological basis for new life in us. Furthermore, since Christ is the only true and adequate subject of grace, grace is only communicated to us as far as we participate in him: he is the transcendent subject of grace.

Congar argues similarly for the ‘means of grace’ in the Church. The effects of grace, including the presence of Christ as the true celebrant of the sacraments, consecration, ‘merit’, and the communion of saints, are all attributable to the *virtus Spiritus sancti*, the work of the Holy Spirit. And even though these may be counted ‘among the dowry put up by Christ for his Bride’, nevertheless, they do not belong to the Church, and do not remove the need for ‘a perpetual *current* intervention of Christ and the Holy Spirit, nor of the corresponding *epiclesis*’.<sup>233</sup>

Thus, just as in the individual, Christ is the transcendent subject of grace participated in through the Holy Spirit, bestowing him or her accidentally, but ontologically, with new life, so in the Church Christ bestows grace through the presence of the Holy Spirit to effect new life through the sacraments and other ‘means of grace’. However, this does not constitute the Church as a person. It is simply to recognise that, since we are not the proper or true ontological subjects of grace, it is only through our participation in these ‘means of grace’ in the Church that Christ is mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. This is the means through which we are recreated according to the form of grace and receive new life. The Church, herself, is therefore the *instrument* of grace – one that does not in any sense ‘possess’ grace, but nevertheless through whom grace is accessed.

In this conception of new life through grace Congar sees the truth of Maritain’s ‘mystical subsistence’ without having to resort to any notion of ‘subsistence’. It is in the *contingent* nature of the Church’s existence that its subsistence, and hence its personhood, exists:

For any operation of grace that occurs in her, the Church is entirely suspended by her divine causes, has her existence and her consistence by them. It is this, not something else, that is the mystical subsistence. It is in this sense that one is able to assume the traditional themes of the *una persona, Christu et Ecclesia* and to say, with various modern authors: ‘Christ, the Lord, is properly the one to speak the I of the Church’.<sup>234</sup>

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233 Congar, ‘La personne’, p635

234 Congar, ‘La personne’, p636

For Congar, it is because the Church is contingent on God for her very existence that she cannot be considered to be constituted as a person. Her subsistence exists in her ‘suspension’ by God. The oneness of the Church is derivative upon the oneness of God – this is the testimony of Scripture and Tradition – and therefore it cannot ‘subsist by itself’:

In Scripture and in Tradition, the ecclesiological or community’s unity is unceasingly related to the fact of the absolute unicity of God, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit.: Eph 4:4-6; 1 Cor 8:6; 12:6ff (only one Spirit); 10:17 (only one bread); 2 Cor 11:2 (engaged to *ἐνὶ ἀνδρὶ*); John 10:16 (only one flock because there is only one Shepherd). The principle of unity is put *as God*, not properly in the Church herself, where it is only derived and consequent. But the gifts which form her, while only having a specific unity in the Church, find, in their divine or christological cause, a principle of personalisation.<sup>235</sup>

The force of Congar’s argument lies in the contingent nature of the Church’s existence and unity. Both are derivative from God and are therefore not intrinsic to herself. Her subsistence is contingent upon her ‘divine causes’, and, as a consequence, she cannot be described as a person. The argument derives from the Thomist understanding of the individual or person, whose existence and oneness is, by definition, substantial and independent. The extent to which personalisation can be spoken of with respect to the Church and ‘the gifts which form her’ is the extent to which they derive from the personal nature of Christ himself. It is Christ who is the ‘I’ of the Church, and the Church can only be spoken of in terms of ‘personhood’ in so far as she shares in Christ’s personhood. Just as her subsistence is derivative from its divine causes, so too her personhood is derivative from Christ’s participation in her by the bestowal of his gifts, of himself.

However, if the contingent nature of eschatological life, itself, and hence personal ontology, is fully recognised, then the ability to ‘subsist by itself’ ceases to be an adequate definition of a person, as previously discussed, since no person can exist eschatologically outside Christ, and without the gift of life bestowed by the Spirit. In this case there would be no persons at all outside the Trinity: all eschatological life is contingent upon God. The possibility for defining the Church, contingent as she might be upon God’s grace, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and Christ’s gift of himself to her, as a ‘person’ must remain a possibility.

Congar moves on to discuss the *purpose* or plan of God for creation, and in particular, for the Church. He cites Romans 8:28-30 in which Paul expresses the intention of God to reproduce the image of his Son in those whom he has called:

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235 Congar, ‘La personne’, p636

We know that with those who love him, God works together in all things for their best, with those that he has called according to his intention. For those he knew in advance, he has also predestined to reproduce the image of his Son, in order that he might be the eldest of a multitude of brothers; and those whom he has predestined he has also called; those whom he has called, he has also justified; those whom he has justified, he has also glorified.

It is in the reproduction of this image that those who are called become sons of Gods and hence brothers of his Son. But the reproduction of the image of God's Son is not in the faithful individually. Those who are called are not called to reproduce 'images' of his Son, but 'the image' of his Son. That is, it is the faithful *together* that reproduce a *single image* of the Son. As Christ has taken on our earthly form, so we are called to be conformed to, to participate in, his heavenly body of glory:

The purpose of God has its own unity. [H]ere St Paul considers, not the faithful individually, but the whole of the children of God destined for glory, in short, the Church. The plan of God has in view the gathered ones: chapters 9-10 [of Romans] that follow our text demonstrate it well. Now this plan is 'to make possible a participation in the "form" of his Son'. He who has taken our form or earthly image, our form of humility and of servitude (1 Cor 15:49; Phil 2:7), calls us and elevates us to carry the image of his heavenly state, to become con-formed, *σύμμορφοι*, to his body of glory (cf. 1 Cor 15:49; Phil 3:21).<sup>236</sup>

Thus there is, in this purpose of God, a unity in that 'for those he knew in advance, he has also predestined to reproduce the image of his Son.' This image, which is the purpose of God, is a single image. 'Participation in the "form" of his Son' is a participation in the singularity of this image. Congar sees Maritain as being correct, therefore, in founding 'the unity of the person-Church in the identity of Christ himself, whose faithful reflect his *image*.' It is in the reflection of this image by the Church that it forms a single entity: there is only one who is foreknown, called, justified, and glorified, and it is therefore only as the faithful participate in, are conformed to, his image, that they share in God's purpose and thus receive the grace of sonship. But it is Christ's sonship in which they share by participating in his image. It is his *identity* whose image they reflect, and it is Christ's identity of *sonship (filiation)* in which the unity of the Church resides.

This unity is that of the grace of sonship which has been given to many brothers since the First-Born (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Rev 1:5), by him and in him, and which constitutes them as his co-inheritors (Rom 8:17; 1 Pe 3:7) of the patrimonial goods of God.<sup>237</sup>

It is at this point that the wideness of Congar's love, and his longing for the whole of humankind, shines through. For he sees, in this participation in the image of the Son, the calling of all humanity through baptism so that, together, 'all those who participate in

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236 Congar, 'La personne', p636-7

237 Congar, 'La personne', p637

human nature, once regenerated in Christ by the Holy Spirit, and reflecting in a unanimous way the glory of God (cf. 2Cor 3:18) will be able to say: “Our Father””. This is the basis of the missionary imperative of the Church.

The purpose of God is begun and completed in Christ, and we participate in that purpose in so far as we participate in him. The Church is the realisation of that purpose. Christ is the principle of the unity of the whole and this unity is real because of him. However, ‘it is realised in a multitude of persons and elements,’ and Congar will not allow it to ‘have a substantial-personal unity other than that of the various human people’ that comprise it. Thus he can refer to the Church as an ‘aggregate’:

Its unity is a unity of an aggregate, analogous to that of any society. But, on the one hand, this society is supernatural and, on the other, the ‘aggregate’ is not here simply a resultant one: it is not merely visualised by the intention of a human founder or chief. It has its consistence, and in this sense, its subsistence in the intention or purpose of God, who is the creator and realiser of that which he plans.<sup>238</sup>

The reality of the Church is found in the purpose of God. That is, its existence as an entity resides in God’s intention and it has no independent or substantial existence outside or without reference to this. Thus God is ‘both the creator and realiser of that which he plans.’

Personhood, for Congar, exists only at the level of the individual, the substantial. It is not part of the language of the unity of the Church. The unity of the Church resides in the purpose of God, as defined, and participated in, in Christ. The effects of grace *operate* at the level of the individual, but *form* part of a whole. It is the gifts of grace, emanating from God by the Son and through the Spirit, realising the purpose of God in humankind, that give the Church her unity and subsistence. The gifts of grace are the fruit of the missions of the Son and the Spirit, and while their effects are the realisation of the singular purpose of God, Congar refuses to assign an ontological status to the unity and subsistence which derive from them – the Church is *not* a hypostasis. However, he will allow her a ‘personality’ in the same sense that a human, secular institution can be said to have a personality, even if the Church’s exceeds that of the secular institution’s by virtue of being the product of God’s will rather than human wills. He summarises his position:

The person-Church is the one and whole reality visualised efficaciously by the unique and whole purpose of God. Grace or ministries *only exist* in individuals, and yet the Church is something more than the material sum of these: she is *the expression of a single and whole Purpose*, sovereignly efficacious. It is this that gives her a personality that passes beyond the

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238 Congar, ‘La personne’, p637



moral personality of a social or political body, the Academy, for example, or France. For such bodies are only the result of individual wills submitting to a certain idea more or less defined, whereas the Church is the realisation of an efficacious will or a conceived and willed efficacy by Him whose action penetrates all reality more intimately than one is able to conceive and *exists* in her, causing her to exist according to the purpose that generated her. The Church is not a person, she does not have a created 'subsistence', she does not have an existence that ends in an individual spiritual nature. She is not a hypostasis. Nevertheless, she has a claim to personality which exceeds the moral personality of a natural society: the reality of this claim consists in being the expression visualised and granted efficaciously by the purpose, the election, the initiative of the Covenant of God. (His italics)<sup>239</sup>

It is clear that Congar is not at ease even with Balthasar's definition of the Church, who comes much closer to defining her as a person, although still denying her a hypostasis. In this categorical denial of any ontological form of personhood for the Church is his first reference to the eschatological nature of personhood: 'she is not a person, she does not have a created "subsistence", she does not have an existence that *ends in an individual spiritual nature*.' 'Person' is equated to an eschatological reality in the form of 'an individual spiritual nature'. This is not a theme he takes up elsewhere in the paper, and seems, in its strident tone, simply to be a way of denying Maritain's claim for the personhood of the Church based on eschatological existence. However, in listing 'person', 'created subsistence', and 'individual spiritual nature' as parallels, explanations of why the Church is *not* a person, Congar has introduced the latter, principally in its eschatological form, into the notion of personhood as the measure of ultimate reality. For Congar, that which will exist in the eschaton will be 'individual spiritual natures'.

### **2.2.5 Eschatology and Unity: From Institution to Divine Will**

Although this idea of the ultimate reality in the eschaton consisting of 'individual souls' united with God is not strong in this paper, it nevertheless exists in his earlier writings.<sup>240</sup>

In defining ontology in these eschatological terms, Congar begs the question, What is the purpose of the Church's existence? What is the nature of her presence in the eschaton? Is she to be Christ's Bride on his return, or is she simply the temporary vehicle of salvation for her constituent members?

It is clear the primary eschatological existence for Congar has been, and remains, human souls, constituted as such by their individual union with God. The institutional Church is a temporary structure that exists to enable the salvation of souls. In his later

239 Congar, 'La personne', p637-8

240 Congar, *Mystery*, p87

writing, Congar moves away from the language of Visible and Mystical Bodies of Christ, with less emphasis on the institutional nature of the Church.

This is perhaps seen most clearly in his discussion on the unity of the Church where Congar does not once refer to obedience, the Pope, or the Institution. Instead, he now founds the unity of the Church in the single purpose of the Covenant of God. Congar has changed his perspective from incarnational to eschatological, from Institutional to divine election. In so doing, he has broadened out the possibilities of who comprises the Church, becoming much more open and much less definitive. Congar would never denounce the structure of the Church as unnecessary or irrelevant. Indeed, he still sees the Institution as fulfilling the purpose of God. However, he no longer sees the Institution as the *source* of the unity of the Church – this he now places in the singleness of God's intention for humankind.

Coupled with this change in the *source* of the Church's unity is a diminution in the substantial *nature* of the Church's unity. We have seen how Congar is strenuous in his denial of any hypostasis of the Church in his later writing. But in his earlier writing he is much less insistent. Indeed, in referring to the Church as 'Bride', he positively assigns to the Church her own subsistence.<sup>241</sup>

The marriage to which he refers is a description of the Spirit's relationship with the Church, rather than her union with Christ. Nevertheless, he brings in the description of the Church as the Bride of Christ in order to support his description of her as a person 'having its own subsistence', and he affirms the union between Christ and his Bride with the citation of Genesis 2:24.

Congar's move from seeing the cause of unity in the Institution (deriving from the Incarnation), to the divine will of God (and hence the eschaton) sits much more easily with his understanding of the salvation of individual souls. In his earlier writing he struggled with two strains of ontology within the Church, which resulted in his conception of the Visible Body and the Mystical Body of Christ as distinct, although mutually constitutive, entities. The former was associated with apostolic authority passed down from Christ, while the latter was associated with the interior work of the Spirit in the souls of individuals. By relocating the Church's unity in the will of God, which is eternal, rather than the Institution, which is temporary, he has overcome the

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241 Congar, *Mystery*, p35-36

difficulty of finding grounds for the continuity of the unity of the Church into the eschaton, and hence given it an ontological reality, if not a substantial one.

### **2.2.6      *The Bride of Christ***

In the final section of the paper, having dismissed any ontological dimension to the Church's personal existence, Congar asks the inevitable question 'is the [sublime quality of Bride of Christ] nothing more than a symbol?' In answering he affirms that it is more than a symbol 'precisely because it is the reality that responds to the election and purpose of the Covenant of God,' and the notion of response requires one capable of responding. In so far as there is an 'other' that is called upon to respond, Congar identifies it as 'humanity'. In so far as this 'humanity' actually responds, i.e. is elected and chosen, it is the Church, the Bride. Congar acknowledges that, implicit in God's choice, in his calling and election of the Church, there is another 'person' who is made the object of that choice, who is the object of God's love: 'The one who says bride speaks first of another person who is made the object of a choice, by love.' The quality of 'bride', however, does not pre-exist the naming of the other as 'bride'. The other is constituted as a bride purely in response to the choice made by the one.

The Bride, as such, does not pre-exist the choice which constitutes her election and that gives her the quality of Bride. The initiative is entirely God's: as a sign of which Eve was said to have been taken out of Adam, the woman from the man (cf. Gen 2:23; 1 Cor 6:7-8).<sup>242</sup>

However, although it is true that the Bride, as such, does not pre-exist the choice which constitutes her election, it is equally true that the quality of 'Groom' cannot pre-exist the response of the bride. Response is an action that follows a prior action, and is consequent upon it. In the case of the Church the action upon which her response is consequent is God's election, God's choice of her. This choice is an act of grace by God in that he chose her as tarnished and purified her. Yet as Congar says, this response is a 'free response of faith and love: it brings something that would be absent if she failed to give it.' Indeed, 'the realisation of the purpose of God [is] dependent on this response of love at the same time as being the gratuitous initiative of God.' At this point in the discussion, Balthasar would draw heavily upon Mary as the one who offers the perfect response of humanity to God, in whom all our responses are completed, and her complete absence from Congar's exploration of the Church as person, until his final paragraph, is intriguing. However, despite using personal language of gift, choice,

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242 Congar, 'La personne', p638

response and love, with the Church as both object and subject, Congar insists that this language is analogical rather than metaphorical – there is no person who is this ‘Bride’.

But this Bride, who is *like* another person, *is not* another thing, more like a community of saints than an institution... All are brides (*toutes sont épouses*) but they are seen and wanted as such by God as members of the Bride who is the Church, that is, in the body of the single and whole intention of the Covenant. There is no hypostasis of the Church-Bride other than the whole reality, an expression of the intention of grace, of election and covenant of which we have spoken. (*Italics added*)<sup>243</sup>

The notion that ‘all are brides’ is a strange one that appears neither anywhere else in the paper, nor in the NT. Congar offers no explanation for its origin nor of its defence – he simply states it.<sup>244</sup> However, it is a common theme among patristic writers at least from Tertullian onwards.<sup>245</sup> At its heart, it concurs with his notion of the individual union of each believer with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This makes some sense with his notion of ‘person’ as individual substance, and attempts to take seriously the personal description of Christ as ‘groom’, which would otherwise simply be analogical. However, the idea that each individual soul is a bride of Christ, i.e. that there are ‘brides’ of Christ, is not NT teaching, did not exist before the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and indeed, runs counter to the exclusive usage of the term as a description of the whole Church.<sup>246</sup>

The difference between metaphor and analogy that Congar draws implicitly in this passage, and throughout the latter part of the paper, forces the issue of personhood to the fore. In saying that the Bride is ‘like’ a person, but ‘is not another thing’ (*n’est autre chose*), he separates out the necessity of defining ‘bride’ as coincident with ‘person’. That is, he is taking a term used as the subject of the most intimate of human relationships, and removing the *content* of personhood from it. The ‘Bride’ no longer *is* a person, but *is like* a person. He has introduced a gulf between the two terms such that there is no longer any interdependence between them, only similarity. It is difficult to see what is left in the term ‘bride’ once the substance of personhood has been removed from it.

The corollary of this position is that the description of Christ as ‘Groom’ also becomes devoid of personal, and hence relational, content. For if the bride is not a person, then

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243 Congar, ‘La personne’, p639

244 There is, however, a reference in a footnote to compare with a passage by Chavasse in *The Bride of Christ*, pp83-85. See p184, below.

245 Chavasse, *Bride*, p133

246 Unless one is to develop an understanding of each ‘person’ as a catholic hypostasis as in Bulgakov, Zizioulas, and others, and mentioned, (although not expanded) by Congar later in *I Believe* (eg Vol.2 p52).

neither can the groom be a 'person' in his relationship with her. The entire relationship becomes one of analogy, and the terms 'bride' and 'groom' do not *participate* in the relationship between Christ and the Church.

However, the language, particularly of the NT, seems to speak in more definitive terms of the relationship between the two: Congar appears to be in danger of imposing his philosophical presuppositions onto the text. Gunton suggests that, with reference to talk about symbolism and analogy,

to begin with the concrete relationships expressed in the New Testament metaphors, is to centre attention on the way in which theological language actually has been used and, perhaps, should or may be used now.<sup>247</sup>

In this context, it is to allow the relationship expressed in the metaphor of Christ and Church as Groom and Bride to define the true nature of the content of both 'groom' and 'bride', and hence also 'marriage', rather than predefine the nature of the relationships. Centring attention on the relationship reveals that the nuptial language of both the Old and New Testaments expresses both something concrete about God's relationship with humanity, which is revealed definitively in Christ, and the true nature of the human relationship of marriage, of which Christ's relationship with the Church becomes the referent. Thus, when Jesus refers to himself as a 'bridegroom' in the gospels, he describes himself as *the* bridegroom in reference to whom all other bridegrooms are to be understood. That is, he is the one to whom the most intimate of all human relationships must refer in order to understand the significance of their existence. Not only is he, in this, the source of the significance of the term, but he is also most supremely a person, since this is the most intimate of human relations (Gen 2:24).

Furthermore, Christ being named as 'groom' supposes the existence of one to whom he will be united as 'bride'. Just as Eve was created as Adam's bride from his body, so the Church comes into existence as she is taken from Christ's body on the cross, in baptism, and the Eucharist, as the Fathers understood. In the same act that she is created from Christ's body, she is created as his bride. That is, she is created from his body in order to be united to him as his bride, so that they may become one body. This is the nature of communion. Adam was a 'man' before Eve was created, but only a 'man' as distinct from an 'animal', i.e. generically. He became 'man' as distinct from 'woman' only as Eve was created, and he was husband only in so far as he was united with his bride. Hence both the bride and groom are mutually constitutive of each other as such, in their

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247 Gunton, *Atonement*, p48

relation to each other, just as the Father and the Son are mutually constitutive of each other as such – there can be no ‘Father’ without a Son to name him such, and no ‘Son’ without a Father to name him such.

In his final paragraph Congar offers Mary as the ‘excellent personal realisation of the response of the Church, and even of all humanity, to the offer of the bridal union of God.’ He testifies to the personal joy and spiritual benefits over many years of the liturgical use of the Magnificat as a song inseparably of both Mary and of the Church, seeing them as having ‘the same heart and the same voice’, being

spiritually the same person, being the same term and reality of the same design of grace, one in a personal and perfect way, the other in a collective way, as in the beautiful phrase of H Rahner calling the Church ‘the Mary of the history of the world’.<sup>248</sup>

His reticence to refer to Mary in the course of his discussion, in contrast to Balthasar who leans heavily upon her as the one in whom all participate, derives from his more individualistic definition of salvation, in terms of the uniting of individual souls to God. Mary is nothing more than the prime example whom all are to emulate. She is nothing like Balthasar’s co-redemptrix, woven into the fabric of salvation and the dispenser of grace to the rest of the Church. Hers is not, for Congar, the consciousness in whom all participate, however much her response is the ‘excellent personal realisation of the response of the Church, and even of all humanity.’

Throughout this paper and earlier writings, Congar does not draw out the relationship between the two metaphors of the Church as Christ’s Body and his Bride. We have seen that there has been a tendency in Catholic ecclesiology over the years, as described by Congar, to dwell heavily on the metaphor of the Body. However, a shift towards describing the Church as Bride coincides with a greater emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the Church and in its relation with Christ. Balthasar struggles deeply with the relationship between the two, and finds a form of solution in the uniting of the (male) Institution as representative of Christ with the (female) receptivity of the Church, primarily in the Eucharist. Congar does hint, in several places, at the nature of the relationship between the two, especially with reference to Gen 2:24. But there is little in the main text that develops this relationship.

In a footnote towards the end of the paper, Congar cites an extended quotation by Bossuet, the 17<sup>th</sup> Century French Bishop of Meaux, who, as well as being outspoken against Protestants, led the Catholic Gallican stand against the Roman ultra-montanist

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248 Congar, ‘La personne’, p640

insistence on supreme papal authority over France. In this reference, which Congar says one can never tire of citing, he draws together for the first and last time the relationship between the metaphors of the Church as Body and Bride. It is worth quoting in full because it reaches the heart of the significance of the relationship between them:

Man chooses his bride, but he is formed with his members: Jesus Christ, the particular Man, chose the Church; Jesus-Christ, the perfect Man, was formed and completes his forming every day in the Church and with the Church. The Church as Bride belongs to Jesus Christ by his choice; the Church as Body belongs to Jesus-Christ by a deeply intimate operation of the Holy Spirit of God. The system of election through the promises of engagement, appear in the name of *Bride*; and the mystery of the consummated unity through the infusion of the Spirit, is seen in the name of *Body*. The name of *Body* makes us see how the Church belongs to Jesus Christ; the title of Bride makes us see that she was estranged from him, and that it is willingly that he seeks after her. Thus the name *Bride* makes us see unity through love and will; and the name *Body* compels us to hear unity as natural: such that in the unity of the body something most intimate is apparent, and in the unity of the bride something most sensitive and most tender. Fundamentally this is only the same thing: Jesus Christ has loved the Church and he has made her his bride; Jesus Christ has accomplished his marriage with the Church, and he has made her his body. Thus the truth: *Two in one flesh, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh (Gen 2:23)*. It is this which was said to Adam and to Eve; *and this is (says the Apostle) a great sacrament between Jesus Christ and his Church (Eph 5:32)*. Thus the unity of the body is the final seal which confirms the title Bride.<sup>249</sup>

In this passage Bossuet explicitly identifies the metaphor of ‘body’ as the completion, the ‘final seal’ of the ‘one-flesh’ union of Christ and the Church, which ‘confirms the title Bride.’ He speaks of this union as ‘accomplished’, in the past tense, with perhaps an over-realised eschatology, and in doing this loses the eschatological richness of the parabolic and Eucharistic references to the wedding feast. Nevertheless, he does identify the coincidence of the two metaphors in both the OT and NTs. The question he leaves unresolved is whether these are metaphors to be understood as relational, and therefore personal, or, with Congar, they remain purely allegorical.

## **2.3 Ecclesiology in ‘I Believe in the Holy Spirit’**

### **2.3.1 Christology Revisited**

As we have seen, in his earlier work Congar identified the real Church, the ontological Church, with the Mystical Body of Christ or the Bride of Christ. This reality exists eschatologically but is made present interiorly and sacramentally. His distinction between the sending of the Son by the Father as separate from the work of the Holy Spirit lead to a direct distinction in the Church between the Instituted Body commissioned by Jesus, and the Mystical Body generated by the Spirit. However, the

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249 Congar, ‘La personne’, p638, footnote 98. Taken from Bossuet, ‘Lettre IV’, p224

criticism was made that in this dualistic view the absence of the created order from the Mystical Body, other than sacramentally, relegating Christ's createdness to the level of instrumental.

Congar responded to this criticism in his work *I Believe In The Holy Spirit*, where he explicitly acknowledges the problems introduced by his dualistic approach, particularly with respect to the division between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit.<sup>250</sup>

He addresses the imbalance by revisiting his christology in the first volume, since, he states, 'our first task is ecclesiological'<sup>251</sup> – the point being that ecclesiology must start in christology: if the christology is right, the pneumatology, and thus ecclesiology, will follow.

His grounding is explicitly biblical.<sup>252</sup> He therefore starts with a survey of the Spirit in the Old Testament, going on to look at the Spirit's relationship to Jesus in the New, followed by a brief résumé of the Tradition. His concern is to identify the role of the Spirit in the Incarnation, and in particular, the relationship of the Incarnation to the Baptism of Jesus, for this is where he perceives the problem with his earlier theology.

### **2.3.1.1    *The Word and Baptism***

Congar maintains that Jesus' baptism is the decisive moment in his mission: it is not simply an annunciation, since this is, for example, where Mark locates the beginning of his gospel.<sup>253</sup>

There are 'two missions', that of the Word and that of the Spirit. The relationship between them is defined by the activity of the Spirit at Jesus' birth and his baptism. We shall turn to the mission of the Word shortly, but the mission of the Spirit is proclaimed at Jesus' baptism:

This is the beginning of the eschatological period characterised by the gift of the Spirit to a people of God with a universal vocation. At his baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus is marked out and dedicated as the one by whose words, sacrifice and activity the Spirit enters the history of mankind as a messianic gift and, at least as *arrha* or earnest-money, as an eschatological gift.<sup>254</sup>

Eschatology is the domain of the Spirit, even at Jesus' baptism. However, despite the use of the term, *arrha*, Congar does not at any stage explore the imagery behind the

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250 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, pp11-12

251 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p20

252 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p.vii

253 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p15

254 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p16



term, which naturally relates to the bridal concept of Jewish dowry. Understanding the gift of the life-giving Spirit in this sense opens a new dimension to the relation between the missions of the Word and the Spirit, both in terms of messianic and eschatological gift: Jesus receives the Spirit in order for humanity to become wedded to God through Christ by the Spirit.

Congar's focus at the moment, however, is on the relation of Jesus' baptism to his incarnation. In the gospels, therefore, the baptism of Jesus is the anointing by the Spirit of God, when he was 'called and sent as the Messiah and that Messiah is described as having the characteristics of a prophet, as a king in the line of David and his house... and also as the Servant.'<sup>255</sup>

The *purpose* of Jesus' baptism, and this is the mission of the Spirit, is *for us* to be baptised in the same Spirit.<sup>256</sup> This is why Congar talks in terms of the Spirit 'entering the history of mankind...as an eschatological gift.' The mission of the Spirit is to sanctify the people of God as the people of God. Although the Spirit was active in the conception of Jesus, this was under the old disposition, in which the Spirit's activity was as the Spirit-Breath of creation and life. At his baptism a *new* mission of the Spirit was inaugurated:

A new communication or mission was initiated in the event of his baptism, when he was declared the Messiah, the one on whom the Spirit rests, who will act through the Spirit and who, once he has become the glorified Lord, will give the Spirit.<sup>257</sup>

This mission of the Spirit is more than a baptism of power. It is the very essence of Jesus' sacrificial mission. 'It was for this reason that the Word became Jesus Christ.' The giving of God's Spirit to the world is at the heart of the purpose of the Incarnation. It is the Father's gift to the world to usher in the new creation through the death and resurrection of Christ, to make his people holy and thereby acceptable to him – as the bride of his Son. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, prefigured in his baptism, is thus undertaken through the Spirit.

It would undoubtedly be claiming too much if we were to say that the baptism of Jesus contained the whole doctrine of his substitutive death, but there can be no doubt...that Jesus came to be baptised and that he experienced the event with the intention of offering himself and being open to God's plan for him... Jesus in fact saw his death as a 'baptism' (Mk 10:38;

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255 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p17

256 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p20

257 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p16. See also p45: 'The communication of the Spirit to the disciples is therefore not a total replacement for Christ, but rather a transmission of his prophetic mission (in the full sense of the word), which consists of being the one who proclaims the message of God... It is possible to say that Christ transmits to his apostles the presence of the Spirit that he received in the Jordan.'

Lk 12:50). He offered himself to God as a spotless victim through the ‘eternal spirit’, that is, the Holy Spirit. His sacrifice was the consequence of this baptism, and his glory was the consequence of his sacrifice.<sup>258</sup>

Having established the centrality of Jesus baptism to his mission as Messiah and the mission of the Spirit, he links the baptism, and hence anointing by the Spirit, to Jesus’ birth. In particular, he links two announcements. Firstly, the declaration in Luke-Acts that Jesus was announced as the Messiah (i.e. the ‘Anointed One’) to Mary (Lk 1:31-33), to the shepherds (Lk 2:11), and by Simeon (Lk 2:26) at his birth. Secondly, the declarations made by Peter in Acts that Jesus was ‘made both Lord and Christ’ (2:36)<sup>259</sup> and that ‘God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power’ (10:38)<sup>260</sup>. That which Jesus was announced to be at his birth was fulfilled in his baptism: ‘the revelatory and soteriological part played by Christ cannot be separated from what he was constituted to be from the beginning.’<sup>261</sup> Therefore the Spirit was involved in sanctifying Jesus from the beginning. In discussing the contribution of Heribert Mühlen, he summarises it thus:

It is not that Christ was not made holy at the moment of his conception. It is rather that this sanctification should not be attributed to the hypostatic union as such, that is, the mission of the Word, but to the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Spirit is the consequence in time – ‘in the fullness of time’ – of his eternal procession ‘from the Father and the Son’, as the term of their mutual love, first in Mary’s womb and then in the Church, whose supernatural existence is connected with the Spirit of Jesus.<sup>262</sup>

Notwithstanding his dubious use of the *filioque* clause (Bulgakov uses exactly the same event to demonstrate that Spirit is *not* subordinate to the Son but is sent from the Father), this is a remarkable shift in Congar’s christology and pneumatology. The sanctification of humanity is here accomplished by the Holy Spirit in uniting the Word with humanity. Not only so, but the ‘supernatural existence’ of the Church is now ‘connected with the Spirit of Jesus’ rather than the direct mission of the Word, in the same way that the Spirit was the agent of the Incarnation.

The mission of the Word, then, as indicated above and in distinction to the mission of the Spirit, is the assumption of humanity. That is, that although the sanctification and anointing of Jesus are the work of the Spirit, and his sacrifice is made effective through the Spirit, nevertheless the actions performed by Jesus are attributed to the Word, or Son, because he was the subject of Jesus’ humanity:

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258 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p19

259 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p24

260 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p23

261 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p24

262 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p24

because of the hypostatic union, the Word or Son of ‘God’ is the principle of Jesus’ existence and the metaphysical subject to which his actions are attributed.<sup>263</sup>

So there are the two missions, that of the Word and that of the Spirit. However, although the Spirit is active in the Incarnation, it is at Jesus’ baptism that the Spirit’s mission, his ‘pouring out’, his ‘coming’, is inaugurated *for us*.

### **2.3.1.2    *The Spirit and Incarnation***

The form of the distinction Congar makes between the mission of the Word and of the Spirit relates to the procession of the Spirit as defined in the *filioque*. As the mission of the Word in the Incarnation precedes that of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism in the economy, so this order reflects the procession of the persons in the immanent Trinity. The procession of the Spirit from the Son means that the Son takes humanity to himself, and that humanity is secondarily sanctified:

Thomas [Aquinas] distinguished two aspects, following one another not in time, but in logic and by nature, the first relating to the assumption of a human nature by the Word and the second to the Spirit who fills that man-God with gifts of grace.<sup>264</sup>

The essential thing is to respect the two missions, of the Word and of the Spirit, on the pattern of the succession which derives from the procession within the Trinity.<sup>265</sup>

In other words, the Son accomplishes the Incarnation, the assumption of humanity, the hypostatic union ontologically prior to the sanctification of that humanity, which is subsequently accomplished by the Holy Spirit.<sup>266</sup> So although he acknowledges the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation he does *not* consider this to be an integral part of the Incarnation *for us*. Rather, it is the work of the Spirit *under the old disposition*, in which he was God’s active Breath in creation:

There is no doubt that the Spirit was active before Jesus’ coming, under the old disposition. It was by the Spirit that Mary conceived Jesus, whose quality of ‘son of God’ is mentioned by Luke (1:35), in whose gospel it refers, not to Jesus’ pre-existence, but to his conception by the Holy Spirit.<sup>267</sup>

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263 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p18

264 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p24

265 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p25

266 ‘It is the Spirit who, by activating in Mary her capacity as a woman to conceive (and thereby supplying the 23 male chromosomes), produces the human being who the Son, the Word, unites to himself, and thereby also the ‘holy’ fact. In this way, Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, because he was of the Holy Spirit (and conceived by that Spirit). That is, dogmatically and theologically, the meaning of Lk 1:35.’ Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p25

267 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p16

Thus, on the basis of the *filioque*, Congar defines the hypostatic union itself solely as an act of the Word. In trying to define distinct missions of the Word and the Spirit he has driven an ontological wedge through the work of the Spirit, with (exterior) creation on one side and (interior) sanctification on the other.

He translates this succession directly into the structure of the Church:

Ought we, then, not to recognize a similar order in the Church...by stressing the real connection between the Church and the Incarnation as such? Was the institution of the Twelve by Jesus (see Mk 3:14) not followed by the sanctification and animation of the apostles by the Spirit of Pentecost? And was the institution of the sacraments and the delivery of the message of the gospel not followed by the making present of those gifts of the covenant by the Spirit?<sup>268</sup>

It is perplexing that these comments follow so soon after his insistence that the ministry of Jesus is carried out in the context of his anointing by the Holy Spirit in his baptism. When Congar asks ‘Was the institution of the Twelve by Jesus not followed by the sanctification and animation of the apostles by the Spirit at Pentecost?’ we want to reply ‘Did not the institution of the Twelve, itself, follow the *anointing* of the Messiah at his baptism?’<sup>269</sup> Or is Congar trying to suggest that, because the Spirit had not yet been poured out at Pentecost, he was not involved in, or did not sanctify, the actions of Christ, including his teaching and the institution of the sacraments? His line of reasoning only makes sense if one is to see certain actions of the anointed Christ, such as his calling and appointing of the Twelve, teaching etc., as actions of the Word and not the Spirit, whereas other actions, such as his baptism and death on the cross, pertain to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Certainly the Spirit had not yet been poured out when the Twelve were called. However, to suggest this was therefore an act of the incarnate Word, without the involvement of the Spirit, is to reduce Christ’s baptism and his anointing by the Holy Spirit to a purely instrumental act. It has no effect on his ministry other than to make his sacrifice efficacious for others.

And yet this does not accord with his own earlier statements concerning the role of the Spirit in the life of Jesus:

Pentecost was for the Church what his baptism was for Jesus, that is, the gift and the power of the Spirit, dedication to the ministry, mission and bearing witness...The coming of the Spirit at Jesus’ baptism, then, is clearly seen as his anointing for his messianic ministry. That anointing is both royal and prophetic.<sup>270</sup>

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268 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, pp24-25

269 A point Congar himself makes, *I believe*, Vol.1, p45

270 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p19

In this and other passages Congar is quite clear that, although ‘because of the hypostatic union, the Word or Son of “God” is the principle of Jesus’ experience and the metaphysical subject to which his actions are attributed,’<sup>271</sup> they are also all actions of the Holy Spirit, and undertaken through his anointing and empowering. These statements represent a development in Congar’s pneumatology noted by others.<sup>272</sup>

It makes little sense, then, to separate out the institution of the Twelve, Jesus teaching, the institution of the sacraments etc. as part of the mission of the Word, which is only subsequently anointed by the Spirit at Pentecost.

Congar may be attempting to give concrete space to the mission of the Spirit in the economy by indicating the *connection* between the activity of the Word and the Spirit. However, these statements, made in the first volume of *I Believe*, sound remarkably like the earlier Congar, where he stressed the *distinction* between the activity of the Word and the Spirit. This followed through into his ecclesiology as the distinction between, and, indeed, primacy of the activity of the apostolate over that of the Spirit, again based on the hierarchical inner-Trinitarian relations expressed in the *filioque* clause. They seem very difficult to reconcile with the more integrated pneumatology found in the second volume, where he stresses the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the *institution* of the Church:

Irenæus expressed the derivation of the Church from the two missions, that of the Word and that of the Breath, in a poetical manner in the image of the two hands of God... [He] also showed the apostles as instituting and founding the Church by communicating to believers the Spirit that they had received from the Lord: ‘That Holy Spirit that they had received from the Lord is shared among and distributed to believers; in this way they instituted and founded the Church’... *This must mean that the Spirit did not come simply in order to animate an institution that was already fully determined in all its structures, but that he is really the ‘co-instituting’ principle.*<sup>273</sup> (*Italics added*)

If it is true that the Twelve were instituted by Jesus – with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2) – did the succession in their ministry not begin with the initiative of the Holy Spirit, at least in the historical form of a mono-episcopacy?<sup>274</sup>

In these passages there is no hierarchical distinction between the work of the Word and the Spirit. Instead, there is seen a mutuality in which the work of the Spirit, while distinct from that of the Word, is seen as an integral part of Jesus’ life and mission. It is, perhaps, telling that in both his earlier Christology and his comments above from

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271 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, pp17-18

272 E.g. Groppe, *Yves Congar*

273 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p9

274 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p10

Volume 1, the priority and hierarchical nature of the Institution over the Spirit occurs within the context of relating the nature of the Church to the relations in the Trinity in the light of the *filioque* clause.

It is also interesting to note that it is when referring to Irenæus that Congar appears to come closest to this mutuality between the activities of the Word and Spirit. In discussing the relationship between the Institution of the Church and the Spirit, particularly in relation to pneumatic activity, he recognises the Spirit as ‘the principle giving life to the Church and faith.’

He quotes the passage from Irenæus ending ‘Where the Church (*ecclesia*) is, there is also the Spirit of God and where the Spirit of God is, there are also the Church and all grace. And the Spirit is truth.’<sup>275</sup> Here, there is no Church without the Spirit, just as there is no life in the flesh without the breath of God. It is not so much that there are two distinct missions, one of the Word and one of the Spirit, but that both are active in the one mission of God, the one act of creation. The Word creates the body, as it were, and the Spirit breathes life into it, although this is not how he interprets it. Rather, he sees the Spirit and the Church as ‘conditioning’ each other. There is still a mutuality in the relationship between the two, but he sees them in ‘dialectical tension’.<sup>276</sup>

He makes the Irenæan concept of the Spirit as the breath of life in the Church more explicit in an endnote, where he refers it to not only the renewal of the faith handed down from the apostles, but also the making present of that faith in the local community, both of which are the activity of the Spirit.<sup>277</sup>

### **2.3.1.3 Conclusion**

In conclusion, Congar has moderately redefined his understanding of the nature of the Incarnation through reviewing his pneumatology. He sees a progression of the work of the Spirit in creation from exterior (‘the old disposition’) to interior (‘the new disposition’), with the Incarnation being the event that divides the two. The Incarnation, rather than being solely a work of the Word, is now a joint work of the Word and the Spirit, but in a way that separates (or joins) the two dispositions of the Spirit. The Spirit overshadows Mary to create the human being in her womb (in keeping with its operation under the old disposition) that the Word then unites to himself. The Word has

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275 Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, III.24.1

276 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p68

277 Congar, *I believe*, Endnote 30, Vol.1, p72

now entered the world and the new disposition has begun. This humanity, now in hypostatic union with the Word, is then sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The sequential description refers to ontological priority rather than temporal, but at all times is the activity of the Spirit strictly subservient to that of the Word, in keeping with the theology of the *filioque*.

The Incarnation, itself, is *announced* in the Scriptures from the beginning as a messianic mission, that is, Jesus is to be the Christ, the ‘anointed one’, a work of the Spirit. The mission to introduce the Kingdom of God into the economy, the mission of Christ, however, is only *inaugurated* at his baptism, which prefigures his saving death on the cross. Thus Christ’s Incarnation, his anointing by the Spirit, his baptism and his death are all linked pneumatologically. However, Christ’s baptism and anointing by the Holy Spirit occur in order to make his sacrifice efficacious for us after Pentecost.

Congar is ambiguous, if not contradictory, in the way he sees the operation of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus. At one point he speaks of Jesus teaching, healing, ministering, proclaiming the Gospel in and through the anointing action of the Holy Spirit as a consequence of his baptism. But later he goes on to say that the institution of the Twelve, Jesus’ teaching, and the sacraments are all actions of the mission of the Word as distinct from that of the Spirit, which anoints them later at Pentecost. This is the pattern of the institution of the Church, he says, because of the hierarchical theology of the *filioque*.

Congar refers to the *filioque* to support his understanding of the Spirit as ‘the term of their [the Father’s and the Son’s] mutual love,’<sup>278</sup> that is, the Spirit is mutually constitutive of the Father and the Son. However, his ecclesiology seems to lapse back into a linear trinitarianism that gives an ontological priority to the work of the Son over any activity of the Spirit.

The consequence is that, despite all the promise of a more coherent and integrated ecclesial ontology, we are left with the old fundamental and dualistic division between a temporary, exterior and visible Body and an eternal but interior, mystical Body. The unity of the former still derives from obedience to a juridical authority derived apneumatically from the mission of the Word, while the unity of the latter is derived from the singularity and interiority of the Spirit. As long as the Church *in its constitution* remains juridically, that is pneumatically, connected with Christ, it can only

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278 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p24

be described in terms of his body. The ontological space required for the Other remains absent.

It appears that, as far as Volume 1 of *I Believe* is concerned, Congar has failed to fulfil the promise of his own pneumatological corrective. More importantly, he has failed to provide an integral place for the entire created order in his ecclesiology, relegating it to the instrumental in the temporariness of sacramentality. All stems from his theology of the *filioque*.

### **2.3.2 The Person ‘Church’ and ‘the Bride’**

Congar does not devote much space in the trilogy either to the notion of the Church as a ‘person’ or as ‘bride,’ although both have specifically titled sections within Volume 2. His passage ‘Is the Church a person?’ comprises one side,<sup>279</sup> while ‘The Church as the Bride’ comprises two.<sup>280</sup> Clearly these are not major concerns in this work, even though the first part of the second volume is dedicated to exploring the relationship between the Spirit and the Church.

Nevertheless, he re-positions certain aspects of his ecclesiology. In particular, his question concerning the personhood of the Church arises in the context of church unity residing in the singularity of the Holy Spirit. His pastoral concern has led him away from his earlier dependence on juridical authority as the basis of unity, which he sees as crushing the gifts of the individual. The Spirit is the gentler and enlivening, but transcendent, source of unity.

The Spirit, who is both one and transcendent, is able to penetrate all things without violating or doing violence to them.<sup>281</sup>

Congar’s language here is future-based, concerned with ‘becoming’: the Spirit ‘brings about unity’ rather than it being imposed. The Spirit is associated with the eschaton, is ‘an eschatological reality’, being the ‘*arrha* or earnest-money’, his presence guaranteeing our participation in the future kingdom of God. He refers to the Spirit as one who indwells each person, enabling them to participate in a mutual indwelling:

[The Spirit] is the extreme communication of God himself, God as grace, God *in us* and, in this sense, God outside himself... This communication and interiority do not lead to a merging together. It is rather a state of indwelling – God dwells in us and we dwell in him. There is no confusion of persons. This is the way in which there is a realisation of the mutual

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279 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, pp19-20

280 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, pp55-57

281 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, pp16-17



interiority of the whole in each which constitutes the catholic sense: *kath' holou*, being of a piece with the whole. The Spirit enables all men to be one and unity to be a multitude.<sup>282</sup>

There is a dynamic sense of unity established through the Holy Spirit in these passages which was not present in his earlier writing, while retaining an ontological basis of that unity. The oneness of catholicity derives from the being of God, using the trinitarian relations to protect the distinctiveness of each person. His concept of 'catholic' interiority strongly suggests the influence of Zizioulas, to whom he dedicates an appendix at the end of this section.<sup>283</sup> The unity of the Church here is based not on the apostolate, nor primarily on God's 'will,' but on the Spirit's presence as 'God outside himself,' although he does still refer to God's 'purpose' and the 'mystery of the will' of God as related to the Church's unity.<sup>284</sup> This leads him directly to talk of the Spirit's relationship with the Church in the traditional sense as the 'soul' of the Church as the Body of Christ, reminiscent of his Mystical Body theology in *Mystery*.<sup>285</sup>

### **2.3.2.1    *The Church as Person***

It is from here that he raises the question of whether the Church is a 'person'. He acknowledges that the Church has its own reality, is, indeed a subject with attributable properties; he names unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity, and indefectibility. So he asks:

Should we say therefore that the Church has a created personality which is peculiar to it, or should we rather say that Christ is the 'I' of the Church or that the Spirit is its supreme personality or its transcendent 'I'?<sup>286</sup>

Although he believes that such a proposition can be accepted, both of these possibilities lead to seemingly insurmountable difficulties in interpreting relations with respect to the biblical witness. It is important to note here that Congar's basic point of reference is Scripture, rather than inherited Tradition or Mariology. One reason is that in and through Scripture there exists a close connection between the Word and the Spirit.<sup>287</sup> He goes on to ask

If Christ is the 'I' of the Church, how can the Church be his bride? And if the Holy Spirit is the 'I' of the Church, how can it be the Body of Christ?<sup>288</sup>

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282 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, pp17-18

283 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, pp50-51

284 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, p20

285 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, p19

286 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p19

287 See Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p27ff

288 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p20

Nevertheless, Congar notes, there is a oneness pertaining to the Church that, time and again, is related in Scripture back to the oneness of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. Although he does not explore the oneness of God in this context, it should be apparent that the doctrine of the unity of God must here play a crucial role in defining the nature of the unity of the Church. For example, is the unity of God based on his substantial unity, his *ousia*, or on the perichoretic relations of the three hypostases? The answer to this question leads to two very different understandings of the nature of the unity of the Church.

But in answering his own question about the personhood of the Church, Congar remains ambiguous. On the one hand he states

By appropriation the Holy Spirit is the subject who brings about everything that depends on grace or, as C Journet said, the supreme and transcendent effective personality of the Church.<sup>289</sup>

But he then goes on immediately to qualify this by saying that the Holy Spirit is not consubstantial with us; the Son, however, is. The Son's humanity, made holy by the Spirit, is the source of grace so that the Son, together with the Spirit, are the 'authors of the Body.' However, the humanity is Christ's alone, personally, 'homogeneous with its members.' For this reason it is *his* body, not the Holy Spirit's.

So we are left with the impression that the Church is in some sense a 'person', but we have no clear understanding of who the 'I' of the Church is for Congar. In some senses it is the 'I' of the Holy Spirit, and in others it is the 'I' of Christ. What he is careful not to admit is the possibility of some other 'I'.

The consequence of this position is that, in relation to God, there remains no autonomous response from Creation to God's call or invitation. The 'I' of Christ *is* the 'I' of the Son, the Word, and the 'I' of the Spirit is that of the Third Hypostasis. So in both cases the unity of the Church, or the 'I' that responds to the 'Thou' of God's invitation, is always already a part of the already-constituted Trinity. This leaves the difficulty of Creation's freedom to respond to Christ, which is precisely the point of the bridal language employed in the Gospels, by Paul, and by John. The wedding feast, the presentation of the bride to the bridegroom, and the call of the bride to 'come' correspond to the beckoning of Creation by the One who has taken its substance and redeemed it. It is for exactly this reason that Bulgakov places such heavy emphasis on

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289 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p20

the response of Mary in the Annunciation: she represents the free, personal response of Creation to God's invitation.

### **2.3.2.2 The Church as Bride**

It is in the context of 'holiness' that Congar comes to the Church as 'bride.' The only two locations that he observes referring to the Church, as such, as being 'holy,' rather than individuals (e.g. 'saints') are Ephesians (5:26, 27) and 1 Corinthians 3:16ff. The first of these names the Church as 'bride,' the second as 'temple.' These, then are the two categories under which he explores the Church's 'holiness.'<sup>290</sup> However, even here he sees these descriptions as primarily individualist:

The Church, then, is a bride and a temple, but strictly speaking every believing soul is a bride, and every believer is a temple; this is in the New Testament<sup>291</sup> and is proclaimed again and again by the Fathers.<sup>292</sup>

This insistence on the priority of the individual for Congar is worth noting. He claims that the Fathers' understanding of the catholicity of the Church in each believer is evidence that the individual is the primary referent for the description of 'bride' and 'temple':

At least since Origen, whose influence was very great, but even before him – Hippolytus, for example – the Fathers and other early authors said that 'every soul is the Church.' Every soul is a bride and every soul is a temple. The liturgy passed from one to the other and from the singular to the plural, using the singular first.<sup>293</sup>

Congar's reference to 2 Cor 11:2 as his sole Scriptural text in support of the notion that the individual soul is the bride is extraordinary, since in the Greek Paul quite clearly equates the plural 'you' to the singular 'holy virgin,' not the plural 'holy virgins' which his interpretation would require. Likewise, his Scriptural references to the temple are either collective ('you' [plural] are the 'temple' [singular], never 'temples' [plural]), or else refer to the physical body of the Christian, never the soul. These texts are much more persuasive in demonstrating the opposite notion, that the church in each place is a singular 'temple' or 'virgin,' in which each person participates.

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290 cf. Bulgakov's rubric in which the Church is complementarily 'Body' and 'Temple', in relation to Christ and the Spirit, respectively, and thirdly as 'Bride' pertaining to the Church in distinction from Christ and the Spirit.

291 Footnote 2: 'The soul as bride: 2 Cor 11:2; the soul as temple: 1 Cor 3:16ff; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16. See also 2 Tim 1:14'

292 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p52

293 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p52

Indeed, Congar cites 2 Cor 11:2 (along with Eph 5:25-27, 29-31 and Tit 3:5-7) as the ‘most important New Testament texts that are in some way related to the theme of the Church as the bride.’<sup>294</sup> He goes on to elucidate the principal themes of the wedding between Christ and the Church, a Tradition which he has ‘studied with great love.’ The most important of these is the notion of election and the importance of response:

It [the Tradition] sees it [the mystery of that wedding] as an election of grace, by means of a choice and an appeal and by means of an anticipatory love.<sup>295</sup>

It is clear that he recognises the fundamental element of free response, ‘choice’ and ‘appeal’, in the concept of the nuptial metaphor. The election, following Augustine,<sup>296</sup> is achieved through the ‘marriage’ of human nature with divine nature in the incarnation in Christ.

Christ assumed soiled human nature and purified it, by making it his betrothed or bride.<sup>297</sup>

Purification is achieved through his baptism and the death on the cross. But this still leaves the aspect of the free ‘response’ to Christ’s election. Baptism and crucifixion ‘communicate his Spirit to the Church, the new Eve.’ This ‘new Eve,’ he says, ‘the Church as the bride,’ firstly through the baptism and gift of the Spirit, and secondly through the Eucharist,

*becomes* the Body of Christ and with him forms, spiritually and mysteriously (or mystically), ‘one flesh’.<sup>298</sup>

Congar is here using the metaphor of the Church as bride in a *primary* sense, not in the derivative, Augustinian sense.<sup>299</sup> The ‘new Eve’ is created from the side of Christ, and in *response* to him (although he does not explicate this), through the Spirit and the sacraments, *becomes* the Body of Christ. This is now seen, not as a biological or organisational metaphor, but a nuptial and personal one in the sense of Genesis 2, ‘the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a reversal of Augustine’s theology in which the Church is formed through participating in Christ’s body, and thus becomes also the bride. In this sense the bride, for Congar, here, is the primary ontological referent for the Church:

From the time of Tertullian onwards at least, the Fathers of the Church and the early Christian writers have been unanimous in seeing this [Genesis 1 and 2] as a prophetic

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294 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, p55

295 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p55

296 See Section The Union of Natures, below

297 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p55

298 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p56

299 See Section 5.1.1.1, below

announcement of the wedding between Christ, the new Adam, and the Church, the new Eve, when, from the pierced side of Jesus, fallen into the deep sleep of death, came water and blood, the sacraments, baptism and the Eucharist, which built up the Church, the marriage of the Cross and the marriage of the Lamb!<sup>300</sup>

The act of *becoming* is an ongoing process, begun at the Pentecost (=baptism in the Spirit) and completed at the eschaton. For Congar the wedding has already taken place in the Incarnation, but the purification of the bride, her joining to Christ to become his Body, the ‘one flesh’ of Genesis 2, only commences at Pentecost. He states

the wedding has been celebrated and the Church is the bride, but she is not yet the perfectly pure bride inaugurated by baptism.<sup>301</sup>

The two aspects of ‘purification’ and ‘becoming one flesh’ with Christ, becoming his body, are identical. Purification has not yet been achieved, and becoming one body with Christ has yet to be completed. Although Congar is careful not to say that the Church is becoming progressively more holy, he does hold to the Catholic teaching of the progressive understanding of the Church required to make sense of the doctrine of papal infallibility.

Nevertheless, his approach raises potentially difficult questions concerning the efficacy of Christ’s work on the cross. Is the Church not already sanctified by Christ’s sacrifice, or does she have to add something more? How is she to become ‘the perfectly pure bride’ if she is not already so through the work of Christ? How are we to understand the historical life of the Church before the eschaton?

Congar is trying to find theological space for the reality of the Church’s historical brokenness. Christ’s work on the cross is not incomplete for Congar, rather it is the consummation of the marriage that is incomplete, because the bride is not yet fully formed. This eschatological aspect to the completion of the nuptials is fundamental for him. Time and again he refers to the Spirit as *arrha*, ‘earnest-money,’ a down-payment in anticipation of the full marriage that is to come.<sup>302</sup>

She is tempted, in her sinful members, to join other bridegrooms (see 1 Cor 6:15ff). The union that should be consummated in one spirit (or Spirit) is still imperfect. The Church must also experience an Easter event of death and resurrection in the power of the Spirit. Her wedding will only be perfect eschatologically. She aspires to that perfection. She only possesses the first-fruits of the Spirit as earnest-money.<sup>303</sup>

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300 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, pp56-57

301 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p56

302 Eg Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, pp17,18,24,56,57(x2),69-71

303 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p56

When he states ‘the wedding has been celebrated and the Church is the bride’ he is referring to the Jewish betrothal celebration that takes place up to a year before the actual wedding. After this the couple are considered to be legally bound to each other (hence Joseph was going to ‘quietly divorce’ Mary, Mat 1:19). As part of the betrothal celebration the bridegroom gives the gifts, the *arrha*, that constitutes his promise to return for the bride and complete the wedding. In this sense the Spirit is the reminder of Christ’s promise to return, being the comfort of his presence in his absence. Thus the parousia of Christ is his return for the bride, with whom he left the Spirit as his presence. The wedding will then be fully consummated at the wedding feast, when the bride will become ‘one flesh’ with Christ, and thus his body with him as the head.

His statement that ‘the Church must also experience an Easter event of death and resurrection in the power of the Spirit’ is not one that he has made before and is theologically quite loaded, but again, does not elaborate. Nevertheless, it is worth considering briefly.

Death and resurrection pertain to the brokenness of sinful nature: it is through being clothed with Christ in baptism that the sinful nature dies and the promise of eternal life through the resurrection is given. Accompanying this is rebirth through the Holy Spirit: being born again of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5). This is, theologically, being born into the Church. Thus the Church comprises post-baptismal creation. The gift of the Holy Spirit from the other side of death by the resurrected Christ is the guarantee of safe passage through death into the resurrection to eternal life. Indeed, this is already accomplished sacramentally in baptism. Congar’s assertion that the Church, herself, must go through this process is therefore tantamount to a claim that the Church, as the new Eve born from the side of Christ on the cross, is still a ‘fallen’ Eve, not just an incomplete one. That is, she is still clothed in the brokenness of sinful human nature. It is only the presence of the Holy Spirit as the guarantee, the ‘*arrha* or earnest-money,’ that will carry her through her own ‘Easter.’ Resurrected flesh does not need to go through death a second time.

Theologically this must be what Congar is implying, rather than the ‘Easter’ of each individual. On the other hand, however, he might be referring to the Church having to pass through death, herself, to be resurrected. But what would this mean? If she is none other than those who comprise her, and not some *tertium quid*, she could only face her Easter *in* each of her participants, together. However, he does not spell it out. If he had,

it is questionable that, even as a cardinal, it would have been accepted as Catholic teaching.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In many ways Congar's later ecclesiology is more pneumatic than his earlier. Then, his principal understanding of the visible Church was a juridical institution, held together in unity through the apostolate, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, to give life to the Mystical Body of Christ, an invisible concept with an eschatological ontology.

However the conclusion of the analysis of his revised christology in Volume 1 of *I Believe* (Section 2.3.1.3, above) suggested that, although there were aspects of his christology and pneumatology that were revised, the revision was ambiguous. At one stage it appeared as though his pneumatology would interpenetrate every aspect of his christology, but then it seemed to revert to a subordinationist relation under the auspices of his application of the *filioque* clause.

The pneumatology expressed in Volume 2 appears, in many ways, to be much more radical. The second chapter is entitled *The Holy Spirit makes the Church one: he is the principle of communion*. The Spirit is now the source of unity, prior even to the apostolate:

[Augustine] was able to say, on the one hand, that it is necessary to be in the Body of Christ in order to have the Spirit of Christ and, on the other, that one has the Spirit of Christ and lives in that Spirit when one is in the Body of Christ. This is of decisive importance, since, if the Spirit is received when believers are *together*, it is not because there is one body that there is only one Spirit – it is rather because there is only one Spirit of Christ that there is only one body, which is the Body of Christ.<sup>304</sup>

Previously the Church's unity derived from the nature of the visible Body of Christ, because the apostolate was instituted by Christ himself. Thus obedience to the apostolate was the criterion for unity. The Spirit was always the source of unity in the Mystical Body. However, the shift in emphasis means this is now ontologically prior to that of the visible Body, which derives its constitution from the Spirit. The pneumatology of the two volumes is difficult to reconcile.

Accompanying this transmutation in pneumatology is a much more tentative approach to the Church's history. It is clear that, for pastoral reasons, Congar wants to take the Church's history seriously, especially her faults and shortcomings. For him this means

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304 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p15

these faults have to be incorporated into his ecclesiology. This he does, almost surreptitiously, by acknowledging the broken or incomplete nature of the Church as she awaits her own Easter and resurrection, although it is unclear what he means by this.<sup>305</sup>

This broken Church is on the road to holiness and purity but has not yet arrived. These lie, eschatologically, on the other side of resurrection. The Holy Spirit is the ‘*arrha* or earnest-money’ given to the Church as the promise of what is to come. The Church’s imperfection is the consequence of the incompleteness of her nature and also that ‘she only possesses the first-fruits of the Spirit.’ She has yet to experience ‘resurrection in the power of the Spirit.’<sup>306</sup> For Congar, the Church’s ontology and fullness is now purely eschatological:

According to the Bible, the truth of all things is found at the end, but it is envisaged at the beginning.<sup>307</sup>

The Spirit is the one who draws the Church towards purity and fullness, which gives rise to the struggle between the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’.<sup>308</sup> She has an eschatological ontology, and in this context he is prepared to give her a notional personhood, but not an autonomous one. She can be either the ‘I’ of the Spirit, as bride, in response to the ‘Thou’ of Christ, or she can be the ‘I’ of Christ, as his body, in response to the ‘Thou’ of the Father. In either case the ‘I’ of the Church is already an ‘I’ in the hypostatic Trinity. The question is whether creation, itself, has any free and personal relation with the triune God, whether there is any *one* (Jn 17:11) who may respond to the invitation to communion with God. He comes very close, with his understanding of interior catholicity, to defining an ontological (communional) unity in the image of God, but does not take the last step. Ultimately for Congar, therefore, the Bride of Christ does not *really* exist – it is metaphorical language without a corresponding ontology, unless that ontology exists purely at the level of the individual: there are ‘brides’ but not a ‘bride.’

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305 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p56

306 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p56

307 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p56

308 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, p57



## **Chapter 3 The Ontology of the Church in Bulgakov's 'The Bride of the Lamb'**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In 1945, the year after Bulgakov's death, *The Bride of the Lamb* was published. It represents the last volume of his great dogmatic trilogy *On God-Manhood*<sup>309</sup> and deals with anthropology, ecclesiology and eschatology. It was translated into English for the first time by Boris Jakim in 2002. The first volume of the trilogy, *The Lamb of God*, concerning Christology, was published in 1933 (translated by Jakim, 2008). The second volume, *The Comforter* (1936), was on the Holy Spirit and pneumatology (translated in 2004, again by Jakim). He considered *The Bride* the most important of the three.<sup>310</sup>

In describing this last volume Jakim says:

*The Bride of the Lamb*, Bulgakov's last major theological work, is the greatest sophiological work ever written. A masterpiece of mystical theology, it is the crowning glory of Bulgakov's theology (and one of the crowning glories of twentieth century Christian theology in general), the most mature development of his sophiology.<sup>311</sup>

Yet in his time, and still today, Bulgakov was a controversial figure upsetting many Orthodox theologians.

The main cause of the opposition was his sophiology. It came to a head in the Sophia Affair in 1935-36, in which his sophiological writings were condemned as heretical by the Moscow Patriarchate and the synodal Church (Russian Orthodox Church in Exile), but defended by his own bishop, Metropolitan Evlogy, the Russian exarch in Paris.<sup>312</sup>

Although Bulgakov's trilogy follows a definite structure, Logos – Spirit – Church, his writing is anything but systematic. It certainly follows paths but he does not attempt to systematise his thinking in gathered passages. Instead, the reader must be very careful *not* to think they have garnered the whole of his thinking on a particular subject just because they have read a section with that subject as its title! Furthermore, Jakim's translation suffers from some over-zealous editing whereby several long sections of the

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309 This is the preferred transliteration of Prof A Louth (*pers. comm.*). Valliere (*Modern Russian Theology*) prefers to translate the title as 'On the Humanity of God,' while both Jakim and Williams (*Bulgakov*) use the translation 'On Divine Humanity.' The Russian word *bogochelovechestvo* is rendered God-manhood throughout this thesis.

310 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p.xvii

311 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p.xiii

312 For an informative description of the affair see Williams, *Bulgakov*, p172-181

Russian original have been excised without any indication of their presence in the English. Such sections could have been preserved in appendices and their absence is a loss. As it is, only those with access to the Russian original (or French) will even know of their existence.

For Bulgakov, all we can know about God, and therefore ourselves, is revealed to us in the totality or wholeness of his revelation through the Son and the Spirit, through Sophia. Nuances and alternative perspectives therefore continually illuminate different aspects of that interrelated whole. Furthermore, his writing is permeated throughout with such enormous as well as poetic conceptualisation that it often defies reduction.<sup>313</sup> Describing Bulgakov's writing in the first volume of the trilogy, *The Lamb of God*, Rowan Williams says 'these pages are likely to drive a strict scholastic to drink!'<sup>314</sup>

In contrast to the christological bias introduced in the *filioque* theology of Congar and Balthasar, Bulgakov insists on the unity of the work of the Word and Spirit in all aspects of creation, revelation, redemption and new creation. This unity of the two 'hands of God' allows him to develop a fully hypostatic anthropology, and explore the unity of humanity in personal terms without losing the uniqueness of each person under and essentially functional structure. We will therefore explore his anthropology as it is foundational for his understanding of the Church.

Like much of the previous section on Congar, most of this study is based on the English translations. To the extent that these sometimes fail to capture the exact technical content of Bulgakov's thought this is a weakness. However, for particularly dense passages the Russian original has been consulted. In most cases this has confirmed the high standard of the English translation.

### **3.2 Hypostasis, Spirit, Nature, Soul and Body**

Central to Bulgakov's theology are the notions of hypostasis, nature and spirit. He gives them specific technical meanings born out of his merging of Greek patristic thought, Russian Sophiology, and German Idealism. It is worth clarifying their definitions although Bulgakov, himself, somewhat frustratingly does not always strictly adhere to their technical content.<sup>315</sup>

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313 For example, in speaking of life beyond death he describes infants who die at or soon after birth as those who 'enter the world only to leave it immediately, as a bird grazes a water surface with its wing,' Bulgakov, *Bride*, p370

314 Williams, *Bulgakov*, p168

315 Sometimes this is a weakness of the translation, other times not.

In his paper ‘Hypostasis and Hypostaticity’ he attempts to elucidate what he means by the term ‘hypostasis.’ Meerson summarises the distinction between hypostasis, nature and spirit thus:

Personalising, after Florensky, the Patristic concepts of *ousia* and *hypostasis*, Bulgakov maintains that personality (both human and divine) is a spirit who has personal self-consciousness, which he terms as ‘*hypostasis*,’ and nature which he terms ‘*ousia*.’ Their indivisible unity constitutes the life, or existence, or personality.<sup>316</sup>

However, it is unclear from Meerson’s description whether ‘personality’ comprises a spirit (= hypostasis) plus nature or whether ‘personality’ is the same as ‘spirit,’ which comprises hypostasis plus nature. In fact ‘spirit’ for Bulgakov is the personal being that exists as the union or combination of the personal hypostasis in its own nature. For Bulgakov, there can be no spirit without a hypostasis *and* its nature.

The hypostasis and the nature do not exist separately but compose one *living* spirit.<sup>317</sup>

‘God is Spirit’ (Jn 4:24). The nature of every spirit consists in the indivisible union of self-consciousness and self-being or self-foundation, of hypostasis (*ὑπόστασις*, *persona*) and nature (*φύσις*, *natura*). Outside of self-consciousness spirit does not exist; every spiritual being is aware of itself as *I*, is *I*.<sup>318</sup>

An example of Bulgakov’s lack of precision in his use of terminology can be seen here where he says ‘the *nature* of every spirit consists in the indivisible union of...hypostasis and *nature*.’ Nature is a union of hypostasis and nature? Such laxity sometimes makes it difficult to follow the content of his reasoning.

However, from the above it follows that, for Bulgakov, ‘person’ and ‘hypostasis’ are *not* coincident. ‘Hypostasis’ refers to the self-aware aspect of a personal being, not that being in itself. In Bulgakov’s terms ‘person,’ in the common usage of the term of being plus its nature, would appear to be identical with ‘spirit.’

Spirit cannot exist without its own nature or ‘substance,’ but this nature does not define the limit of what a spirit is, since nature of itself has no self-awareness, no consciousness. ‘Nature’ or *ousia* becomes hypostasised, becomes aware of itself, by its spirit. It is the ‘indivisible unity’ between self-awareness, or hypostasis, and its nature that constitutes the spirit, and is therefore coincident with Meerson’s term ‘personality.’ However ‘personhood’ would be a better term than ‘personality’ since the latter is used to describe the characteristic features of a person rather than referring to the being of a person itself. In this definition, person and spirit become identical in content, although

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316 Meerson, *Trinity*, p172

317 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p183

318 Bulgakov, ‘Hypostasis and Hypostaticity’, p18

the latter term refers more to the ontology than the relationality of the subject implied in the former.

If ‘spirit’ and ‘person’ are to be identified with each other, however, the question arises as to whether a ‘person’ necessarily has a ‘body.’ When Bulgakov speaks of ‘spirit’ he does *not* include ‘body,’ although when referring to ‘nature’ he sometimes does, depending on the context. In this case ‘person’ and ‘spirit’ are not coincident since we cannot know a person other than as *embodied* spirit. Having said this, Bulgakov argues that, in the Chalcedonian definition of the Incarnation, the divine nature of the Logos coexisted with the human nature in a human body.

It is impermissible to narrow and thus distort the general idea of the body of Christ by asserting that a body is proper to Christ only according to humanity, as the garment of flesh that He, though He Himself is bodiless, puts on for our sake and for our salvation. Such a supposition is ontologically contradictory, for what is essentially bodiless cannot put on corporeality.<sup>319</sup>

The fact that the divine nature could take on human flesh demonstrates that there is a kenotic compatibility between divine nature and corporeality. Since bodies are proper to spirits in the creaturely Sophia, it follows that some form of ‘spiritual body’ cannot be alien to Divine Sophia, to God. A ‘body’ must, therefore, be an expression of the ‘nature’ of the spirit. He elucidates this further in his doctrine of the Church as the ‘Body’ of Christ (see Section 3.6.1, below).

In his discussion of ‘soul’, which he sees as the ‘nature’ or *ousia* of the spirit, Bulgakov clarifies the distinction between ‘soul’ and ‘spirit.’

The difference between soul and spirit consists in the fact that the soul is *not* hypostatic, whereas the spirit is...The soul corresponds to the spirit’s nature. The soul lives and is hypostasised by the spirit (and, in this sense, the soul is not the spirit’s hypostasis but its hypostaticity, or more precisely, its hypostasisability).<sup>320</sup>

The distinction is further clarified in his discussion on death. Death divides the spirit and the soul on the one hand from the body on the other. However, the soul belongs to the created realm, to creaturely Sophia, as the spirit’s bodily ‘energy.’ This relation between the spirit and the soul in death, the inseparability of the two, is the guarantee that creation will pass through the state of death to be resurrected.<sup>321</sup>

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319 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p259

320 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p80

321 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp354-356

### 3.3 *Sophia, Hypostaticity, and ‘Humanityness’*

In 1924 Bulgakov produced a paper that set out to explain his sophiology and answer the charges of ‘heresy’ concerning a fourth hypostasis.<sup>322</sup> He presented it in London in 1932 to the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, and although he later claims that it became ‘out of date’ he nevertheless continued to cite from it. It contains some of his most profound thinking on the nature of Sophia in its relation to God and creation, particularly concerning God-Manhood. While it is, in many places, ‘dizzily dense’ it nevertheless expresses some important aspects of Sophia.

Of particular interest is the theme described by the translators as ‘the distinction between the being of God as love and his immersion into nothingness resulting in creation or Created Sophia.’<sup>323</sup> The theme relating to Sophia as the ‘eternal feminine’ or as the ‘actively passive entity,’ ‘hypostaticity,’ is also of interest, since it directly impinges on the relationship between God and the Church.

Later on we will encounter Sophia as an object of love and also the apparently oxymoronic notion of ‘impersonal love’ (see section 3.6.2). This can only be understood in terms of what Bulgakov refers to in Russian as *ipostasnost’*. This difficult word, coined by Bulgakov, receives various different translations. The original translator of the paper in 1932, Bateman, uses ‘personality’ but most agree this is inadequate. Williams suggests ‘hypostaseity/hypostatic existence/hypostatic character’,<sup>324</sup> Jakim chooses ‘hypostasisedness’,<sup>325</sup> while Gallaher and Kukota opt for ‘hypostaticity.’<sup>326</sup> For the sake of clarity all quotations of the word (including Jakim’s) are here rendered ‘hypostaticity.’

Williams describes the meaning of the word as ‘the capacity for being hypostasised, being concretised in an active subject, as opposed to existing directly as an agent or subject or hypostasis.’<sup>327</sup> But this seems to miss an important thrust in Bulgakov’s usage of the term, which Gallaher and Kukota identify as ‘actively passive.’ What is meant by this is an almost wilful act by a nature to be receptive. Bulgakov uses deliberately ambiguous language to imply this ‘active passivity.’

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322 Bulgakov, ‘Hypostasis’

323 Bulgakov, ‘Hypostasis’, pp7-8

324 Williams, *Bulgakov*, p165

325 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p39

326 Bulgakov, ‘Hypostasis’, p14

327 Williams, *Bulgakov*, p165

[Hypostaticity] is the capacity to hypostasise oneself, *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, hypostatisation through self-surrender.<sup>328</sup>

Without going into the technical detail of the verbs used here,<sup>329</sup> there is an active reflexive element that suggests a striving, with an implicit, but hidden 'will' as borne out by his reiteration later in the paper:

In the final reckoning, all creation has a human hypostasis, but it itself possesses only hypostaticity, a capacity and a striving to hypostasise itself in a multi-unity of hypostases.<sup>330</sup>

In his later writing he appears to leave behind this 'active passivity' in favour of a more clear-cut distinction between the passive impersonality of 'nature' and the active and personal willingness of hypostasis. For example, in its usage in *The Bride*, the word seems to be much closer to William's rendering, that is, simply the passive property of having the potential to receive a hypostasis, or needing a hypostasis to become complete, to become a 'thou.'

The creaturely Sophia as the world soul...is subjectless, does not belong to anyone, is without master, as it were. As such, she is deprived of the fullness of creaturely being that is postulated by her as the soul of the creaturely world and consists in hypostaticity.<sup>331</sup>

Nevertheless, the concept of the receptivity of Sophia is still important, and Sophia, even in *The Bride*, is the recipient of love as expressed here:

This [hypostaticity] is the power of love; however, it is a passive, feminine, self-surrender in the acceptance of love, but without the capacity to become active, it's [love's] hypostatic centre. That is what the mystics call 'eternal femininity'.<sup>332</sup>

The difficulty is that, although in his later work he wants to leave the notion of some form of desire or implied will in 'hypostaticity,' his wish to retain Sophia as a passive *object* of love carries within it a contradiction (seen in his reference to 'feminine' and 'self-surrender'), since to be an object of genuine love there must be a beloved, as Bulgakov admits:

To belong to God-Love as his object, content, idea is possible only to a living reality, which gives itself up to that love, albeit passively, not as a hypostasis, but nevertheless hypostatically, in the image of a hypostasis, as a self-hypostasising principle.<sup>333</sup>

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328 Bulgakov, 'Hypostasis', p28

329 See Bulgakov, 'Hypostasis', p15

330 Bulgakov, 'Hypostasis', p38

331 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p82

332 Bulgakov, 'Hypostasis', p29

333 Bulgakov, 'Hypostasis', p29, p30

But what is the ‘image of a hypostasis?’ And how can something non-hypostatic behave in a hypostatic manner? Although Bulgakov tries to defend such an idea in the paper this passive activity of Sophia is quietly dropped in the later writings. However, it still remains prominently in his conception of the Church as ‘body’ in *The Bride*, where the Church, as Sophia, Divine and created, that is, as the ‘nature’ or ‘body’ of Christ, is the object of God’s love.

The other aspect of Sophia that has immense implications relates to its nature. Taking his notion of God-Manhood to its logical conclusion, Bulgakov proclaims that, as Divine Sophia is to God, so creaturely Sophia is to humanity. That is, that the whole cosmos of creation, which has its foundation in creaturely Sophia, is humanity’s nature, or is, as he calls it ‘humanityness,’ since it is hypostasised by humanity. This theme runs unchanged throughout Bulgakov’s theology.

In its integral substance the world is *humanityness* and mankind is the living centre-point of the world, its ‘god’ (in his predestination).<sup>334</sup>

and in *The Bride*

The creaturely world is a cosmo-anthropic world, or man is a microcosm. The humanness of the world is revelation’s fundamental and generalising truth about creation... Having the creaturely Sophia as his nature, as the source and foundation of his life, the creaturely god, man, received also his own personal spirit.<sup>335</sup>

Divine Sophia is God’s own nature, his ‘Glory’ or shekinah. He is its hypostasis. But in yielding his Sophia to temporality and finitude, to creation, God has ‘yielded his throne in creation’ to man. Creaturely Sophia has become man’s nature, and man has replaced God as its centre, as its ‘creaturely god.’<sup>336</sup>

### **3.4 Creation and Hypostasis**

#### **3.4.1 Freedom and Creation as Eternally Completed Act**

Tracing the theme of creation in Genesis 1, Bulgakov sees the Six Days of creation as forming one account, but a parallel account of creation of a different sort is found on the Sixth Day. The indication of this is given in Gen 1:26 (God’s council concerning the creation of man ‘in our image, after our likeness’), and in Gen 2:7 (the dual act of creation of man out of dust and breath).

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334 Bulgakov, ‘Hypostasis’, p31

335 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p85

336 Bulgakov, ‘Hypostasis’, p31

Bulgakov's talk of 'becoming' in relation to the creaturely Sophia introduces the notion of time, temporality. In this regard he distinguishes between two types of eternity: divine and creaturely.<sup>337</sup> There is, he says, a fundamental distinction between them: divine eternity refers to the infinity and *unchangeableness*, the absoluteness, of God – it has no beginning or end, as such categories belong to temporality. Creaturely eternity refers to the unending process of *becoming*, which does have a beginning, and by definition, refers to a process *in time*. The latter, which might scientifically be referred to as semi-infinite, or semi-eternal, is a category of temporality: the former is its ground. The two are, therefore, categorically different. Concerning divine eternity he states:

Eternity and time are not two parts of one temporal process, but belong to two totally different categories. Divine eternity does not precede time, but is its foundation, and by no means can it be situated in the temporal process.<sup>338</sup>

Concerning creaturely eternity he says:

The creation called to being by God is indestructible and endless, and in this sense the world does not know an end, is 'eternal'.<sup>339</sup>

Considering the testimony of the Bible on divine eternity, Bulgakov refers to the temporality and limited duration of certain OT facts and institutions that are ascribed the notion of eternity, such as eternal law, eternal priesthood. These have clearly been superseded, so the description of 'eternal' must refer to some other concept than 'never-ending'. Instead, he says

Such institutions, which attest to direct indications and actions of God's hand in the life of humanity, have a sacred and, in this sense, divine character. Taking into account its different nuances, 'eternal' is used here as a synonym for 'divine.' 'Eternity' is synonymous with God's activity, manifestation, or energy. It is the ladder between heaven and earth.<sup>340</sup>

The divine eternity of God is also a way of speaking of his omniscience. God beholds all of creation as a completed act.<sup>341</sup>

The discussion at this point in *The Bride* concerns the notion of predestination, which, Bulgakov claims, 'annuls the world's originality and creaturely freedom, and transforms the human world into a world of things.'<sup>342</sup> On the face of it, such a statement appears to contradict his claim for the omniscience of God. The discussion of predestination is

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337 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p467

338 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p226

339 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p382. He qualifies this by saying the 'mode of being that became proper to the world after the fall at the beginning of our time or this age is transitory and has an end: the image of this world passes away' but that 'the cosmos [will be] transformed, not abolished but transfigured.'

340 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p468

341 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p227

342 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p227



beyond our scope here, but Bulgakov's formulation of the relationship between God's omniscience and creaturely freedom provides an example of the outworking of the relationship between Divine and creaturely Sophia.

Divine Sophia, being divine, exists in God's eternity. It contains all potential possibilities within it – it is the Wisdom of God. Thus:

One can and must say that eternity contains all the content of time. There is and can be nothing in time that does not have its foundation in eternity, in the Divine Sophia, who reveals herself in the creaturely Sophia, in the world.

Everything that is, that can be, has its roots in the Divine Sophia. For it to be otherwise, something new, something outside God, would have to be created. Some *other* force, i.e. god, would have to bring into existence something that previously was not.

But this *determination* in the Divine Sophia has nothing to do with causal predestination, 'where freedom is in fact annulled and eternity is equated with the beginning of time.' Bulgakov insists that creaturely freedom can determine its own mode of existence, can create something 'new', that creation does not follow a 'pre-determined' temporal path.<sup>343</sup> This is not a contradiction with the determination of the Divine Sophia since all possibilities already exist in the Divine Sophia as the *pleroma*, the fullness of God. The problem posed by classical ideas of predestination arises precisely due to the confusion of equating divine eternity with unending temporality, which renders God subject to time. Rather, creaturely freedom is the fulfilment in the creaturely Sophia of the determination in Divine Sophia:

In divine eternity there is a *determination* that covers the whole reality of the world and all the possibilities contained in it. All these possibilities are actualised by creaturely freedom, which, like all creative activity, contains something new in this sense. But it is new only for creation, not for God.<sup>344</sup>

This notion of fulfilment is key to understanding the being of creation. Creaturely Sophia is the temporal outworking of Divine Sophia. Creation has its very being in the wisdom of God and cannot be separated from it.<sup>345</sup>

Understanding the relation of temporality to eternity in this way, we can turn to the conception of humanity within Creation. All the possibilities of Creation are contained within the Divine Sophia, which is eternal. But Bulgakov also claims that all creation is complete in that Creation was completed on the sixth day, including the entirety of

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343 Although this is constrained by the origin and limits of freedom.

344 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p227.

345 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p227-8.

humanity. This creation takes place supratemporally, prior to the creation of temporality but within the creaturely Sophia.<sup>346</sup>

### **3.4.2      *Humanity as a Created Whole***

Although at first sight Bulgakov's claims about the creation of humanity may seem esoteric, he derives them from an investigation of the Incarnation which, he says 'has never been posed and never been discussed in theology' and thus constitutes 'an anthropological lacuna in christology.'<sup>347</sup>

The question is this: if the Chalcedonian creed is right, that Christ is 'perfect in humanity...truly man...consubstantial with us according to humanity', how and in what sense is 'the assumption of the elements of the human bodily and psychic nature [to be] equated with the assumption of the human nature in its entirety, of the whole old Adam'?<sup>348</sup> In other words, *how* can Christ redeem all of humankind?

The question goes to the heart of the nature of humanity and its creation in the image of God. Bulgakov has already insisted that God is first of all personal<sup>349</sup> and likewise human nature does not exist apart from its hypostatic form, i.e. concrete personal existence. This is a vitally important axiom for Bulgakov's anthropological arguments:

No human *nature* exists that has being wholly independent of hypostatic concretisation, as if *prior to* or *outside of* it. Humanity as nature is found only in the fullness and presence of hypostases. Nature and hypostasis can be separated or opposed only in abstraction (*en epinoia*); and in itself, this separation or opposition does not correspond to any reality.<sup>350</sup>

The question of the assumption of human nature in the Incarnation takes on a different urgency in the light of this axiom. If human nature, as some 'thing', does not exist, what, or more correctly, whose, human nature does Christ assume? In what does the *homousian* relationship of Christ with the rest of all humanity consist?

This is a fundamental point to understand in Bulgakov's anthropology – humanity, each human being consists in a human nature united with a human hypostasis. However, although human nature and human hypostasis are inseparable in existence, they each have very different properties that correspond to different modes of adoption in the Incarnation (which is, of course, how we consequently understand them in creation).

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346 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p113.

347 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p109

348 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p108

349 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p37

350 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p108

Assumption of flesh and bones, i.e. corporeality, or psychic nature, although essential, is not enough since these attributes are unique to each person – no-one else shares my body or thinks the same thoughts as me. They are similar between people, but not the same, i.e. they are *homoiousian*. Neither is it acceptable to say that only those who have lived prior to the Incarnation are in some sense incorporated in Christ, for his work of redemption applies to all human beings, past, present, and future. For Christ's *homooousian* relation with all humanity to be ontological Bulgakov insists that the possibility of an integral humanity must therefore exist.<sup>351</sup>

It follows from this that humanity as a whole is already complete. That is, creation is already complete, including the creation of humanity. *If* human nature does not exist independently of hypostasis, then there can be no 'generic' human nature to assume, or one that is not associated with a hypostasis. Otherwise, how can those who come after Christ, i.e. those not yet born, be included in him? All hangs on this 'if'. Bulgakov's answer is that they cannot and for this reason they must all already be created. There is thus a fixed and finite number of human beings. The point of the Sabbath is that God rested after the completion of the work of creation. The fact that human beings are still being born, he states, does not contradict this, since the creation of humanity took place supratemporally, not before time, but beyond time and for time, and is realised temporally. Otherwise the creation of humanity would be ongoing and infinite, which means there is no possibility of its fullness or completion,<sup>352</sup> and if it does not yet exist as a whole 'the Incarnation of God is also impossible.'<sup>353</sup> The consequence of all this is that Christ assumes the humanity of *each concrete person* in his Incarnation.

In some sense, humanity exists independently of these limitations of time, or supratemporally. The assumption of the integral humanity signifies not the abstract assimilation of certain human properties, corporeal and psychic, but the concrete assumption of me, you, them. In general, humanity does not exist abstractly and impersonally. It exists only as mine, yours, ours, theirs. It consists of the totality of all particular human persons. The Lord took His humanity not from impersonal nature but from each of us *personally*. He thus became one with His humanity, introducing it into His own hypostatic being. And only on this basis can it be said: 'Christ lives in me.'<sup>354</sup>

So humanity is a complete and finite hypostatic multiplicity. But not only this, Bulgakov says it is also a 'hypostatic multi-unity' - the integral Adam, 'the all-person,

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351 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p109

352 Bulgakov draws a fundamental distinction between human beings and creatures, denying the latter any concept of personhood, and therefore capable of infinite reproduction without 'creating' anything new. *Bride*, p122.

353 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p108

354 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p109

in the image of the one but trihypostatic God.<sup>355</sup> Everyone is a part of this ‘all-person’, a part of the whole. But the whole also exists in every person:

Humanity, like each individual human being, must not be understood as a series of individual units, attached one to the other by virtue of a kind of similarity. It must be understood only as a whole: the entire natural Adam lives in every human being. Every person is a point on the surface of this sphere, connected by a radius to the centre. The whole and a particular variant, the genus and an individual, exist with one existence, are inwardly one.<sup>356</sup>

He attributes an ontology to this all-unity, but, it seems, no form of personal personhood, describing it in terms of a generic Adam. Indeed, it appears to have a prior ontology to our own, and upon which our own ontology as persons depends. It does have a ‘personal-generic self-consciousness’ in which all humanity participates. He describes it as a ‘higher reality [that] penetrates into and is realised in our consciousness only weakly and in a limited way.’ But this generic self-consciousness is ‘determined from the depths of man’s being and constitutes the very foundation of this person.’ In this way, Bulgakov says that we are all *actually* connected with the original, generic Adam.

In this sense, Genesis 1:27-28 speaks of the creation of man in general, or of the all-man. It does not speak of the creation only of a particular person: ‘God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.’... Here the entire second chapter speaks of the all-man in general. Only in chapter 3, after the fall, does the particular man Adam appear, and then Eve (3:8-9, 12, 17, 20-21).<sup>357</sup>

Despite describing it as a ‘person’ it is not clear from his description how this ‘hypostatic multi-unity’ or ‘all-person’ relates to his previous assertions that there is no such thing as non-hypostatic human nature, which, he says, can only exist as concrete hypostatic male or female. To claim that there is a generic Adam with a generic consciousness that has a higher reality than hypostatic human being is a bold one, unless the claim centres on the inherent humanity in the Second Person of the Trinity, but Bulgakov does not say this. The generic Adam is *created* humanity, in its independence from the Divine. However, it is difficult to see how there can be *any* form of human hypostasis that does not have a material body without succumbing to a dualistic creation of the Cartesian sort. Furthermore, it is clear that this understanding of a finite and completed humanity could not co-exist with any notion of biological evolution.<sup>358</sup>

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355 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p110

356 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p110

357 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p110

358 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p175

The link between each empirical hypostatic person and the generic all-person in Bulgakov's thinking serves two primary purposes. One is that Christ, in the Incarnation, takes the personal humanity of each and every human being ever created. Thus his assumption of humanity is effective for all. The second is linked to the first in that, as all share the humanity of the first Adam, so too all share in his sin – original sin.

### **3.4.3      *Humanity as the Hypostasisation of Creation***

Creaturely Sophia is the soul of creation. However, the very act of creation 'throws her into the state of becoming' and creaturely Sophia is 'kenotically diminished' precisely because in this act she 'falls out of the fullness of hypostatic life in which the Divine Sophia lives in the Holy Trinity.'<sup>359</sup> This kenoticism of creaturely Sophia is crucial to understanding the rôle of humanity in Bulgakov's theology: not just his sophiology, but his understanding of creation, incarnation, redemption, and glorification. To grasp the importance of this move, we must focus on the being of Divine Sophia.

Divine Sophia, as the world of God's being, finds her fulfilment in the hypostases of the Trinity – she 'is hypostasised from all eternity by the Holy Trinity in its hypostases. Hypostatic being is an attribute of the Divine Sophia; she presupposes it in herself.'<sup>360</sup> Divine Sophia, as such, is not a hypostasis, does not have a hypostasis of its own. She exists in God with the ontological potential to be that which is fulfilled by the hypostases of the Trinity, and is so fulfilled from eternity by them.

Taken out of this life and 'thrown' into nothingness she becomes creaturely Sophia, but devoid of any hypostasis, devoid of that which gives her any personal shape. In other words, she remains unfulfilled, or as Bulgakov puts it, as a predicate without a subject, waiting for the subject through whom she might participate in a hypostasis, become hypostasised and thus be fulfilled, while at the same time giving life to that subject.<sup>361</sup>

She contains within herself the potential for individuation, for multiplicity, indeed, for personal being, since she is created out of, founded upon, Divine Sophia. Yet in herself, in her kenotic ejection or creation, she remains unhypostasised. Creation, in and of itself, Bulgakov maintains, is incapable of hypostasisation, since this is a property of spirit, not creation.

This lack of subject in nature, however, is overcome in man, who is the supracreaturely principle in the world, for he has a spirit that proceeds from God and a hypostasis, which,

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359 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p82

360 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p83

361 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p82

albeit created, is in the image of God. In this sense, man is the hypostasis of the creaturely Sophia, which is multiple in the hypostases of the human race.<sup>362</sup>

This duality of man – comprising both creation in the image of God and God-breathed spirit, means that he is open both to God and to creation. He is created precisely in order to hypostasise creation, to lead it into its fulfilment, to be the hypostasis of creation that participates in communion with God, through the reception of divine life, and hence the divinising of creation. He is the created god of creation, its king, its prophet, and its priest, the cosmic centre of creation, created to enable its temporal ‘becoming.’

As both a created spirit and a spirit who is divine according to his source, man is open both to divine life, in which he participates by virtue of his deification, and to the creaturely Sophia, whose hypostasis he is. In this sense, he is created as a creaturely god in nature, as a god by grace. His reception of *divine* life is the action of the Image of God in him... *Gratia* is, of course, *supernaturalis*, insofar as it enables man to commune with God; but this communion with God corresponds precisely to the natural human essence, which is created to be a receptacle of grace. And in this sense the original Adam was, before his fall, already the king of the world, the high priest and prophet by the power of God acting in him; and in this sense he was a *god-man in the process of becoming*.<sup>363</sup>

Hypostatic being, therefore, is the central element of man’s being, defining his mediatorial rôle between the entire expanse of cosmic creation and its fulfilment through glorification, divinisation and communion with God. Humanity is created to fulfil all the potential that exists in creaturely Sophia, which is achieved through humanity’s hypostatisation. Humanity, personal being, is the subject for which the predicate of creaturely Sophia longs, while the latter is the predicate that gives existence, life to the subject. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of humanity’s hypostatic being for creation in Bulgakov’s theology. It forms the crux around which the rest of his theology revolves. The whole Sophia project finds its resolution in terms of its hypostatisation, first by Adam (and all of humanity in him), and subsequently in the redemption through Christ (and Mary). In non-sophianic language we might say that as the Trinity hypostasises the *ousia* of God, so humanity hypostasises the *ousia* of creation.

However, an important difference exists in the hypostatisation of the two Sophias. This difference arises due to the mode of created Sophia’s creation. Divine Sophia is hypostasised by the Divine Hypostases as she belongs to those hypostases – is in one sense the *ousia* of God, is God. However, created Sophia, being Divine Sophia submerged into nothingness and thus being created out of nothing, is created *out of* Divine Sophia. That is, she is created.

362 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p211

363 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p212

Human personhood, on the other hand, comes not from the Divine Sophia, but from the Person of God, since personhood, personal spirit can only come from a Person, never from something impersonal.

The creation of the world therefore consists of two acts and necessarily has two sides: the creation of creaturely nature as the creaturely Sophia and the creation of new, creaturely persons, capable of hypostasising this nature, of being the subjects of the creaturely Sophia. This act of creation of personal spirits refers not to Sophia but to the very Person of God.<sup>364</sup>

The consequence of this is that, with reference to Gen 2:7, the human spirit, human personhood, 'has not a creaturely but a *divine* origin, even though it is created, that is even though it is determined to being for creatures or in connection with the creation of the world.' This difference in origins between creaturely Sophia and the human spirit means that, even though they were created for each other, they do not 'own' each other in the way that the Divine Hypostases own the Divine Sophia.

Although personality (the personal spirit) lives in the creaturely Sophia and has her as its own 'nature' or the world, it does *not* itself belong to Sophia, but is given to her as her subject... [The Divine Sophia] is hypostasised by the Divine Person, belongs to God, whereas [creaturely Sophia] is entrusted to creaturely, human persons (as well as angelic ones), is independently hypostasised by them.<sup>365</sup>

The point of this 'entrusting' is that the creaturely Sophia still *belongs* to God as his creation. Nevertheless, He gives up his place as the hypostatic centre to humanity in order for it to become fully autonomous.<sup>366</sup>

#### **3.4.4 Hypostasis and Personal-Centredness**

Bulgakov maintains that the hypostatic nature of humanity is derived from that of the Holy Trinity. God in himself is three hypostases, not more, not less. Three is the divine hypostatic fullness.<sup>367</sup> The kenotic self-giving love of God extends ecstatically into the 'nothingness' out of which creation is made to give himself hypostatically, and thus create a 'fourth' hypostasis.<sup>368</sup>

The Holy Spirit is the hypostasising agent who goes out from God to 'ignite' the creaturely hypostasis capable of a response of love. Thus the 'fourth' hypostasis is called into existence as the creaturely response of creation to communion with God.

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364 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p84

365 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp84-85

366 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p85

367 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p92

368 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp155-156. See also pp 89, 92-93, 93

This ‘multihypostatic’ hypostasis can, in some sense, be considered as a single, united hypostasis, and Bulgakov seems to oscillate between the singular and the plural.<sup>369</sup>

Although the ‘fourth’ hypostasis exists as unique personal beings, each with its own characteristics in concrete and particular hypostases, they all share an integrity. Otherwise the Second Person of the Trinity could not have efficaciously assumed ‘human flesh.’ Indeed, this unity has ontological priority over individuality.

This individuality of personal being is not its supreme and definitive determination. On the contrary, this being is subordinate to the power of integrity, of unity in the whole, where one’s soul must be ‘lost’ before it can be saved, where the corn of wheat must die before it can bring forth fruit. This being becomes fully itself when it *loses* its individuality. This individual, qualified ray, which hitherto has shined only in its own colour, now begins to shine with the light of the pleroma and participates in the wholeness in which God is all in all.<sup>370</sup>

These lines are from the ‘Creation’ chapter in *The Bride* and yet they are based on Jesus’ comments referring to his coming passion (Jn 12:24). Applied, they are normally taken to refer to the necessity for spiritual death (in baptism) before new life in the spirit can begin, prefiguring the bodily resurrection. Here Bulgakov remarkably applies them to original creation, affirming the kenotic nature of ‘becoming’ as the intended original task of hypostatic love in creation. Thus he sets out the work of redemption as seamless and contiguous with the original task set before creation.

The hypostatic singularity is of crucial importance for Bulgakov’s soteriology. Since Christ’s humanity is efficacious, for all human hypostases that have been, are, and will be, a similar unity must have existed with Adam. This is why Christ is referred to as the Second Adam in the Scriptures.

Ontologically, this personal-generic self-consciousness is determined from the depths of man’s being and constitutes the very foundation of his person. Just as Adam is the ‘progenitor’ of the *whole* human race and bears in himself *all* of humankind, is connected with all of humankind, so the sons and daughters of Adam all bear him in themselves, are, in this sense, Adam himself in his multi-unity.<sup>371</sup>

Thus the inter-connectedness of the original Adam extends throughout the human population in time and space, the notion of the catholicity of every person.<sup>372</sup>

The divine and human hypostases are comparable in that both comprise ‘equi-hypostatic I’s’ qualified by unique hypostatic abilities<sup>373</sup>

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369 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p89

370 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p92

371 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp109-110

372 Cf. John Donne’s ‘No man is an island unto himself.’

373 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p95



He goes on to ask in what ways are human individuals thus qualified. Having modelled his understanding of hypostasis on the Trinity, his response is, perhaps surprisingly, anthropocentric: the fundamental qualification of humanity is gender – male and female.

He derives the basis of this gendered distinction on the pattern of creation in Genesis 1, in which male and female are created in the image of God. Bulgakov argues that, since creation is an act of the Father through the Spirit and the Son, this dyad being the Revelation of the Father, we are compelled to understand the creation of male and female in God's image as being in the image of the Son and the Spirit: as in the economic, so in the immanent. Thus we understand maleness as being in the image of the Son and femaleness in the image of the Spirit.

These male and female principles in which is imprinted the image of the Divine Sophia, of prototypical humanity, are the differentiation and unity – expressed in the language of creaturely being – of the Logos and the Holy Spirit in Sophia. From the image we ascend here to the Proto-image and understand it.<sup>374</sup>

The 'unity' to which he refers is the dyadic nature of the revelation of the Father. *Together*, Logos and Spirit are the 'God-manhood' of which creaturely humanity is the reflection in the creaturely Sophia. Although the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity are distinct and differentiated, it is their *togetherness* that reveals the Father in the Divine Sophia. Likewise, it is the togetherness of the distinct and differentiated male and female natures that form the image of God.

But this 'togetherness' Bulgakov also considers to be a kind of super-hypostatic hypostasis, which appears to be different to the 'multihypostatic' hypostasis of Adam. In this case it is a more generic hypostasis, or 'I,' that corresponds to God's hypostatically undifferentiated 'I:'

We have here, first of all, a *hypostasis* in general, a personal I, without distinction as to whether this pure I-ness is given to male or female. As I, the divine hypostases are not distinguished among themselves and equally enter into the triunity of the trine I.<sup>375</sup>

What, or who, is this 'personal I'? Bulgakov never answers the question, but it must, following his logic, have a parallel answer to the same question asked of God: who is the personal 'I' of God? The OT answer to this question was the divine tetragrammaton, Yahweh. However, Bulgakov understands this name, not to be the personal name of the undifferentiated Trinity. Instead he interprets it as the name of the Logos.<sup>376</sup>

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374 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p186

375 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p89

376 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p167

An answer to the question therefore remains elusive. Does God ever speak as the Divine ‘I,’ or is God’s ‘speech’ always just one of the revealing hypostases? Likewise, is there a single response to God from the ‘personal I’ of hypostasised creation, or is it the singularity of a harmonic chord?

‘God-Manhood,’ the overarching title of Bulgakov’s systematic trilogy, in its origin refers to the Incarnation, to the God-man, Jesus Christ. However, since the Incarnation is a work of both the Logos *and* the Spirit, so too ‘God-manhood’ is an aspect of the dyadic relationship between the Logos and the Spirit. God-manhood is the *union* of Divine Sophia with creaturely Sophia in Jesus. The foundation of the union, itself, is their common sophianicity, creaturely Sophia being the created image of the Divine Sophia.<sup>377</sup> It is the uniting of the heavenly and earthly Adam, of Divine and human natures. This is the bi-unity of Divinity and nature. God-manhood exists in heaven as the ‘eternal foundation of the world’,<sup>378</sup> but in creaturely Sophia is actually a temporal process, a becoming, a fulfilling. ‘It is the revelation of the Logos by the Holy Spirit, Their inseparable bi-unity.’<sup>379</sup>

In order for the Incarnation to take place, for Divinity to be united with humanity, creaturely humanity must be compatible with the Logos in whose image it is made. The Divine Sophia therefore contains within it the eternal Humanity that pertains to the Logos and that forms the basis of the Incarnation. Conversely, creaturely Sophia, created humanity, contains within it the image of the Divine Sophia that enables it to be hypostasised by the hypostasis of the Logos.

The Logos is the pre-eternal God-Man as the Proto-Image of the creaturely man. The Logos is the demiurgic hypostasis whose face is imprinted in the Divine world, as in the Divine Sophia, by the self-revelation of Divinity through the Logos. The hypostasis of the Logos is *directly* connected with Sophia. In this sense the Logos *is* Sophia as the self-revelation of Divinity; He is her direct (although not sole) hypostasis...Sophia is also the heavenly humanity as the proto-image of the creaturely humanity; inasmuch as she is eternally hypostasised in the Logos, she is His pre-eternal God-manhood.<sup>380</sup>

A more nuanced position is expounded in both the later works, *The Comforter* and *The Bride*, which ascribe a greater emphasis to the *gendered* nature of the Spirit’s hypostasis. Here, the Divine Sophia is the dyad of the *two* Hypostases *together* that are the eternal God-manhood, which is also described as the Proto-Image.<sup>381</sup> The emphasis lies on the gendered bi-unity of the Logos and the Spirit together being the Revelation

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377 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p216

378 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p357

379 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p357

380 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p187

381 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p97

of the Father in the God-manhood. The Logos still remains as the content of the God-manhood and the Spirit as the one that gives life, actualises it.

This God-manhood is different to that which unites Divine and creaturely Sophia. The eternal God-manhood is that in whose image creaturely humanity is made. In this sense, since Divine Sophia is hypostasised by the Logos *and* the Spirit, Bulgakov can refer to the Divine Sophia *as* eternal God-manhood. Again, we understand the nature of the eternal God-manhood from its image in creation.<sup>382</sup>

Thus God-manhood in Bulgakov refers to two separate, but intimately related entities. In the first place (chronologically, not ontologically), it refers to the Incarnation, to the two natures of Divinity and Humanity united in one Person – Jesus Christ. In the second place (which is ontologically prior), it refers to that aspect of God in whose image created humanity is made. In *The Lamb* this eternal Humanity is described as the eternal ‘God-Man’. In a memorable phrase that speaks of the eternal orientation of God towards his created image, and of that image reflecting back towards God, he says

The God-manhood and the God-Man, that is, the humanity of Divinity and the divinity of humanity, are given pre-eternally in God.<sup>383</sup>

### **3.4.5 Hypostasis and Gender**

Bulgakov introduces the notion of gender in the Second and Third Hypostases as the two spiritual principles that characterise them in *The Lamb*. This correlation between the Word and the Spirit is, he says, *reflected* as the correlation of the male and female principles in the creaturely human world. They are reflected in all human trans-gender relationships, such as mother-son; sister-brother; bride-bridegroom; wife-husband as well as daughter-father. The correlation of the Holy Spirit with the female principle is found most clearly at the end of St John’s Revelation where ‘the Spirit and the Bride say, Come’ (22:17). Here the relationship between the Logos and the Spirit is expressed as a *personally* qualified form of love

a ‘qualification’ that can be expressed in creaturely language by analogies of forms of love between the male principle and the female principle (and it is of course self-evident that anything having to do with sex or, in general, with sensuality must be excluded here). And just as the hypostasis of the Logos is the hypostasis of Christ, made incarnate in a male infant and reaching maturity as a ‘perfect male,’ so the hypostasis of the Spirit is most fully revealed for us in the Mother of God and becomes a reality for us in the Church, which is the ‘Spirit and the Bride.’<sup>384</sup>

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382 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p186

383 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p114

384 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p115

The primary distinction between male and female in creation, Bulgakov maintains, cannot be reduced to any common factor 'humanity'. It is the most basic element that distinguishes or 'qualifies' individuals. It is a distinction as fundamental as the distinction between the hypostases in the Trinity. Indeed, the distinction is read back into the hypostases of the Trinity, with maleness derivative upon the hypostasis of the Son, and femaleness derivative upon the hypostasis of the Spirit, as indicated above. Thus, Bulgakov 'engenders' (rather than 'sexes') the Trinity.

What is this individual qualifiedness and to what does it refer? In the first place, as we already know, two types of persons, which together express the image of God in man, are fundamentally separate: male and female ('male and female created he them' [Gen 1:27]), who are created in the image of the hypostasis of the Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>385</sup>

In relation to the Father, however, Bulgakov does not want to ascribe any notion of gender. Although the gendered language of 'Father' is used for the first person of the Trinity this is not to be understood in such a manner. Rather, we do not have appropriate language to speak of personal being in an ungendered way.<sup>386</sup>

Perhaps sensing some reticence in an over-gendered understanding of the two hypostases of the eternal God-manhood in the Logos and the Spirit, Bulgakov wants to ensure a distinction between created 'maleness' and 'femaleness' and their counterparts in the Divine Sophia.

Of course, here we must set aside the specific qualities of the male and female principles according to which they exist in the creaturely world in the images of the male and female *genders*. One must instead understand them as images of one and the same spiritual principle, Sophia, in the fullness of its self-revelation, in the image of the Second and Third hypostases.<sup>387</sup>

But introducing this distinction inevitably leads to the question as to what, then, is the nature of the image? In what principles or characteristics *does* the image reside, especially since we have read this gender back from the *œconomia* to the *theologia*? His answer is that the 'maleness' of the Logos corresponds to content; the 'femaleness' of the Spirit corresponds to life and love. He describes the relation between these attributes in the Divine Sophia and creaturely Sophia, in the created male and female spirit, as parallel ('not more and not less than a parallel'). Their parallel is found in the human *spirit*, where maleness corresponds to thought and idea, and femaleness, to life, receptivity, creation, beauty.

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385 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p95

386 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p115

387 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p186

The Holy Spirit is life, and love, and the reality of the Word, even as the Logos is, for Him [sic], the determining content, word-thought and feeling, Truth and being in Truth – as the Beauty of self-revealed Truth. All these interrelations have a *parallel* (not more and not less than a parallel) in that the bi-unity of the human spirit in which the male, solar principle of thought, logos, is united with the female principle of reception, creative accomplishment, beauty.<sup>388</sup>

The human spirit, Bulgakov claims, is a bi-unity, comprising both male and female elements. If this is a parallel correspondence between Divine Sophia and creaturely Sophia, the ‘bi-unity of the human spirit’ is a unity of two distinct elements ‘without confusion and without separation’. This unified spirit exists in each individual human person.

The human sophianic spirit is a male-female androgyne, although, in fact, every individual human being is only either male or female; that is, despite this androgynism of the spirit, every individual human being experiences being according to only one of these principles, in relation to which the other principle is only complementary. And this androgynism is the *fullness* of the image of God in human beings.<sup>389</sup>

However this poses an important question concerning the relation between Divine Sophia and its image in the creaturely Sophia, for in the Divine Sophia the male and female principles are hypostasised in the Logos and the Spirit. Their bi-unity in the eternal God-manhood is a bi-unity of two distinct hypostases. However, if in the creaturely Sophia the bi-unity exists in a single hypostasis, an individual human being, this would lead to a fundamental lack of correspondence between the Divine and creaturely Sophias.

Furthermore, if the bi-unitary nature of the human spirit, as expounded by Bulgakov, is correct, the nature of the created ‘image of God’ as male and female hypostases, upon which he develops his understanding of the gendered nature of the Logos and Spirit, is called into question. In what sense are the created male and female hypostases, as individual human hypostases each with its own bi-unitary spirit, the image of God? If we are to understand that the Logos and Spirit are gendered by reading from the creation of the economic ‘male and female’ into the immanent Sophia, how are we then to read back from the Divine Sophia this bi-unitariness of the individual human spirit? Conversely, if the male and female elements are combined in a single human hypostasis, how are we to read a gendered hypostatic nature into the Divine Sophia?

Bulgakov does not appear to answer these questions. Instead, he goes on to use the hypostatic differentiation of male and female in the Divine Sophia as the ground for

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388 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p186

389 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p186

needing both a male and a female hypostasis to redeem and fulfil the created Sophia, created humanity.<sup>390</sup>

### **3.4.6      *Hypostasis and Finitude***

So far Bulgakov has defined two aspects to creaturely hypostasis: I-ness, and gender. The third, which distinguishes it from divine hypostasis, is its finitude. This limiting means that the features or themes of an individual, which, in all their multiplicity are all contained within the Divine Sophia, are not repeated in any other individual, making each one unique.

Every person has his own theme of being which does not repeat other themes, although it is consonant with them. This theme is God's thought about creation, about its place in the sophianic pleroma. All of these themes, whose possibility is implanted in the 'integrity' of the Divine Sophia, become 'substrates,' or hypostases, in personal being. And there cannot be a hypostasis without a specific theme, or an empty I, so to speak, an I that does not have its own individually coloured nature.<sup>391</sup>

For Bulgakov, then, the uniqueness of each individual being resides in the unrepeatability of his or her attributes, of their particular combination of 'gifts' or personal characteristics. This uniqueness is a function of creaturely finitude, in that, were each individual infinite, then these 'themes' would be common to all and there would be no uniqueness. This raises the question about the differentiation between the Son and the Holy Spirit, since their 'content' is infinite and therefore identical: what distinguishes the Logos from the Holy Spirit? For Bulgakov their difference lies in their mode of generation:

These two hypostases differ, as hypostatic centres, in their *how*, but not in their *what*; and in this sophianicity of theirs, in the pleroma, both hypostases contain all of their creaturely images.<sup>392</sup>

As hypostatic centres, as persons, the Logos and the Holy Spirit differ only in their 'how', their generation, that is, in their relationship with the Father. This is important for Bulgakov goes on to map male and female hypostases onto the Logos and the Holy Spirit, respectively, the latter being the images from which the former derive.

Returning to creaturely hypostases, it is the combination of this differentiated finite theme of attributes along with the equal 'I-ness' of each creature that constitutes the uniqueness of each creaturely hypostasis. Thus, creaturely personal uniqueness, for Bulgakov, is ultimately defined, to put it rather crudely, by a person's abilities or

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390 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p187

391 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p96

392 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p97

characteristics, rather than any particular *relationship* with God. This is odd given Bulgakov's insistence on the recognition of the God-manhood of God, the intrinsic *personal* orientation of God towards humanity, and his criticism of Thomist and other 'proofs' of God as mechanical. It does, however, reflect the classical definitions of God in terms of his attributes, and hence the characteristics of humanity in terms of its attributes; perhaps in this Bulgakov is closer to traditional western definitions of God than he would be willing to admit.

However, these themes that define the uniqueness or calling of each person, and into which each person freely enters with a greater or lesser degree of conformity, or even resistance, are all contained within the hypostasis of either the Son or the Spirit, depending on whether the person is male or female. In the same way that the Son and the Spirit hypostasise the pleroma of the Divine Sophia, so male and female hypostasise creaturely Sophia, all male and female hypostases being contained, as it were, in the hypostases of the Son and the Spirit.

The image of God in human hypostases is determined by the divine hypostases of the Logos and the Holy Spirit, which hypostasise the pleroma, the Divine Sophia, from which the creaturely Sophia also acquires her image...in this sophianicity of theirs, in the pleroma, both hypostases contain all of their creaturely images. They are *all-hypostases*, or more precisely, the one proto-image of any hypostaticity, which in itself is thereby transparent for the Logos and the Holy Spirit. This proto-image is precisely the one true hypostasis. All humankind in the male image is the one hypostasis of Christ, is Christ; it finds its hypostases in Christ's hypostasis, reflects and is reflected in His hypostasis. All humankind in the female image is the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit, which is revealed, becomes transparent, in the image of the Mother of God and, in *this* sense, is manifested in Her hypostasis.<sup>393</sup>

Bulgakov makes a critical move in his understanding of hypostatic being that is reflected in this passage (among others), and contained in the words 'or more precisely'. The move is from 'they' (the Logos and the Holy Spirit), who together are the 'all hypostases', to 'the one proto-image'. This one 'proto-image', which he describes as the proto-image of 'any hypostaticity', now becomes 'precisely the one true hypostasis', which, itself, becomes the basis for introducing a similar concept in the creaturely Sophia. He has moved from the many to the one, simply describing it as an act of precision, which he confirms in the next sentence of the paragraph:

These two images of human all-hypostaticity are united in one creaturely God-manhood, just as in the heavens, in the Holy Trinity, they are united in one Heavenly God-manhood.<sup>394</sup>

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393 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p97

394 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p97

### 3.4.7 *The Two and the One*

What is the relation between the Logos and the Holy Spirit on the one hand, and the ‘one true hypostasis’, this ‘Heavenly God-manhood’, on the other? It is important to note, in this connection, that this ‘hypostasis’ is not to be equated with Divine Sophia, which is *not* the proto-image. In this he differs from his forbear, Solovyov.

The proto-image is that which hypostasises the Divine Sophia – it is the unity of the Logos and the Holy Spirit. But Bulgakov does not elaborate on the nature of this ‘super-hypostasis’. Is it a ‘person’ in the sense of the persons of the Trinity? Is it a ‘who’? Does it have a name and a centre of consciousness? If not, in what sense is it ‘the one true hypostasis’?

Bulgakov’s treatment of these relationships displays similarities with those of the German Idealists, although with very important differences. One such similarity is seen in the positing, for example by Schelling, of the coming together of the opposition of Subject and Object to form the Absolute, or Reason: ‘I give the name of Reason to the absolute Reason or to Reason in so far as it is conceived as the total indifference of the subjective and objective.’<sup>395</sup>

Although Schelling is referring to the categories of ideal and real, the notion of thesis and antithesis coming together to form a higher synthesis is certainly part of what Bulgakov is doing with male hypostasis, female hypostasis, and supra-hypostasis. The overcoming of the differences between male and female, Logos and Spirit, is achieved in the combination of the two, not just in the oneness of their revelation of the Father, but metaphysically, in the ‘dual-unity’ of a single hypostasis of the Divine Sophia (which, as we will see later, is reflected in a single all-human hypostasis in the creaturely Sophia). It is important to note that this combination, as with the German Idealists, does not obliterate the different entities by making them into some new ‘mixture’ or being. They still continue to exist, but united in their difference to form a higher reality – for Schelling, the Absolute or Reason. However it is not the hypostasis of the Trinitarian God, as we might expect.

Bulgakov calls this hypostatic unity the ‘Heavenly God-manhood’. But this does not answer the question. In *The Lamb of God*, he says the following:

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395 Schelling FWJ, quoted in Copleston F, *Philosophy*, p123.



The Divine Sophia, as the pan-organism of ideas, is *the pre-eternal Humanity in God*, as the divine proto-image and foundation for man's being.<sup>396</sup>

Here he refers to Divine Sophia as the 'proto-image', but it is clear that he is not referring to the same 'proto-image' as in *The Bride*. Rather it is the Logos, personally, that is both the Proto-Image and the hypostasis of the Divine Sophia. This *appears* to be a different thesis to that expressed in *The Bride*. However, he goes on to discuss the relation of the Holy Spirit in the God-manhood in a passage that is fundamental to understanding the relation between the Logos and the Spirit.<sup>397</sup>

The relation between the Logos and Spirit is that of content and actualisation, of word and breath, which together reveal the Father. The Holy Spirit is the 'transparent' hypostasis offering the Son to the Father and the Father to the Son in a movement of love. Thus, each of the hypostases in the Holy Trinity only knows the other through its relation with the third: the Father 'sees' the Son through the Spirit, the Son 'sees' the Father through the Spirit, and the Spirit is known to the Father and the Son through his mediatorial role of love. The relations in the Holy Trinity are therefore dynamic without any egocentrism, and the Divine Sophia is, through the actualisation of the Spirit, always a personal movement and never a static centre. But more than that, it is a personal movement with *content*, with self-emptying kenosis, that is, love, which of necessity must always involve the Other in its own self-understanding, and thus identity. In referring to the role of the Palamite distinction between divine essence and divine energy, Williams describes it thus:

It [this distinction] enables us to conceive Sophia neither as the divine nature in itself nor as a mythological individual, but as an aspect of the divine nature *in action*, in relation.<sup>398</sup>

He goes on:

Spirit is the union of an act of self-awareness, conscious independent existence, with the 'nature' of which it is conscious; neither term in this union is real, concrete, without the other, so that there *is* no actually existing ego without the concrete 'what' that it thinks. But equally, there is no individual and isolated unit of ego-plus-nature, because the 'I' exists only with another 'I'.<sup>399</sup>

The principle of interdependence of hypostatic identity is central to Bulgakov, as is the inseparability of personal being from its essential content or 'nature'. Although the Logos is the hypostatic centre of the Divine Sophia, is its true hypostasis, it is a

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396 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p113

397 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p114

398 Williams, *Bulgakov*, p165

399 Williams, pp165-166

hypostasis actualised or realised through the Holy Spirit. The Logos is described as, and is, the God-Man, the concrete hypostatic centre; the Holy Spirit, however, is the actualising or breathing of this content and is identified as God-manhood. Thus, it is the inseparable dyad of Logos and Spirit that together establish the hypostasis of the Divine Sophia, although the existence of such a supra-hypostasis is not mentioned in *The Lamb*.

The discussion is taken no further in *The Comforter*, where the view set out in *The Lamb* is clarified and expanded in relation to the role of the Holy Spirit and the Word as the dyadic-unity of Divine Sophia. This, despite a 12-page section on the dyad of the Word and the Spirit in the Divine Sophia exploring the hypostatic relationships.<sup>400</sup>

The passage under consideration in *The Bride*, then, brings something new into the discussion – that of a supra-hypostasis, ‘the one true hypostasis.’ This is different to the hypostases of the Logos and the Holy Spirit, and does not occur in *The Lamb* or *The Comforter*. One might have expected its identity to derive from Genesis 2:24, ‘and the two become one flesh.’ However, Bulgakov never refers to Genesis in this regard. Rather, his logic extends from a theological interpretation of the Incarnation, which acts as a path or reflection in the economy to the reality in the immanent.

The definition of divine nature as pre-eternal Humanity or God-manhood (which in this case is the same thing) is conceived as a reflection from the creaturely world, from creaturely humanity. In this sense this definition is only an *analogy*, but one that is understood *realistically*: that is, not only are all the distinctions of state preserved, but the identity of being is also preserved. We know man only as a creature, and therefore it may seem arduous to ascend from the creature to the understanding of God. However, we can also take the reverse path of ‘that which is above is also below’; that is, taking Divinity as the point of departure, we can understand man as the cryptogram of Divinity.<sup>401</sup>

In this case, it is the relationship between Mary and Jesus in the Incarnation that forms the ‘cryptogram’ for the relationship between the Logos and the Spirit in the Divine Sophia.

However, Bulgakov elaborates on the operation of the ‘Proto-image’ or supra-hypostasis in the economy where, he says, ‘this positive all-unity of the hypostasis is

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400 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p177-189

401 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p116

realised in the Church.<sup>402</sup> He does this by exploring Paul's claim in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is neither male nor female. He uses the passage as a foil for demonstrating the action of the genderless, or perhaps supra-gendered, 'supra-hypostasis.' The question he poses is interesting in that it suggests the difficulty he is facing with his thesis of the fundamental ontological distinction between male reflecting the Logos and female reflecting the Holy Spirit:

How can one reconcile this dual-unity of the human hypostasis in Christ and the Mother of God, or the Logos and the Holy Spirit, with Scripture's testimony that in Jesus Christ 'there is neither male nor female' (Gal 3:28)?<sup>403</sup>

This affirmation, that 'in Christ' there is no male or female, comes about, he claims, due to the operation of love, whereby hypostases are 'overlaid' on each other: 'The law of the identification of different things, which is love, operates here,'<sup>404</sup> he says. Therefore the 'all-hypostasis' is identified with Christ.

All of humankind has *one* all-human hypostasis, one all-hypostatic name: Christ, who in the Incarnation was indivisibly united with the Mother of God.<sup>405</sup>

However, this is only in the sense that Christ, as the Logos incarnate, is the *content* in which all human *nature* is encompassed, in contrast to human being or hypostasis, despite the fact that elsewhere he has insisted that human nature does not exist except hypostatically. Referring to Gal 3:28 he says

One must first indicate that, in this case, it is a question, strictly speaking, not of a hypostasis, male or female, but of humanity, of human nature, as such, which in holy baptism is clothed in Christ, becomes Christ's humanity by the power of His humanisation or incarnation.<sup>406</sup>

Here, Bulgakov associates baptism with the Incarnation: the Logos is clothed with Mary's humanity in the Incarnation, so to be clothed with Christ in baptism means to be clothed with Christ's incarnated flesh, thus making baptism a work of Jesus and Mary, Word and Spirit. It is only because of the incarnation that baptism, being clothed with Christ, salvation, is available to human nature.

Biblically, theologically, and liturgically, however, baptism has always been associated with Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection.<sup>407</sup> There is no mention of the cross anywhere in this discussion of baptism and being clothed with Christ.

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402 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p99

403 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p98

404 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p98

405 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p99

406 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p98

407 eg. Mk 10:38; Rom 6:3ff; 1Pe 3:18ff etc.

Theologically, baptism is actually the reciprocal of the incarnation: in the incarnation Christ became clothed in fallen human flesh; in baptism a person becomes clothed with the Christ of new creation, post-resurrection and post-ascension: ‘God became man so that man might become god,’ both being a work of the Spirit. The fallen flesh assumed by Christ at his incarnation had to be transformed through obedience and by undergoing death, resurrection and ascension before humanity could be saved by being clothed in it. Of course, Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension cannot, in one sense, be separated from his incarnation, and indeed presuppose it. But neither can they be conflated with it as Bulgakov is here attempting to do. The cross in the Gospels and in the theology of Paul stands as a cosmic fulcrum, bringing to completion the telos of sinful flesh. As such it is not the same as incarnation. It is from the other side of the grave that Christ offers his resurrected body back to the Church through the Spirit. There are stronger grounds for linking the Eucharist with the Incarnation than baptism, since in that sacrament one does become a bearer of Christ in the flesh, but the Eucharist also is a sacrament of the Cross, since in that, too, the broken body of Christ is transformed by the Spirit into the post-resurrection flesh of the risen Christ.

Baptism, of course, is a work of the Holy Spirit, the latter being the incarnating hypostasis, so Bulgakov rightly says that to be clothed in Christ is a work of the Trinity. And it is the case that the Holy Spirit brought about the incarnation of the Logos through Mary, and that the same Spirit clothes us in Christ. But it seems over zealous to link baptism to Mary.

Bulgakov links this being clothed in Christ not only with the Church being the body of Christ, and thus the incarnation of God, but also the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Since the Logos is the male image and the Spirit is the female image, being clothed in Christ means belonging to, and ontologically being, a part of the Church. The ‘life-in-Christ’ is thus a work of both the Word and the Spirit. He concludes the paragraph:

And in the light of this life-in-Christ of *all* of humankind, the difference between male and female does not hold.

However, this conclusion does not obviously flow from the preceding section. The logic appears to be that, because being ‘clothed in Christ’ in baptism is an act of the Trinity, or more specifically of the incarnated Logos and incarnating Spirit, it is an act of both the male and female hypostases. In the sense that this being ‘clothed in Christ’, accomplished by both the Word and the Spirit, creates the Church, which is both the Body of Christ (male) and the Temple of the Holy Spirit (female), it includes both male

and female within it. More than that, although he is not explicit at this point, it also means that both male and female principles are involved in the ‘clothing’ of every hypostasis in baptism, and therefore the hypostatic differences between them ‘do not hold.’ Later, Bulgakov goes on to explore the spiritual anthropology of a person and there describes each hypostasis as being comprised of both male and female principles, but with different degrees of emphasis.

Nevertheless, given his fundamental ontological distinction between the genders, the conclusion is far from convincing, since clearly there are both male and female hypostases in the Church and they never stop being hypostases, even in baptism. If the differences between them ‘do not hold’ in baptism, the question arises as to why they should be of paramount significance elsewhere. It is also unclear why, if the gender difference is so theologically important, Paul lists it third in the same verse after Covenantal/ethnic (Jew and Greek) and social (slave and free) differences.

It is also difficult to reconcile this mapping of the creaturely images of maleness onto Christ and femaleness onto the Spirit with Bulgakov’s insistence on the bi-unitary, androgyne nature of the human spirit expounded in *The Lamb*. However, with this strongly gendered interpretation it seems inevitable that he is going to run into difficulties when it comes to a traditional understanding of the efficacy and the all-sufficiency of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. How can a male Jesus save women? Come to that, how can he save anyone? The latter question he goes on to explore in the pages subsequent to this passage.

### **3.5 Soteriology – Incarnation and Σάρξ**

The soteriology of the Church is based on the following premises of an axiomatic character: (1) the unity of the human race in Adam and his fall from his original state; (2) the commonality of sin-tainted nature inherited by all, together with the personal guilt of every person through his personal participation in this sin; and (3) the redemption accomplished by Christ, with restoration not only of Adam but also of every individual through the healing of original sin by the sacrament of baptism.<sup>408</sup>

Mary plays a key role in the fabric of Bulgakov’s soteriology. There are several reasons for this. First, she is required as the female hypostasis to compliment the male hypostasis in Christ. Second, she provides creaturely Sophia’s autonomous response to the love of God. Third, her assumption and presence in heaven is the guarantee for humanity’s survival of the process of deification.

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408 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p403

However, there is a fourth reason, which has to do with the nature of the humanity adopted by Christ, his flesh, *σάρξ*. For Christ ‘was the New Adam, in whom was restored the integral virginity of the first man in his sophianicity.’<sup>409</sup>

Despite his repetition of St Gregory the Theologian’s maxim ‘that which is not assumed is not redeemed’, Bulgakov states that the flesh adopted by Christ, although weakened by the fall, was, itself, received in a pre-fallen manner and thus devoid of the sinful passions. The following extract is taken from his paper ‘*The Eucharist Dogma*,’ published in 1930, three years before *The Lamb*.

The Lord, in receiving human flesh, unites His Divine corporeality, Sophia, Glory, with human creaturely corporeality. He adopts this human corporeality genuinely and wholly with the exception of sin, that is, the damage caused to the *state* of this corporeality by Adam’s fall. Born of the Virgin, without male seed, the Lord adopts Adam’s body such as it is outside the Fall. The Lord lives in the midst of the sin-damaged world, but this damage has only an outer impact on His life, not an inner one. So, He shares with all humankind the need for food, which is no longer provided to human beings directly from the tree of life and the trees of paradise, but is earned in the sweat of the face. The Lord needs clothing and shelter (although He constantly goes without it). He becomes fatigued and suffers. But His body remains pure and immaculate; sinful tendencies are foreign to it; it is not subject to sickness and it is free of the inevitability of natural death, for the Lord accepted death on the cross...Thus, The Lord received corporeality of the not-yet-fallen Adam in his birth from the Virgin, and He lived by the life of this body.<sup>410</sup>

The reference to the ‘integral virginity of the first man’ is to the primal state of man before the fall. In *The Comforter* he describes this as the state in which sexual reproduction and fleshly union was united with the spiritual principle of syzygy. The union of the *spiritual* eros of male and female was the true friendship that, before the fall, accompanied the fleshly bi-unity expressed in the biblical injunction that ‘the two should become one flesh’ (Gen 2:24). This union reflects the spiritual-corporeal nature of humanity as incarnate spirit, in which the fleshly union, with its relation with the animal world, is ‘*transcended* by the presence of the spiritual principle in man and by its harmonising spiritualising power.’<sup>411</sup>

This harmonisation of sex and spirit was ‘the most difficult of tasks’ for pre-fallen man, since the relationship between them was ‘unstable’. It was precisely this relation that disintegrated with the fall, described in the words of Gen 3:7 ‘Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realised that they were naked.’ Bulgakov expresses it thus:

This change can be expressed as follows: in man, *sex was awakened* as a rebellious, autonomous element, an element of desire and passion which not only was not subject to the

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409 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p298

410 Bulgakov, *Holy Grail*, pp131-132

411 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p324

spirit but which subjected the spirit to itself: ‘and thy desire shall be for thy husband’ (Gen 3:16); and such also became the desire of the husband for the wife. Sexual life in man lost its initial harmony and took on a tragic character.<sup>412</sup>

It is the presence of spirit in man, as a spiritual-corporeal being, that causes the resulting loss of ‘innocence’ to characterise the sexual life of humanity, whereas the absence of spirit in the animal world means that for animals it remains ‘innocent’. Nevertheless, the differentiation between male and female is not just a fleshly difference – it is an essential qualification of the *spirit* of man, which is why, in its essential nature, eros is a spiritual love.<sup>413</sup>

Eros is designed to be the passionate human response to the Holy Spirit, since it is a reflection of ‘the presumed presence of the male and female principles in Revelation itself,’ and is thus the means of receiving gifts from God through the Spirit:

The intensity of eros as the spiritual energy of inspiring love is the fiery element which seeks to be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and which receives Him (*sic*), inasmuch as the following principle is valid with regard to the gifts of the Holy Spirit: ‘Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find’ (Mat 7:7)<sup>414</sup>

The language concerning sexual life in man as described in *The Comforter* (1936), originally created to be united with eros and thus transcended in the spirit before the fall, and awakened to rebellious autonomy and disruption by the fall, is very different from that written in *The Lamb* three years previously (1933), where he says:

Begetting through fleshly union was only a consequence of original sin; it replaced *spiritual* begetting, which is unfathomable for us and which remained unrealised by man before the Fall.<sup>415</sup>

Eating is an ontological relation with the world; it is communion with the flesh of the world, a communion established by God in paradise and not abolished in the Heavenly Jerusalem (see Rev 22:2), whereas sex and sexual conception, sexuality in general, entered the world with the Fall, as a principle of mortal and damaged life.<sup>416</sup>

In *The Comforter* Bulgakov describes the act of sexual union as a fundamental part of the fleshly, incarnated nature of original, i.e. pre-fallen, humanity:

In the first man, the animal function of reproduction was united with the spiritual principle of syzygy as the spiritual eros of the male and female principles. This was *friendship* in the proper sense of the word.<sup>417</sup>

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412 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p324

413 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p325

414 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p326

415 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p181

416 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p299

417 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p324

And 'they shall be one flesh' (2:24). Thus from the beginning, spiritual love for the 'help meet' is joined with fleshly union in fulfilment of the commandment to multiply.<sup>418</sup>

He goes on to say that 'a connection is preserved with the animal world', an idea directly at odds with his illustration of 'eating' demonstrating a valid relationship with the world in opposition to his vehemently negative approach to 'sexual conception, sexuality in general' which 'entered the world with the Fall' in *The Lamb*. Here, human reproduction prior to the fall was intended to result from an unknown form of spiritual union in which bodily or fleshly union was absent.

In *The Comforter* the emphasis is distinctly on the disruption between the flesh and the spirit. Sex as a passion, opposed to the spirit, is what is awakened in the fall, not the act of fleshly union resulting in reproduction. This, he now says, was originally an expression of the union of spiritual eros of male and female.

The identification of this development in Bulgakov's thinking is important since it strikes at the heart of the nature of the flesh adopted by the Logos in the Incarnation. In *The Lamb* he describes how the flesh of the Logos taken from Mary is different to our humanity. He insists that

having assumed only the sinless 'likeness of man,' man's flesh, but not its sin, the God-Man thus could not receive into His nature that which is the centre of the whole power of sin and which, at the same time, is unnatural for man, for it exists only within the limits of the life of sin and selfhood.<sup>419</sup>

Included in this exclusion from what is assumed by the Logos is everything related to sex and sexuality (although not the spiritual distinction between the male and female essences), since Bulgakov maintains that this entered the world 'with the Fall, as a principle of mortal and damaged life.'

Therefore, all that is connected with the proper life of sex as such does not belong to the nature of Adam received by the New Adam in its original state. To be sure this nature was received by Him in the diminished state proper to fallen man. However, this reception extended only to 'sinless passions,' and the sexual life is not one of them. In this respect, Christ was *different* from the entire human race, for in Him the natural chastity and virginity of the race were restored. (*his italics*)<sup>420</sup>

Bulgakov insists that the flesh inherited by the Word from Mary was free from original sin. It was still authentic 'common human flesh', despite Jesus not having an earthly father, precisely because, he says, sexual reproduction, which requires a father, is a consequence of the fall, and is therefore not ontological to man. Nevertheless, both

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418 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p324

419 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p299

420 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p299



original and personal sin were absent from it. In this regard Bulgakov refers to the ‘likeness’ (ὁμοιότητα) of sinful flesh in Romans 8:3 to indicate its *difference* from our flesh.

This ‘difference’ Bulgakov introduces between Christ and the rest of humanity stands in contrast to St Gregory’s maxim. Elsewhere he attempts to explain it:

Christ’s humanity is the inner human condition of every human being, about which it can be said that *nihil humanum est a Christo alienum* (nothing human is foreign to Christ) (of course, not in the sense of the empirically given, sinful state of humanity, but in the sense of its nature).<sup>421</sup>

The reason Bulgakov is insistent on Christ’s assumption of ‘sinless’ flesh, and the absence of ‘sinful flesh,’ has to do with the relationship between the latter and original sin: ‘sinful flesh,’ for Bulgakov, means participating in original sin. For Christ to have actually had sinful flesh, therefore, would mean that he *participated* in original sin, that he *knew* sin. The point he is making is that Christ actually assumed fallen, or weakened, flesh, and in this sense it was ‘like’ sinful flesh, but crucially it was not actually ‘sinful’ flesh because then Christ would have been contaminated by sin.

The obvious soteriological dilemma that arises from this, then, is the question: how is humanity rescued from its depravity if the Saviour does not share in that depravity which results from original sin and its consequent passions, even if his assumed state is a ‘diminished’ one ‘proper to fallen man’?

Bulgakov’s answer lies in Mary, since her flesh was *not* free from the burden of original sin. Instead, in preparation for the Incarnation, it was purified by a combination of the descent of the Spirit upon her, and her own personal sinlessness through ‘the power of her personal freedom,’<sup>422</sup> in order that the flesh taken by the Logos was, while fallen, free from sin. She therefore constitutes other half of Christ’s Incarnation, making up what was lacking of our nature in Jesus’ own flesh. She thus becomes a fundamental part of the soteriological matrix since she *does* share our sinful flesh, and, through *her* ascension, guarantees our salvation. A significant amount of space is therefore devoted to Mary in all three volumes of his systematic theology, in addition to a whole volume of his mini-trilogy.

The Logos could *take* His flesh from the Virgin Mary only because She *gave* it, desiring to become the creaturely Sophia, the sophianic Mother of Christ’s humanity, which must possess the fullness of sophianicity. That which was lacking for this even in the Virgin

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421 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p266

422 Bulgakov, *Burning Bush*, pp42-45

Mary's humanity (because She too was burdened by the weight of original sin) was provided by the Holy Spirit, who descended upon Her at the Annunciation.<sup>423</sup>

He explicitly states this in a footnote critical of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, in a section dealing with the unity of humanity in relation to participation in original sin, and thus redemption:

The separation of the Mother of God from the human race by the mechanical 'privilege' of being free of original sin contradicts this love [that unites us with Christ, Jn 13:34] and, in a certain sense, does not exalt but diminishes her holiness.<sup>424</sup>

And in speaking of the nature of Christ's flesh in relation to Adam's pre-fallen humanity he states:

If the Lord's body were identical in all its properties with the body of the first Adam, it would really have differed from our body: and the salvation of man by Christ's assumption of our essence would have remained unrealised (a similar dogmatic misunderstanding characterises the Roman Catholic doctrine of the 'immaculate conception' of the Mother of God, which in effect breaks the connection between Christ and our humanity).<sup>425</sup>

Bulgakov has introduced a subtle, but crucial, distinction between original sin and fallenness, the latter being the *consequence* of the former, and not identical with it. Christ's human nature, while free from original sin, was still a fallen nature: i.e. Christ bears the consequence without the cause. It was, therefore, *sinless* flesh.

Although the God-Man, the 'only one without sin,' received His flesh from the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit and was therefore free of original sin, nevertheless even this sinless flesh is not Adam's original essence, for it is weakened and burdened by the *consequences* of original sin.

In the God-Man, the fallen and infirm human essence, subjecting itself to the divine essence, becomes harmonious with and obedient to it.<sup>426</sup>

However, although Christ adopted this 'fallen and infirm human essence,' he did not do so through the fallen course of hereditary transmission, from parents to children through sexual reproduction. Instead, he received it in a manner that bears some resemblance to the way in which reproduction was intended *before* the fall:

In order to redeem the entire human essence and to transform the entire human race, the Lord had to assume human flesh. This flesh was Adam's, but He took it not from the fallen Adam but in another manner: 'in the likeness [*homoiomati*] of men' (Phil 2:7). Christ did not assume the human essence in the manner that every man has it; His assumption of the human essence was not limited, truncated, or egocentric – in a word, it was not *individual* or atomistic. He assumed it in the manner in which it was possessed by the original Adam, who came out of the hands of the Lord.<sup>427</sup>

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423 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p200

424 Bulgakov, *Bride*, fn15, p186

425 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p289

426 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p243

427 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p205

The argument for Bulgakov revolves around the issue of the universality of the effectiveness of redemption. For this reason it is important that Christ's flesh is not limited by individualism, which Bulgakov sees as being the primary consequence of the fall. Prior to the fall the first Adam was a particular person, 'a concrete I', but he was a perichoretic man – 'the entire human race with all its possible persons effectively lived in him.' Persons were intended to be 'transparent for one another: all in all and everyone in all. That is the ontology of personality.' After the fall 'humanity knows the personality only as individuality.' 'With the Fall the image of all-humanity was obscured in Adam; he became an individual who could beget only individuals.'<sup>428</sup>

There is a dilemma here, for if Christ was to adopt 'fallen flesh' in the ordinary manner two consequences follow: first, he would have to take on the personal burden of original sin – sinful flesh – but sin cannot co-exist with divinity, nor does it belong to the proper state of humanity, so this is impossible. Second, redemption could not be universally effective if the flesh adopted belonged to atomistic fallen humanity. Instead, the Logos had to assume fallen flesh firstly *without* the burden of personal original sin, and secondly in a way that pre-empted the atomisation of humanity in order for his salvific work to be universal.

Bulgakov's answer to this lies again in Mary. In answer to both the problem of original sin and the consequent atomisation of humanity, Mary's agreement to be the 'handmaid of the Lord' means that she conceives spiritually, without a father:

Original sin is transmitted precisely through human conception, and with it are transmitted bad multiplicity, egocentrism, and limitation.<sup>429</sup>

Christ therefore receives not only his 'fallen flesh' from Mary, but does so in the manner in which reproduction is supposed to have taken place before the fall, thus *not* receiving original sin, or its consequent atomisation.

More than this, however, Christ also needed to receive, not just a pre-atomistic humanity, but a full and universal one. This, also, he received from Mary:

The proper nature of the Most Holy Theotokos with Her personal and generic holiness was restored in its sophianicity and purified and integrated to such a degree that the descent upon Her of the Holy Spirit could occur, communicating perfect sophianicity to her. When the Most Holy Virgin Mary gave birth to the Lord, She bore within Herself the image of Sophia; She was the personification of the creaturely Sophia. The fruit of Her birth-giving was thus

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428 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p204

429 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p205

the sophianic man, the New Adam, who was distinguished from all men by the *form* of his humanity.<sup>430</sup>

Bulgakov maintains that this humanity is identical with ours except for its universality, although as with many of his statements, it can be drastically modified or qualified elsewhere in his work:

This was the true humanity, identical with the humanity of each of us (which is why we are Christ's 'brethren' [Heb 2:12]), but it differs from our humanity by the fact that it excludes no one and includes everyone, by the fact that it is not limited by anything but bears the image of chaste and wise Integrity. And it was the Virgin Mary who gave this to Her Son.<sup>431</sup>

The obvious question arises as to how, then, *sinful* flesh, that is, not just 'weakened' flesh, but flesh burdened with original sin (if such a distinction exists), is redeemed if not assumed by the God-Man. In discussing the *work* of Christ Bulgakov states that

by a free act of His will Christ received into His sinless humanity the sinful humanity, centred in Adam.<sup>432</sup>

This is not an apparent adoption of human sin, but actually the sin of *all* humanity, past present and future, which he can receive presumably because he has assumed the pre-fallen, pre-atomised humanity of the first Adam, although Bulgakov does not explicitly state this. He goes on

'The Word was made flesh' (John 1:14), but this flesh is already sinful flesh, which, although it is free of *personal* sin in Him in virtue of His sinlessness, nevertheless remains in its sin. Through His humanity this sinful flesh becomes also His flesh. And in taking upon Himself the sin of the world, the Righteous One is equated, in the eyes of God, with sinners.<sup>433</sup>

How the 'taking up' of sins of the world by the Redeemer is accomplished remains a mystery,<sup>434</sup> although the human nature he adopts belongs to each of us personally. Nevertheless, the assertion that 'through His humanity this sinful flesh becomes also His flesh' does not seem to correspond with his earlier insistence that Christ's humanity was 'free of original sin, nevertheless even this sinless flesh is not Adam's original essence.'<sup>435</sup>

There is much confusion in terminology here, for Bulgakov can say at one time that Christ adopts 'sinless flesh,' and at another, as here, that he takes 'sinful flesh,' and at other times that Christ did *not* take 'sinful flesh,' only the 'likeness' of sinful flesh!

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430 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p205

431 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, pp205-206

432 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p350

433 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p351

434 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p354

435 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p243

When he speaks of ‘sinful flesh’ in relation to assumption by Christ he does *not* mean the opposite of ‘sinless flesh.’ Rather, ‘sinful flesh’ means ‘fallen flesh’ and does not connote the presence of original sin, merely flesh that is weakened by original sin – that carries the consequence without the cause, as it were, unlike the rest of us who carry both the cause (we participate in original sin) and its consequence. On the other hand, ‘sinless flesh’ in this context also means ‘fallen flesh,’ but is another way of saying that original sin is not present in it.

Notwithstanding this confusion, Bulgakov is insistent that Christ’s flesh is *not* the same as ours for he does *not* experience the same temptations as those common to fallen humanity, such as sexual temptations. The nature of the humanity adopted by Bulgakov’s Christ is so high above ours that there seems little in common between him and us:

If we examine the character of the temptation, we will note that it did not include those impulses and desires of the flesh that, after the Fall, enslaved the human essence with animality and crippled it with passions. Such a temptation never came close to the God-Man. He remained above it, being liberated from the hereditary original sin; He was the New Adam, in whom was restored the integral virginity of the first man in his sophianicity.<sup>436</sup>

For Bulgakov, Christ remained above the worst depravities that threaten weakened man, never experienced the horrific temptations that wrack the consciences of *fallen* humanity. Specifically, Christ does not experience the sexual temptations common to the rest of humanity, and hinted at in Genesis 3:7, ‘then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and make coverings for themselves.’

Bulgakov insists that ‘Christ was really tempted.’<sup>437</sup> To say otherwise would be docetic. Christ’s temptation constituted an authentic trial that had to be experienced and overcome. Citing St Gregory’s maxim he says

it [the temptation] was absolutely real, for it was the voice of the human nature assumed by Christ. This was the first real victory of *deification* over the human nature.<sup>438</sup>

His assertion is that Christ’s humanity, being universal, was capable, through its association with his divinity, of experiencing *all* human sin through *intensification*. And it is this intensified form of sin that constitutes the manner in which he experienced it.

What happened was that the power of this humanity was immeasurably augmented through its deification, which was accomplished even before the definitive *glorification* of Christ.

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436 Heb 2:16-18

437 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p297

438 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p298

Only the deified humanity of the God-Man had the power to encompass and withstand the real experiencing of all human sin; and the divine essence and the divine will in Him consented fully to this.<sup>439</sup>

Despite this insistence, a doubt remains concerning the extent to which Bulgakov's 'all' really means 'all' in relation to the experiencing of sin. The *nature* received by Christ was 'in the diminished state proper to fallen man.' But he goes on to qualify this by saying 'this reception extended only to "sinless passions," and the sexual life is not one of them. In this respect, Christ was *different* from the entire human race.'<sup>440</sup> So Christ was not *capable* of experiencing one of the most common temptations to humanity. Bulgakov here admits a doubt as he poses the nagging question, himself:

If He was free of that which, along with hunger, is the most agonising thing for man, then is man wholly redeemed, and is the redemptive work fully accomplished?<sup>441</sup>

The question must have been agonising for him, for having asked, *he never answers it*. He simply presses on to talk about the 'sinless' flesh adopted by Christ.

We must pause to reflect on this interpretation of 'sinless/sinful' flesh. Concerning Romans 8:3 he says,

Jesus is the true Son of Man, even though He is begotten without a human father from His Mother; in relation to *sinful* flesh, however, His flesh, which is free of original sin, turns out to be only a 'likeness of flesh.'<sup>442</sup>

The diminutive 'only' here is being asked to carry a lot of weight. A few lines earlier he has said that 'the "likeness of...flesh" (Rom 8:3; see also Phil 2:7),...is not intended to diminish its authenticity, but rather to indicate that sin, both original and personal, is absent from it'. However, there is no further exegesis on this critical verse.

More importantly, his interpretation of 'only a likeness' is based on the Greek word *ὁμοιώματι* used in Romans 8:3, the exact same word Paul uses earlier in the letter to describe our being joined to Christ 'in the likeness (*ὁμοιώματι*) of his death, so that we might also be [joined with him] in the [likeness of his] resurrection' (Rom 6:5). Likewise in Philippians 2:7 where Paul uses the word again referring to Christ: 'being born in the likeness (*ὁμοιώματι*) of men.' There is no hint that this is 'only a likeness' implying a difference, and indeed, if there was, Paul's entire ontology of salvation unravels. On the contrary, the word is used to describe complete identification and speaks of Christ's participation in the very nature of the sinful human condition (albeit

439 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p358

440 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p299

441 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p299

442 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p181

free from sin, itself), and not of his only apparent likeness.<sup>443</sup> The situation is complicated because elsewhere he says that Christ *does* adopt ‘sinful flesh.’<sup>444</sup> Nevertheless, despite Bulgakov’s claims to the contrary, his interpretation here carries a hint of docetism.<sup>445</sup>

Furthermore, there is great difficulty reconciling this position with that of the writer of Hebrews (2:16-18), where Christ was ‘made like his brothers in every way (κατὰ πάντα)... Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.’ The point is precisely that Christ’s experience was *exactly* like ours. There is no hint in this passage, or any others in Scripture, that there were temptations or experiences common to humanity that were *not* experienced by Christ. Indeed, the argument here is that for atonement to be effected Christ’s *humanity* had to be the same as ours.

But it is not just these ‘passionate’ temptations that never tempt Christ. For, despite his earlier insistence that the temptations were real, Bulgakov says that even those Christ did experience were not really ‘temptations’ as he was never actually tempted by them.

Despite all the reality and power of the temptation, it was absolutely impossible for Satan to be victorious over Christ. Why? [Because Christ’s] human essence itself proved to be inaccessible to the temptation; it overcame its own natural instability.<sup>446</sup>

But temptation can only be called such if it is precisely that, tempting, which must at least imply the *possibility* of failure. Otherwise the temptation is docetic, illusory.

If we ask *how* it overcame this instability, the answer is that Christ assumed the fallen flesh that had acquired all the experience of temptation since Adam and was too pure and holy in his humanity to be tempted:

Aside from the general tested condition of the man, acquired through trials and temptations, Satan was also confronted here by supreme holiness and purity, as well as by an immeasurable genius and a fullness of the entire human essence that not only were not inferior to the genius and fullness of the first man whom he had deceived and seduced but were far superior to them, since they included the entire experience of the generations of the forefathers of the Saviour as the *Son of Man*.<sup>447</sup>

It is not at all clear what Bulgakov means by ‘human essence,’ whether it is human nature, or human spirit (nature plus hypostasis), or something else, or how it is capable of garnering this ‘experience’ through generations. But there is a fundamental difference

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443 So, eg, Best, *Body*, p51

444 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p351. See discussion on p139

445 See for example, Weinandy TG, *In The Likeness of Sinful Flesh*, 1993

446 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p300

447 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p300

between Christ's humanity and ours, and for this reason there is a need to include 'the sinful flesh' of Mary into the fabric of soteriology to make up for that which is absent from Christ's own humanity. Mary, notwithstanding her highly elevated degree of purity and holiness, nevertheless has the potential to identify with our experiences of weakness, which Christ does not. However, given Mary's supposed sinlessness, even this identity becomes tenuous since she has never, by definition, experienced weakness, although presumably she was susceptible to the real experience of temptation.

The other element in Christ's temptation that helps him to overcome them is the voluntary subjugation of the human will to the divine will, as part of the work of the deification of his humanity.

This conquest was not unearned, automatic, mechanical; it was the creative conquest – acquired at the cost of labour and suffering – of the creaturely essence of the flesh in its subordination to the spirit.<sup>448</sup>

Nevertheless, despite its proximity to and consequence upon Christ's baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit (Mk1:12), there is no mention here of the Spirit's role in Christ's temptations.

One is left wondering that if the Spirit was afforded a greater role in empowering Christ's humanity to overcome its weakness, as implied in the biblical narrative, a very different view of the nature of the humanity adopted by Christ might emerge. Dependence on the Spirit, rather than a special version of *σάρξ* inaccessible to the rest of the human race, would not jeopardise the purity of Christ's kenotic divinity. But it might answer Bulgakov's 'agonising doubt.'

The question of the universality of Christ's redemptive work need also not be so dependent on his assumption of a pre-atomised, partially fallen, sinless humanity. Mary's sinless/sinful humanity would become unnecessary if the benefits were universalised through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This seems to be the Pauline understanding, rather than some form of mechanical participation in an Ideal man/woman. But this exploration must await a later time.

### **3.6 *The Ontology of the Church***

The Church herself, the sacrament of sacraments, is not a particular institution, as each of the specific sacraments is. Rather, she is, on the one hand, a sacred fulfilment, the

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448 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p301



fulfilment of God's original design, of 'the dispensation of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God' (Eph. 3:9). On the other hand, she is the unique and supreme reality of Divine-humanity, revealed by Christ expressly at the Last Supper.

The paradox of the Church is its unity and its multiplicity – 'that they may be one even as we are one' (Jn 17:11). There is one Church, but there are billions of unique people, hypostases, in each of whom dwells the Spirit. How are these many one and how is this one many? What constitutes the oneness of the Church, and is this oneness an ontological unity or merely a collective unity? These are questions that have been asked since the earliest days of the Church's existence.

Considering the third volume of his great dogmatic trilogy is dedicated to the 'Bride of the Lamb' Bulgakov's treatise on the ontology of the Church is surprisingly short, barely reaching 15 pages. This compares with 22 pages on the church as 'hierarchical organisation,' and 20 pages on 'grace.' Indeed, the first instance of the word 'bride' does not occur until over half way through the volume.

In his section on the ontology, or essence, of the Church he identifies three primary descriptions of the Church in the NT: the Body of Christ; the Temple of the Holy Spirit; and the Bride of Christ. The first two of these form a dialectic synergy: the male Body of Christ, christological, and the female Temple of the Holy Spirit, pneumatological. Together they reflect the wholeness of the creaturely Sophia, and are therefore the foundation of creation (8 pages). On the other hand, in an extraordinarily brief section, he deals with the image of the Church as Bride, which speaks of the nature of the union of Christ with the Church, and thus divinity-humanity, God-manhood, Divine Sophia and creaturely Sophia, the fulfilment of the deification of creation (around 2½ pages).

### **3.6.1      *The Church as Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit***

Bulgakov introduces his discussion on the Church as the 'body of Christ' and 'temple of the Holy Spirit' with reference to 1 Corinthians 6:15,19: 'Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?...Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?'<sup>449</sup> The Church

449 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p255. However, this difficult passage (1 Cor 6:15-19) is also about marriage, and sexual union, not just chastity, as Bulgakov suggests (*Bride*, p261). Although he does not explore it further, it is one of the few passages in the NT outside Ephesians where the descriptions of the Church as body, bride, and temple are all logically, theologically and spiritually united (see p187,

is made up of members of one body (unity), and each member has different gifts of the one Spirit (1 Cor 12, multiplicity). The consideration of the Church as body is used both to describe the unity of the Church, i.e. all are members of the one body, and also to distinguish those members from each other, i.e. each member has its own place in the body, unique to itself. Differentiation and unity are complementary aspects of the one being of the Church as ‘body.’

This unity is not something imposed from outside, in the form of an organisation. It derives from an inner communion that gives rise to a living body – Bulgakov uses the Slavophile word ‘sobornost,’ the ‘idea of inner ecclesial community.’

In these ecclesiological texts it is first necessary to delineate the idea of sobornost, according to which the Church is an *organism* or a body, or generally a living multi-unity.<sup>450</sup>

The description of the Church as the ‘body of Christ,’ for Bulgakov, is closely linked with Christ being clothed with a body of flesh in the Incarnation. But he does not follow the usual line of argument in saying that the Church is therefore an extension of the Incarnation as Christ’s body on earth. Instead he says that Christ’s assumption of a body demonstrates that a ‘body’ is appropriate to God, not just soteriologically for our salvation, but ontologically, since it is nonsensical (not to say heretical) to suggest Christ could put on something created in his image that was alien to him. Just as human nature is not alien to divine nature (otherwise there could be no Incarnation), the created body is correlated to, and an image of, a spiritual body.

Such a correlation presupposes the existence of two corporealities: spiritual or divine corporeality, which is the Divine Sophia or the glory of God, and human corporeality. The existence of the body of Christ is thus a divine-human fact.<sup>451</sup>

The question therefore arises, what is a body? What is its relation to spirit and to nature? The principle of God-Manhood disclosed in the Incarnation forces the conclusion that not only is ‘body’ not alien to spirit, it must in some sense be its self-disclosure, be a part of the spirit’s own nature. He elucidates this in his paper ‘Hypostasis and Hypostaticity:’

But what is the body? Is it a lifeless mass of muscles and bones? But one must rid oneself of this notion, thinking about the proto-image and essence of the body – spirit-bearing, spirit-obeying principle. The body is the receptacle and conjointly the revelation, the manifestation of the spirit, the body *belongs* to the spirit, but not vice versa, as it is in the sinful condition of man. Christ has the Body-Church, the house of God (1 Tim 3:15).<sup>452</sup>

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below).

450 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p257

451 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p259

452 Bulgakov, ‘Hypostasis’, p30

Bulgakov runs through several of the NT passages where the Church is described as the body of Christ, identifying in most a complementary description of the Church in pneumatological terms (1 Cor 6, 10, 12; Rom 5, 12; Eph 1, 2, 4). In this understanding of the Church ‘many members are united and diverse gifts are distributed, her living unity being headed by Christ and quickened by the Holy Spirit.’<sup>453</sup> But there is a paradox in the description of the Church as Body and Temple. The Body is ‘of’ Christ and the Temple is ‘of’ the Holy Spirit, i.e. not ‘of’ Christ. This is not to drive a wedge between the Logos and the Spirit, but is to highlight the antinomy in the description that displays a dynamic interrelationship in the being of the Church between the Son and the Spirit.

The idea of the unity of the Church as the body of Christ, and also as the temple of the Holy Spirit, contains the obvious antinomy of the one and the many, of the identical and the different, of Christ’s and not Christ’s. In this antinomy, thesis and antithesis must have equal force; between them there is no logical or static synthesis. Such antinomies can be overcome only dynamically, by the churning of life.<sup>454</sup>

He builds on these two aspects of the Church as Body and Temple to say that they form an inseparable dyadic structure. When one aspect is mentioned the other must be immediately understood as well: Christ is the head of the Body, which is quickened by the Holy Spirit; he is also the chief corner-stone of the Temple, inhabited by the Spirit (Eph 2:18-22).

The principal significance of describing the Church as the Body of Christ is that it includes both the divine and the human natures, Divine Sophia and creaturely Sophia, precisely because Christ’s body does in himself. The Divine Church and the creaturely Church (which is in its image and upon which it is founded) are united together in a single body (although Bulgakov does not describe the Body of Christ in this context as being hypostasised). This is the fundamental concept of the Church for him: the Divine Sophia is actually the heavenly or divine church. It is the protological church of which the creaturely church (which includes the dead as well as the living – i.e. not just ‘earthly’, or ‘militant’) is its image, and which it will sophiologically interpenetrate in the ‘dispensation of the fullness of times.’

The Incarnation of Christ accomplishes the unification of divine and creaturely life, man’s deification, which is precisely the power of the heavenly Church manifested in the earthly Church...The Church is the unity of the supra-eternal Divine Sophia and the becoming creaturely Sophia.<sup>455</sup>

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453 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p257

454 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p259

455 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp257-258

The ‘heavenly’ church in this context is *not*, therefore, the church of the saints in glory or the angels. It is the fullness of God’s own being-for-creation; it is the Divine Sophia.

As the eternal God-manhood, the heavenly Church is the life of God, the self-revelation of God, the Divine Sophia.<sup>456</sup>

The creaturely church is then coincident with creaturely Sophia and must be understood cosmically – it is the image of God’s own being in creation. It therefore includes the living and the dead as well as the angels and those not yet born.

Bulgakov claims this interpretation overcomes the ‘otherwise impossible-to-understand’ passage in Eph 1:23, where ‘the Church, which is his body [receives] the fullness of him who fills all in all.’ This ‘fullness’ can only refer to the life of God himself, which is the heavenly Church, the Divine Sophia, and it is Christ alone that can unite this ‘fullness’, this life of God, with the temporal life of those who are ‘predestined’ (1:11). So the Divine Sophia, the ‘fullness of God,’ and the creaturely Sophia, which is in a state of becoming, of pilgrimage, are united in the one Body of Christ, that is the Church, heavenly and creaturely, just as the two natures of Christ are united without separation or confusion in the one body of Christ in the Chalcedonian formula.

However, despite the abundance of NT references in this section, particularly to the book of Ephesians, Bulgakov does not refer to the later verse in the same letter (3:19) that seems to undermine this interpretation. The writer prays that the Ephesians, themselves, might be ‘filled with all the fullness of God’ (*ἵνα πληρωθῇτε εἰς πάν το πλέρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ*). Here it is quite clear that it is not the ‘heavenly church,’ or Divine Sophia, that is to be filled, but the saints being addressed who are the object of the prayer. Indeed such a prayer for the ‘heavenly church’ would be meaningless since, according to Bulgakov, the heavenly church is coincident with the ‘fullness of God.’ This does not necessarily mean that his understanding of the ‘heavenly church’ as Divine Sophia, hypostasised by Christ, and united with the creaturely Sophia, or the temporal church, in him, is wrong, but that his argument from Ephesians is weakened. The ‘fullness of God’ must be something accessible, proper even, to created, restored humanity, and is therefore not a necessary reference to the Divine Sophia. It would certainly make sense to understand this verse sophianically. That is, it refers to the divinisation of the Church, as the creaturely Sophia (represented by the church for

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456 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p257. This is another example of Bulgakov’s lack of consistency since elsewhere he states ‘in their totality the holy angels constitute the heavenly Church’ and ‘the holy angels constitute God’s creaturely glory, and therefore they will participate in the manifestation of God’s glory as the triumph of the heavenly Church.’ (p409)

whom the Apostle is praying) is deified through grace by the Divine Sophia. However, it would still undermine his insistence that a reference to the *πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ* must itself be a direct reference to the Divine Sophia.

For Bulgakov the unity of the Church is a substantial, ontological unity (although not an empirical unity), based on the unity of God. It is a unity of fullness, or wholeness. As the Triune God is one, so the Body of Christ is one as the one revelation of the trihypostatic life of God. And the Body of Christ, being animated by the Holy Spirit, is thus also the self-revelation of the Spirit. Bulgakov speaks of this Body of Christ participating in the divine life of God, and through this participation the divine life is revealed through ‘the ongoing deification of creation.’ The Church *is* the divine life conferred upon creation.<sup>457</sup>

Participation in this divine life is accomplished through belonging to Christ’s body, to becoming a member of the whole, and being thereby animated by the one Holy Spirit. But each person being a member of the body is actually also the whole body, since they belong to the whole and the body only exists in its members (1 Cor 12:14).<sup>458</sup> Thus each person participating in this divine life of Christ *becomes* Christ. But this raises the question of the nature of personal identity.

Each of many persons, while remaining himself in his singularity, is a member of the one Christ and is animated by the one Spirit. But if each member is Christ when he participates in Christ’s life, then what constitutes his own life?<sup>459</sup>

Bulgakov resolves the issue of the one and the many, the multi-unity of the Church quite simply: the Church is one, as a body is one, by virtue of its one nature. It is many or multiple in view of all the human hypostases.<sup>460</sup> The multiplicity of the members of the body, with the multiplicity of gifts, while different from each other, nevertheless *is* the body by virtue of their being members of it. The members belong to each other, and to the whole. Referring back to the Incarnation and the nature of humanity, Bulgakov goes on to describe the unity of the body in terms of the unified *nature* of humanity:

the unity of the body refers to the unity of humanity, first in the old Adam and then in the new Adam.<sup>461</sup>

Likewise, the multiplicity of members in the body refers to the human hypostases, each of whom is in the image of the one All-hypostasis and shares in the same human nature

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457 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p258

458 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p259

459 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p259

460 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p260

461 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p260

(i.e. as part of the body) while being a complete human being, themselves (i.e. also being the body). Each is a unique member of the genus while representing the genus.

Every hypostasis is a personal *how* of the universal *what* and, as such, belongs to the fullness, the *pleroma*. It is a ray of that divine light about which it is said that it ‘was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the World’ (Jn 1:9).<sup>462</sup>

Christ, then, is the one who, as the head, is the foundation of the new humanity, who as the ‘All-man’ includes the *nature* of every hypostasis, which, in relation to the body, is distinguished from every other by its function as different from other members. But since all hypostases are reflections of his All-hypostasis they are also included in his oneness: this is what it means to say that Christ is the *head* of the body. Thus both the nature and the hypostases of all humanity find expression as multiplicity and unity in relation to Christ. Unity of human hypostases is found in the All-hypostasis who is the head. Unity of human nature exists through belonging to the one body which belongs to Christ. The multiplicity of hypostases are unique rays of the All-hypostasis, and the multiplicity of unique members are parts of the one body.

Bulgakov uses the same language of ‘multi-unity’ in talking about the many gifts distributed by the one Spirit. The gifts of the one Holy Spirit are given uniquely to each hypostasis (1 Cor 12:4, 11), and so they become a mark of ‘individualisation,’ which, perhaps surprisingly, he equates with personhood. But the gifts are given to each hypostasis for the building up of the one body, which belongs to Christ.

The personal principle, the principle of individualisation of humanity, is thus connected with the bi-unitary action or self-revelation of the Second and Third Hypostases.<sup>463</sup>

Thus it is the work of both Son and the Spirit that gives rise to the ‘multi-unity’ of the Church: many members (hypostases) in one body (nature) of Christ, many gifts from one Spirit. These gifts are given for the nurturing of the whole of humanity, since all are made in the image of God and their hypostases are included in that of the Logos, upon whom the Spirit reposes.

The cosmic dimension of the Church as body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit, that is, the creaturely reflection (creaturely Sophia) of the Divine Sophia (hypostasised by the Son and the Spirit), leads Bulgakov to ‘affirm a certain panchristism and panpneumatism’ throughout the whole of creation. Since the Church is the inner entelechy of all creation there is nothing that is beyond its limits. And since Christ is the

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462 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p260

463 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p260

All-hypostasis of which every human hypostasis is a unique image, this leads him to say that ‘after the Incarnation and the Pentecost, Christ is the head of humankind and therefore lives in all humankind.’<sup>464</sup>

In summary, then, Bulgakov sees the doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit as formulating a doctrine of humanity’s dynamic relation to the eternal God-Manhood, which itself is humanity’s foundation, and thus a foundation for ecclesiology that precedes any consideration of the church as institution or hierarchy.<sup>465</sup> The Church as the body of Christ is the manifestation of the creaturely Sophia, which is the manifestation of the Divine Sophia’s being as hypostasised by the Logos; the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit is the expression in creaturely Sophia of the animating principle (the Glory) of the Holy Spirit within the Divine Sophia. The Church in its wholeness is the combination, the mutual indwelling, the perichoresis, of both the Divine and creaturely hypostasised Sophias, of Christ and the Spirit. The relation between the one and the many here is contradictory only if considered purely rationally. When considered dynamically, however, it portrays the relationship between the Divine Sophia (which is one and eternal and belongs to the divine trihypostatisedness) and creaturely Sophia (which is multiple and temporal and belongs to the multiplicity of the images of God, which are ontologically transparent to the Proto-image). The Church is a ‘union of divine and creaturely principles, their interpenetration without separation and without confusion.’<sup>466</sup>

### **3.6.2      *The Church as the Bride of Christ***

At the outset it must be said that Bulgakov’s exposition of the Church as ‘bride’ is extremely unclear, very difficult to unravel, and easily misinterpreted, despite being only two and a half pages long!

The Church is frequently described in the NT as the Bride of Christ, and is taken to be the Beloved of the Lover in the Song of Songs in the OT (which he calls the Apocalypse of the OT).<sup>467</sup> For Bulgakov, the description of the Church as ‘the Bride of Christ and the Wife of the Lamb, the Beloved of the Lover,’ refers *primarily*, but not exclusively, to ‘the creaturely aspect of the Church, for which Christ gave Himself.’<sup>468</sup> In its relation

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464 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p261

465 ‘First the Church, then the hierarchy, not vice versa.’ Bulgakov, *Bride*, p281

466 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p261, p262

467 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p264

468 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p263

with Christ it is another way of speaking of the same phenomenon of the eschatological ‘marrying’ of divinity and creatureliness as the Body and Temple images.<sup>469</sup>

### **3.6.2.1    *The Bride in the New Testament Apocalypse***

Bulgakov says that the understanding of the Church as Bride is even more sophiological than that of the body and temple. The reason for saying this is that Revelation explicitly describes both the heavenly Church and the earthly Church as ‘the Bride.’ Herein lays the source of the difficulties. The passages in Revelation 21 that describe the Bride as the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God refer to the heavenly Church, the Divine Sophia. The descent of the heavenly Bride, of the Divine Sophia, into creation signifies the sophianisation, or divinisation, of creation (Rev 21:2, 9-10).

Likewise, Paul’s reference in 2 Cor 5:1-2 to a ‘building of God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,’ and for which ‘we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our dwelling which is from heaven’ refers to the same heavenly Jerusalem, the Divine Sophia, the Bride which abides in heaven.

However, in Revelation 22:17 the Church as the Bride, animated by the Spirit, calls down, summons Christ, while awaiting him and abiding in the world.<sup>470</sup>

This, then, is the earthly, creaturely Bride. Indeed, Bulgakov speaks of this summoning as not a summoning of Christ at all, but a summoning of the new Jerusalem, who is to ‘come down out of heaven from God.’ Thus the creaturely Bride calls down the Divine Sophia, concluding the history of the world.

In the [general] context, this manifestation [of ‘the bride, the *Lamb’s wife*,’ ‘the holy Jerusalem’] which concludes the history of the world, as its ripe fruit, signifies the sophianisation of creation and, in this sense, the Divine Sophia (God’s glory), who descends from heaven to earth, into the creaturely world. About her it is said (Rev 22:17): ‘And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him that heareth say, Come!’<sup>471</sup>

With this unusual interpretation of Rev 22:17, Bulgakov builds a case saying that there are two brides – one in heaven and one on earth, with the earthly one calling down the heavenly one.

Here we have an intentional doubling [splitting] of meaning, as it were: Chapter 21 speaks of the bride-wife, who descends from heaven to earth, while Revelation 22:17 speaks of the

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469 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p270

470 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p264

471 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p263



bride with the Spirit who animates her and lives in her; and she abides in the world and awaits the coming of Christ in the fullness of divine revelation in the world.<sup>472</sup>

This overlapping of description, using the same personal noun, bride, to describe the eternal, uncreated 'Church' and its temporal, created reflection, underlines the dependence and interrelation between the two brides. That is, that the heavenly Church is the Divine Sophia and the earthly Church is the creaturely Sophia. The conjugal union of the two, which depends on their difference, is the marriage of the (two?) Bride(s?) to which Revelation refers.

The Church is the Divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia united (this union signifying not confusion but the penetration of creaturely life by the rays of divinity, their 'synergism').<sup>473</sup>

Nichols interprets Bulgakov's 'splitting of meaning,' the heavenly and earthly brides, as referring to 'two aspects of her [the Church's] life'. Their relation is achieved 'as redemption,' and infers there is one bride who exists both in heaven and on earth ('the Bride descends...she is also on earth').<sup>474</sup> However, the relation between the two is more complex than he suggests. The heavenly bride is the Divine Sophia, who is the *foundation* of the earthly bride, the creaturely Sophia. Bulgakov even goes so far as to say that it is God's life that constitutes the ontological foundation of the one, united (creaturely and divine) Church:

The Church is the unity of the supra-eternal Divine Sophia and the becoming creaturely Sophia. Only this eternal unity of God's life as *ens realissimum* of the Church is capable of explaining all the power and truth of the insistent affirmations of the apostle, constituting the very foundation of church ontology.<sup>475</sup>

Nevertheless, they remain different – precisely because one is created and the other is not. They are two entities, not one, however dependent the one may be upon the other, separated and joined by the ontological chasm of created/uncreated. Bulgakov describes the 'Church' as the union of the two *in their difference*, 'their "synergism".'

Quite why either of these Sophias warrants a description specifically as 'bride,' however, or in what way the union of the two can be interpreted as 'bridal' in the way Bulgakov suggests, remains unclear and unanswered; they do not fit well with his other descriptions of Sophia. It is almost as if the scriptural testimony has to be made to fit his metaphysical ontology.

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472 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp263-4

473 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p270

474 Nichols, *Wisdom*, pp201-202

475 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p258

Some of the confusion here derives from the translation of the original Russian. In an important passage that attempts to clarify the relations between the heavenly and earthly, Jakim translates

The Church, as Sophia, abides in the heavens, is the heavenly Jerusalem..., ('...our house which is from heaven'), which is to descend to earth. And it is by the Spirit that she summons this descent, like the bride (i.e., the earthly, creaturely Church) awaiting her Bridegroom.<sup>476</sup>

Unusually for Jakim, the translation of the second sentence is very muddy: who is the 'she' that is 'like the Bride?' Nichols translates the same passage this way:

As Wisdom, the Church dwells in him; she is the heavenly Jerusalem..., the holy city which must descend to earth. But as the Bride awaiting her Bridegroom she is the created, earthly Church, herself calling out by the Spirit for the descent.<sup>477</sup>

Notwithstanding the question of whether the heavenly Jerusalem dwells 'in him' or 'in the heavens,' clearly Nichols' translation makes much better sense. It also coheres with Bulgakov's earlier comment that the 'bride' refers primarily to the creaturely aspect of the Church.

Nevertheless, Bulgakov still describes the bride descending from heaven in Revelation 21 as the Divine Sophia. He bases his interpretation of the existence of two brides, one heavenly and one earthly, primarily on his exegesis of Revelation 22:17 for its biblical foundation. Crucially, it first requires that the summons of the Bride and the Spirit, 'Come!' is addressed in a heavenwards direction, thus implying an earthly location for the callers. The context of both the letter and the passage, however, suggests a summons, not heavenwards to Christ (notwithstanding Rev 22:20, 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus,' which is not attributed to the Bride but is a prayer uttered by the writer), but earthwards to the churches (and specifically to those who thirst for the water of life), who are being invited to join the Spirit and the Bride.<sup>478</sup> In this case the location of the Bride and the Spirit is ambiguous to say the least, although the context of 'invitation' is more suggestive of an earthly one.

Because the bride exists in two locations at the same time he insists there are two brides, and interprets the summons as addressed to the heavenly one by the earthly.

Bulgakov's interpretation of the heavenly bride as the Divine Sophia is required by his theology to satisfy the complementarity of Divine and creaturely Sophias. If there is a

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476 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p264

477 Nichols, *Wisdom*, p202

478 See, for example, Rev 11:12; 18:4

bride in the creaturely sophia, there must exist a prototypical bride in the Divine Sophia of which it is the image, and through which it will be divinised.

However, the natural interpretation of the Scripture suggests the heavenly bride is the heavenly Church, i.e. the angels and souls in Paradise awaiting the Second Coming, rather than the Divine Sophia. In this case there is one 'creaturely' bride that awaits completion and fulfilment (cf. 2 Cor 5:1-2; Eph 2:6) and the Divine Sophia is absent from the text.

### **3.6.2.2    *The Bride in the Old Testament Apocalypse***

He goes on to discuss briefly the Song of Songs, 'the most New Testament book of the Old Testament,' which, as with the rest of ancient tradition, recognises it as the love between Christ and the Church as Bridegroom and bride, with 'Love itself or Love's hypostasis, the Holy Spirit, being invisibly present.' He therefore describes this poem as 'a revelation of the Second and Third Hypostases as a conjugal syzygy,' and thus a revelation of the Father, which 'becomes a figure for the union between Christ and the Church.'

This description of the relation between the Second and Third Hypostases as a 'conjugal syzygy' is extraordinary. However, it is entirely in keeping with his premise that Mary is the hypostatic representation of the Spirit. It is therefore no surprise that in the next sentence but one he names her as the Beloved in the song.

The Song of Songs is the song of love between God and the world, the Creator and creation, the Divine Sophia and the creaturely Sophia, the Son made incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Unwedded Bride, His Mother. This relation is love uniting all the aspects of personal and impersonal love, and the mystery of this love is hidden in the heavens, to be revealed on earth.<sup>479</sup>

Although he does not explicitly refer to John 3:16, it is clear that Bulgakov sees this poem almost as an exegesis of that verse.

The notion of 'impersonal love' is a difficult one as love is a purely personal category. It refers partly to God's love of himself, of Divine Sophia, and hence also to his love of creaturely Sophia. Further, it corresponds to the response of non-hypostatic creation to the Creator through being true to itself, that is, to creaturely Sophia. Williams explains it in this way:

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479 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p264

God as personal (hypostatic) love, love in action, loves also the *fact* that self-emptying love is *what* God is. And that ‘what’, which is not simply conceptually identical with any or all of the trinitarian hypostases, that eternal object of divine love, is Sophia.<sup>480</sup>

However, Williams also insists that love can only exist hypostatically and that, at the very least, what God loves is the ability or capacity within creaturely Sophia for it to be hypostasised.

what is loved is always love itself, but love cannot exist without loving *agents*, and so when God loves the world he cannot but love in it the capacity of the world to be ‘hypostatic’, a world of agents and subjects. Thus what God loves is the directedness of the world towards the human; God loves the heavenly image or idea of humanity, the ‘Heavenly Adam.’<sup>481</sup>

Since Sophia is not a hypostasis it cannot be ‘personal’ in the hypostatic sense. But Bulgakov goes beyond this and claims it is capable of responding to God’s love in a non-hypostatic manner:

Sophia, like ousia, is inseparable from the hypostases because like ousia it is the spiritual essence of God, on which God’s love abides, and which itself responds to this love, although non-hypostatic.<sup>482</sup>

The nature of this response is not explained here but it probably refers to the feminine aspect of its hypostaticity, that is, to its ‘desire’ to be hypostasised (see Section 3.3). However there is another, non-hypostatic or impersonal way in which creaturely Sophia responds to God’s love. The clue is found in Psalm 148 and the *Benedicite*: here non-hypostatic creation is called upon to sing God’s praise ‘*prior to or apart from man*.’<sup>483</sup>

We must recall what we know about non-hypostatic love, that is, the love of creatures for their Creator and the praise of the Creator to which they are called by Scripture.<sup>484</sup>

Since love defines the fabric of relations within God, Bulgakov goes on assign to ‘love’ an ontological form of relation between beings that has little to do with modern definitions of the word.

God is love and there exist no other relationships within him, apart from those of various forms of love.<sup>485</sup>

This marvellous and mysterious love clearly presupposes not a psychologism, not an affect or an emotion, but an ontology: the reality of the inter-relationship of spiritual realities.<sup>486</sup>

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480 Williams, *Bulgakov*, p166

481 Williams, *Bulgakov*, p166

482 Bulgakov, *A Summary of Sophiology*, p43

483 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p304

484 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p427

485 Bulgakov, *Summary*, p43

486 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

Nevertheless, that the Church is capable of being either the subject or object of the verb ‘love’ in the ontological sense means that she has a real existence, not merely a collective, nor a metaphorical unity, but a being proper to herself.

This revelation testifies that the Church *is*, that being is proper to her; as *ens realissimum*, she is the object of divine love.<sup>487</sup>

For Bulgakov the Church is a being whose most real property is that she is loved by God. This is sufficient to mean that she *is*. She has a being, a reality, a singularity that comprises an object of God’s love, but not necessarily a person, since he has already said that there is such a thing as ‘impersonal love,’ although this refers to the *natural* response of non-hypostatic creation to God’s love. Nevertheless, she is *ens realissimum*, the most real being. Here Bulgakov draws the link between the Church as Bride and the Church as Body, for the two descriptions, linked through Genesis and Ephesians, are the same.

In this sense [i.e. as *ens realissimum*], the Church is represented as a ‘body’ or a wife: ‘men ought to love their wives as their own bodies’ (Eph 5:28).<sup>488</sup>

Although he does not explore this relation any further, he has made the clear link between the two: the Church *as the wife of the Lamb* is the Body of Christ. For the Church, as Christ’s body, to be an object of God’s love, it must in some sense be capable of receiving that love. This was a link he had already made in the opening paragraph of his earlier book on the Church, *The Orthodox Church* published in 1935:

Since the Lord did not merely approach humanity but became one with it, Himself becoming man, the Church is the Body of Christ, as a unity of life with Him, a life subordinate to Him and under His authority. The same idea is expressed when the Church is called the Bride of Christ or of the Word; the relations between bride and bridegroom, taken in their everlasting fullness, consist of a perfect unity of life, a unity which preserves the reality of their difference.<sup>489</sup>

The Church to which he is referring here is the earthly, creaturely Church, creaturely Sophia, not the heavenly Church, the Divine Sophia.

### **3.6.2.3    *The Bride as Soul***

There is a further dimension to his understanding of the Church as the bride that operates at the level of the individual. This is primarily seen in the Song of Songs, which in its first place, Bulgakov suggests, is between Jesus and Mary:

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487 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

488 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

489 Bulgakov, *Church*, p1

The Song of Songs is also a song about Mary and the Logos, as about every soul seeking its heavenly Groom and joining with Him. The Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Bride of God, is the image of every soul in its relation to the Logos, in its ecclesialization.

In this case Christ is the husband of every soul, and every soul is his bride.<sup>490</sup>

Every soul strives for Christ as to its own heavenly bridegroom, wishes to be at one with him, in the image of marriage 'to Christ and to the Church,' the soul is the bride striving in spiritual communion to recognise the heavenly bridegroom.<sup>491</sup>

Likewise, every soul longs to give birth to Christ in its own heart, for him to have his dwelling within:

As the creature, receiving, in humanising the Logos, every human hypostasis thirsts for his birth in its own soul and in the manger of its own heart wishes to become for him a mother, to participate in the motherhood of God. 'His Mother is every pious soul' (Blessed Augustine).<sup>492</sup>

This raises difficulties in the face of his assertion that each human hypostasis can be only male or female. But as noted earlier (see Section 3.4.5), although each hypostasis must be either male or female this is a matter of degree. Bulgakov claims that each hypostasis is a combination of male *and* female.

The fact of the matter is that hypostatic characters or names are never simple or unitary; rather, they consist of two elements, one of which is primary, while the other is an overtone, as it were.<sup>493</sup>

He uses the examples of Logos-Christ, which is a proper hypostasis, and of the Holy Spirit in Mary as indicative of the existence of these 'dual-unities' in a single hypostasis. However in this case he suggests that each human hypostasis comprises both male and female components, and in fact these are necessary in each person in order for there to be a complete human hypostasis.

The male nature is hypostasised in Christ... while the female nature is hypostasised in relation to Him as the Bridegroom of the Church. There are two relations here: centrifugal and centripetal. And both are necessarily united in each human hypostasis; however, they are united in different tonalities, with the love of Christ for the Church, or of the Church for Christ, being dominant.<sup>494</sup>

So although hypostases are either male or female, both are present in each with one or other being dominant. Each soul therefore oscillates, as it were, between these modes or tones, at one time loving the Church, and hence hypostasising the male Christ, and at

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490 Bulgakov, *Burning Bush*, pp103-104

491 Bulgakov, 'Hypostasis', pp36-37

492 Bulgakov, 'Hypostasis', p36

493 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p100

494 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p100

other times loving Christ or wanting to give birth to him, thus hypostasising the female Bride-Wife-Mother.<sup>495</sup>

The Church as bride thus exists in two realities – that of the hypostasised individual (male or female) soul that seeks to be joined with Christ, and that of the entire unhypostasised creaturely Sophia that seeks to be united with the Divine Sophia, which finds its hypostasis in the Mother of God.

### **3.6.2.4    *The Bride as Second Eve***

Despite the title of his volume on the Church, and the long and rich tradition of understanding the Church as the second Eve, Bulgakov is very selective here in his ontology. Although Christ as the second Adam is fundamental to his soteriology, he does *not* speak of the Church as the Second Eve. He never refers, for example, to the Church as taken from the body of the second Adam on the cross or at the last supper. Once he refers to Mary as the ‘second Eve.’<sup>496</sup>

However, he acknowledges that Christ is the head of the Church as the husband is the head of the wife (Eph 5:23), for whom he leaves ‘his father and his mother [to be] united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’ (Eph 5:31). And although ‘this mysterious and brief yet astonishingly significant text is unique in the apostolic epistles,’<sup>497</sup> yet ‘it has a direct parallel in Revelation, in the most significant (for concluding) work of the last book of the Holy Scripture’ (Rev 21:9-11). But the central claim in the Ephesians passage is to the Genesis story of the creation of humanity in God’s image.<sup>498</sup> Bulgakov’s failure to relate his ecclesial ontology in any way to this Genesis story, which has played such an axiomatic role in the rest of his theology, must, therefore, be a deliberate omission.

Why has he not acknowledged this link here, or the tradition built on it? It is not an easy question to answer. It is partially addressed in *The Burning Bush*, and almost certainly resides in the fact that he identifies the second Eve with Mary, who, with Christ, shares in his Incarnation as the ontological origin of the Church. Firstly, the ‘second Eve’ is hypostatically Mary,<sup>499</sup> never the Church. Likewise, the primary referent for the concept of ‘bride’ is Mary, although she is the ‘incarnation’ of the Church:

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495 Bulgakov, ‘Hypostasis’, p37

496 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p90. However, he does refer to Mary as the Second Eve more extensively in *The Burning Bush*, see below.

497 Although cf. Rom 7:1-4; 1 Cor 6:15-16

498 See Section 4.4 for further discussion on the biblical witness to the nuptial theme.

499 Bulgakov, *Burning Bush*, p80

As the representative of the whole creation and more exalted than everyone, she [Mary] is the personal incarnation of the Church: the head of the apostles, the focus of the whole creaturely world.<sup>500</sup>

Secondly, the second Eve is not like the first Eve either in herself, or in her relation to the second Adam. The *only* similarity between the Eves, for Bulgakov, is their sinlessness before the first Eve fell:

The Virgin Mary is often called the new Eve. Like every comparison this one has force only within definite bounds, by maintaining the *tertium comparationis*. But this is exactly *the personal sinlessness* of Eve (before the fall) and of the Virgin Mary; in all remaining relations the old and the new Eve differ from one another.<sup>501</sup>

It is clear that Bulgakov considers there to be almost nothing in common between the two, for among all the elements of the Genesis narrative, the ‘personal sinlessness’ they shared for a limited time barely warrants the typology implicit in the NT, or traditionally assigned by the Church.

In her relation with the new Adam, she is also completely different. The first Adam was a creation in the image of the Logos. The first Eve was taken from his side also as a creature: ‘her origin proved possible only in connection with him, as his necessary disclosure and complement.’ In this sense they both ‘are wholly the creation of God.’<sup>502</sup> The second Adam, however, *is* the Logos, ‘is very Lord, who assumed flesh, i.e. His own creature,’ while ‘the second Eve is a creature, a human being belonging to the creaturely world.’ She originates ‘from the Second Adam, i.e. from God.’<sup>503</sup> This would be the place for Bulgakov to relate the ‘origin’ of Mary as second Eve to the cross, baptism and the Eucharist, but he does not. Thus her origin and her relation to Adam are as different as the two Adams are from each other.

With such a heavy emphasis on the historical, concrete person of Mary as the ontological ground of the Church (since the Incarnation could not have happened without her worthiness) it becomes easier to see why Bulgakov might want to steer away from the Genesis narrative in a baptismal and eucharistic context to define the origins and nature of the Church. Thus, despite the recognition that the Eucharist is a sacrament of the Incarnation, there is no reference in his discussion on sacraments to the Genesis narrative or Adam.<sup>504</sup> For Bulgakov, Mary *preceded* Christ as the necessary

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500 Bulgakov, *Burning Bush*, p101

501 Bulgakov, *Burning Bush*, pp41-42

502 Bulgakov, *Burning Bush*, p80

503 Bulgakov, *Burning Bush*, pp80-81

504 Eg Bulgakov, *Bride*, p273



hypostatic response of Creation to the *Incarnation*. This does not at all fit with the Genesis story.

### **3.6.3     *The Hypostasis of the Church***

The Church, for Bulgakov, is the unity of the heavenly Church and the earthly Church as Divine and creaturely Sophia.<sup>505</sup> Sophia, being a hypostaticity, requires hypostasisation. The two aspects are hypostasised differently.

#### **3.6.3.1     *Hypostasis of the Heavenly Church***

We have seen that Bulgakov describes both the heavenly Church (albeit briefly) and the earthly Church as bride. The former of these, however, the Divine Church, he is careful to ensure is *not* understood as a hypostasis. To be a hypostasis means to be hypostasised by the spirit, and that means to be either male or female, since those are the only two modes in which spirit can be hypostasised. The Divine Church, as the Divine Sophia, is not a hypostasis, and, even though described as ‘Bride’, is therefore not male or female, but is called to hypostasisation, and is hypostasised by the Logos as the divine nature.<sup>506</sup>

Nevertheless, he makes the link between the heavenly Church as the new Jerusalem and the heavenly Bride of the Lamb without any recourse to this issue of hypostasis. The description of the *heavenly Church* as bride carries no hypostatic content for him: it is only a hypostaticity, despite it being an exclusively personal category.

Part of the difficulty with his argument here is that, in referring to hypostasis and the heavenly Church, he comes back to the categories of male and female in the hypostatic spirit. Bulgakov is attempting to address what he calls the ‘excessive spiritualism’ and ‘excessive romanticism’ that has historically surrounded the notion of the Church as bride. He thus wants to remove the ‘feminine’ aspect from the equation that has been the cause of these problems. But to do so requires him to ‘de-hypostasise’ the ‘heavenly Church,’ since, for him, to be hypostasised necessarily means to be already either male or female.

He also wants to ensure that there is no prospect of the Divine Sophia being called a fourth hypostasis. He has identified the ‘heavenly bride’ of Revelation 21 with Divine Sophia. By his definition this cannot, therefore, be a hypostasis.

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<sup>505</sup> Bulgakov, *Bride*, p270

<sup>506</sup> See Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265 and Section 3.4.5, above

However, by making this identification Bulgakov has tied a difficult knot for himself. One is left wondering in what sense the Divine Sophia is called ‘Bride’ or ‘Wife.’ Indeed, he himself appears to be very uncomfortable with the description for having identified the heavenly Jerusalem as both ‘the Divine Sophia (God’s Glory), who descends from heaven to earth,’<sup>507</sup> and as ‘the bride-wife, who descends from heaven to earth,’<sup>508</sup> he never again refers to the Divine Sophia or the heavenly Church as ‘bride.’ It seems that, in this case, despite his repeated castigation of those who reduce biblical images to the level of allegory,<sup>509</sup> he has been forced to do precisely that with the description of the (heavenly) Church as bride.

In the Divine Sophia, the ‘spiritual body’ relates to God’s ousia as hypostasised by the Son. The heavenly body is the Divine Sophia as expressly hypostasised by the Logos. The temple in the Divine Sophia, on the other hand, refers to the Holy Spirit’s manner of hypostatically indwelling divine body, the Divine Sophia, as the Glory of God. Bulgakov has much to say about the Holy Spirit as God’s hypostatic Glory. It relates to the manifestation of God’s Glory in the Temple in the OT, and upon the Church at Pentecost in the NT.<sup>510</sup> In both these cases the categories of body and temple have what Bulgakov refers to as hypostaticity, that is, they require hypostases to complete them.

### **3.6.3.2 Hypostasis of the Creaturely Church**

If the heavenly Church as the Divine Sophia is hypostasised by the Logos, is the earthly Church as creaturely Sophia also hypostasised? In one sense the answer is clearly ‘yes,’ since human persons *are* the hypostases of the creaturely Sophia. But beyond this, is there a unified or single hypostasis that, as it were, utters the free response of creation’s love to God’s invitation?

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507 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p263

508 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p264

509 Eg. Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

510 Eg Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp396-401, pp406-407, pp431-432

### 3.6.3.2.1 *Hypostasis of the Body and the Temple*

Bulgakov has used the singularity of Adam as a hypostasis as the foundation for explaining our personal participation in original sin. ‘All were in Adam.’ Indeed, he has spoken of the *genus* of hypostases that ‘bears the image of the Holy Trinity, which is hypostatically multiple in consubstantiality.’ This he refers to as ‘the perfect manifestation of *the divine person*, as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit’ (*italics added*).<sup>511</sup>

From this he postulates a unitary hypostasis in which all humanity participates, which at the same time does not extinguish the uniqueness of each person. He asks

Does not the image of the Holy Trinity in man also represent an analogous manifestation of the principle of multi-hypostatizedness in the unity of nature, so that individual hypostases are different hypostatic aspects of a *certain multi-unitary hypostasis of the integral Adam*, aspects that are neither identical nor mutually alien, for they are included in the multi-unity of the man Adam? (*italics added*)<sup>512</sup>

It is specifically the existence of this multi-unitary hypostasis in Adam, analogous to the unity of human nature, which enables Christ to include all hypostases within the Incarnation. In fact, it is the other way round: Adam’s all-hypostasis is a reflection of the all-hypostasis of the Proto-Image – the Logos.<sup>513</sup>

The answer to the question concerning the hypostasis of the creaturely Sophia is: Christ, whose hypostasis is the Logos of God. In the creaturely Sophia the categories of body and temple are hypostasised in Christ through the Incarnation – he takes a body, human flesh, human nature (as hypostasised by Mary) and is baptised by the Holy Spirit who rests upon him as the temple. That is, they derive their fullest meaning and personal content through the Incarnation. After the Ascension, in the Pentecost, Christ’s body is extended to give rise to the Church, indwelt as the temple by the Holy Spirit. Bulgakov actually maintains that Christ’s body was extended to include all creation, all of which properly belongs to human nature, by the outpouring of his blood on the cross. This was received into the ground, independently of the ‘communion of the faithful’ for ‘the Church, the body of Christ, is...also the whole universe in God.’<sup>514</sup>

Bulgakov’s usage of the terminology of ‘individuality,’ which he develops specifically from the Latin, is fraught with inconsistency but there is no mention of the overcoming of the ‘bad individuality’ of hypostatic disintegration in the context of the ontology of

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511 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p185

512 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp185-186

513 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp186-187

514 Bulgakov, *Grail*, p34

the Church. Although he talks of hypostases being included in the all-hypostasis of Christ, there is little in this discussion that has to do with restoring the ‘ontology of personality’ or personhood that he has earlier described in terms of mutual relationships, of love, being ‘transparent for one another.’

This individuality of personal being is not its supreme and definitive determination. On the contrary...this being becomes fully itself when it *loses* its individuality. This individual, qualified ray, which hitherto has shined only in its own color, now begins to shine with the light of the pleroma and participates in the wholeness in which God is all in all.<sup>515</sup>

The whole point of this hypostatic transparency is that it is the restoration of the image of God in humanity, into which human beings were called to grow:

The image of God [is] the image of sacrificial and self-renouncing trihypostatic love, in which each of the hypostases acquires its own personal center not in itself but outside of itself, in other hypostases.<sup>516</sup>

The penetrating exception to all this, however, is Mary, the Mother of God. She is the one person who, as creaturely Sophia, perfectly fulfils both forms of this nature (body and temple) hypostatically in herself. She is the one who welcomed the Holy Spirit into her body at the Annunciation, thus becoming the hypostatic temple of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit-Bearer. And in doing so she gave her human nature, her body, to the Son to be his body. Bulgakov claims that Christ’s humanity never stopped being her body, that she remained joined to Christ himself since he took her hypostasised nature, and in this way she, in herself, really is Christ’s body. Since she, then, is both the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, she is the hypostatic centre of the Church.

Who can represent this Church, its heart, if not the Mother of God? Having given Her Son to humankind, the Most Pure Mother of God is, of course, both the hypostatic body of Christ par excellence and the temple of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit-Bearer.<sup>517</sup>

Mary, with Christ, completes the male-female bi-unity of humanity required for salvation.<sup>518</sup> She shares Christ’s humanity. She suffers with him on the cross (‘and a sword shall pierce your own soul too,’ Luke 2:35). And according to Orthodox teaching, in her Dormition she is given a resurrected body, translated to heaven, and abides with Christ in Glory, ‘more venerable than the cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the seraphim.’<sup>519</sup> She will therefore also participate in the parousia of her Son at the descent of the Holy Spirit in preparation for the coming of the Son.

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515 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p92

516 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p156

517 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p411

518 Eg Bulgakov, *Bride*, p100

519 Orthodox Liturgy

In the parousia, which presupposes the revelation of both hypostases, the Spirit-Bearer (that is, the Mother of God), the image of the Third Hypostasis, returns into the world with the God-man, the incarnate Logos. In this sense, the parousia should be understood as the return of Christ and of the Mother of God into the world.<sup>520</sup>

As she is the perfect human hypostasis capable of being the image (not the incarnation) of the Holy Spirit, in heaven she completes the bi-unity of creaturely Sophia with the God-man. Therefore creaturely Sophia is completed in her as the one united with her Son in the male-female bi-unity, imaging the Logos-Spirit bi-unity of the Divine Sophia. The body-temple view of the Church is thus hypostasised in one sense solely by Christ, in another sense solely by the Mother of God, and in another sense by Christ and the Mother of God together.

In the latter case it follows that, if the male-female bi-unity echoes the body-temple bi-unity of the creaturely Sophia, and this in turn images the modes in which the Second and Third Hypostases possess the Divine Sophia, there is a very close relationship between the body-temple and body-bride modes of describing the Church.

#### **3.6.3.2.2 Hypostasis of the Bride**

We have seen that heavenly bride is *not* a hypostasis, but is called to hypostatisation, and is hypostasised by the Logos. But what of the creaturely Bride?

Of the three forms of the Church, body, temple and bride, the one description that already belongs to the personal, hypostatic category, bride, Bulgakov associates with the non-hypostatic Sophia. This he achieves through the identity of the bride in Revelation 21 with the new Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth, which he interprets as the Divine Sophia, and the bride who is already on earth, which he therefore interprets as the creaturely Sophia, and who, with the Spirit, awaits the coming of her bridegroom in Revelation 22.<sup>521</sup> Bulgakov's identity of the bride with Sophia forecloses the hypostatic question before it can be posed. Instead, he draws the link between body (which is nature) and bride (the heavenly version of which he has identified as Divine Sophia). By correlation the bride must also be 'nature.'

As *ens realissimum*, she [the Church] is [the] object of divine love. In this sense, the Church is represented as a 'body' or a wife...(Eph. 5:28). The Church exists in a multiplicity of hypostases, as the one body of many members.<sup>522</sup>

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520 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p409

521 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p264

522 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

In this interplay between body and wife, body clearly has the ontological priority: the language of ‘wife,’ as a singularity, immediately gives way to ‘the one body.’ The implication is that the term ‘bride’ or ‘wife’ as related here to ‘body’ is imbued with the same content as ‘body.’ Indeed, in the next paragraph Bulgakov he makes a point of correcting the ‘misunderstandings’ surrounding the hypostatic interpretations ‘of Sophia as bride, wife, and body’ by de-hypostasising them. His programme here is far from clear for, having apparently identified the *bride* with Sophia, he then empties it of hypostatic content. But he has already identified the Song of Songs as between ‘the Son made incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the *Unwedded Bride, His Mother*’ (*italics added*).<sup>523</sup> So we are left with a perplexing question: who, or what, precisely, is the bride? Is it Sophia, or is it Mary?

The creaturely Church, as creaturely Sophia, is called to hypostatisation, is a hypostaticity, and is hypostasised by creaturely hypostases. However, all creaturely hypostases, all human hypostases, are reflections of, are enveloped and united by, the All-hypostasis of Christ, the God-man. In the Incarnation he takes his human nature, his createdness, that is, the creaturely Sophia, from his mother, the Mother of God, who is his direct connection with creation. It is her hypostasised human nature that she yields to the Holy Spirit. This becomes the human nature of Christ, wedded to his divine nature in the Incarnation. She is therefore the ‘Unwedded Bride,’ who is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit to give birth to Christ. She is thus the personal hypostasis of created Sophia that yields, gives her nature, her humanity, to the Logos that he may be incarnated.<sup>524</sup>

The Church exists in a multiplicity of hypostases, as the one body of many members. The primary hypostasis of the Church, the Church’s personal centre, is the Most Pure Mother of Christ, the Spirit-Bearer.<sup>525</sup>

In a very difficult-to-understand sentence Bulgakov concludes his discussion on the hypostasis of the Church, and indeed, his discussion of the Church as the Bride:

The earthly Church is ‘in-hypostasised’ in Christ as the Wife and Bride of the Lamb.<sup>526</sup>

The expression ‘in-hypostasised’ receives no further explanation, nor is it used elsewhere in this volume of his writing. It appears to mean that the human nature of the Mother of God (the ‘Unwedded Bride’), while becoming the human nature of Christ,

523 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p264

524 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

525 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

526 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

the Bridegroom, still remains her hypostasised human nature. Therefore, as she is the 'Bride' who has given herself to the Logos, her hypostasised humanity remains as Bride in Christ's humanity. This makes sense if seen as human nature being wedded to the divine nature in Christ, but it is difficult to see how this can be described as the 'in-hypostatisation' of the 'Bride of the Lamb' since Christ is the Lamb.<sup>527</sup>

This, the Bride, as bride, he appears to say, is not a hypostasis, but is hypostasised by the Mother of God as the 'Unwedded Bride.' Nevertheless it is difficult to see that there is any difference between saying that the Church, as bride, is not a hypostasis but is hypostasised by Mary as the Unwedded Bride on the one hand, and on the other that the Church, described as bride, is a hypostasis – Mary. Thus, having striven to de-gender the Church as bride, Bulgakov re-focuses the personal, hypostatic centre of the Church on the Mother of God. This appears to re-create exactly the same situation that he was attempting to address. That is, it creates a centre on which 'excessive spiritualism' and 'excessive romanticism' can be focussed, and which can controversially be argued as the root of many problems in a male-dominated church hierarchy.<sup>528</sup>

The other important dimension to his understanding of the Church as hypostasised bride leads to a further ambiguity. We have seen how he identifies the heavenly Jerusalem as the Divine Sophia, called down by the bride as the creaturely Sophia in Rev 22. However, in the closing, and hence most significant, pages of *The Bride*, discussing the parousia of Christ, and therefore also of the Mother of God, he uses the same passages to support his view that the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem signifies the descent of the Mother of God as the bride of Christ. In other words, the heavenly Jerusalem is no longer the Divine Sophia. Instead it is the Mother of God as deified or sophianised, and hypostasised, creaturely Sophia.

The parousia of the Son and of the Spirit are inseparable from that of the Mother of God. This is the most mysterious and significant aspect of the holy city. The great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, the tabernacle of God with men, is insistently and repeatedly also called the 'wife' or 'bride of the Lamb.'<sup>529</sup>

The same idea is expressed earlier where he tentatively suggests that the Mother of God descends into the world first and alone, before the actual parousia of Christ as a sort of preparation for his coming, since humanity 'has need of the vision of Her face to soften

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527 However see discussion of the 'Birth of the Bride' in Section 5.1.3 where it is argued that the OT Bride of Yahweh dies with Christ on the cross in order to be re-born from his side as the New Eve.

528 For example, one of the common arguments for the prohibition of women from the Holy Mount Athos is precisely that it belongs exclusively to the Mother of God.

529 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p525

its heart.<sup>530</sup> Here again he identifies the Mother of God personally as the bride of the Lamb and the new Jerusalem, and her descent as her preparation for the forthcoming wedding feast.

By reason of that general approach of heaven to the world which precedes the parousia, a particular manifestation of the Most Holy Mother of God in the world before the parousia becomes conceivable... The saintliness of the saints, the heavenly Jerusalem, in relation to the Unwedded Bride – does Revelation's symbolic language not refer to the appearance in the world of this Spirit-bearing Bride, preparing the way for the Lord?... It should be noted that the personal destiny of the Most Holy Mother of God places her *outside* the action of the parousia, for this action was already accomplished in relation to Her in Her Dormition.<sup>531</sup>

But references to the new Jerusalem are not exclusively references to the bride as the Mother of God, as Mary, personally: they can also refer to the transfiguration of creative human history. Bulgakov takes the references to the materiality of the city, its mineral constituents and its structure and measurable dimensions, to mean that it has an earthly origin, and its descent from heaven to mean that it participates in the glorification of creation that accompanies the parousia.<sup>532</sup>

This fluidity in his interpretation of particularly apocalyptic passages adds both depth and kaleidoscopic dimensions to his eschatology. However, it also means that his use of Scripture to support his ideas is, from a Western perspective at least, tenuous. For example we have at least three interpretations of the descent of the new Jerusalem from heaven as 1) Divine Sophia, 2) Mary as the Theotokos, and 3) the glorification of human creative history. Each of these interpretations uses the same texts to support them, although elsewhere he argues that scriptural silence constitutes 'dogmatic self-evidence!'<sup>533</sup> Certainly there is no reason why these passages should not have multiple interpretations, but they cannot be used as *evidence* in this way.

Although Bulgakov refers to the symbolic language of the book of Revelation, his interpretation of the bride in terms of the Mother of God goes far beyond the symbolic. He is quite certain that these figures refer specifically to Mary, personally. Another example is where, in the parousia, the Church will be judged, the angels will be judged, the rest of humanity will be judged, but the Mother of God will *not* be judged. It is impossible to say this and maintain at the same time that the language of the 'Mother of God' is a symbolic reference to the Church.<sup>534</sup>

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530 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p412

531 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p413

532 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p428, p523

533 Eg Bulgakov, *Bride*, p410

534 As, for example, Professor Louth maintains (personal communication).



The presence of the Mother of God in the parousia and at the Last Judgement is therefore *essentially different* from the presence of all other participants, without any exception: from that of the human beings and even of the angels, for all of them find themselves on this side of the parousia and the Judgement. All of them, even the angels, will yet be judged. But the Most Holy Mother of God will not be judged.<sup>535</sup>

There is a deeply unsettling aspect to the hypostatisation of Mary in Bulgakov's treatment of her as the Bride of the Lamb that is difficult to discuss. The faith of the Church rests upon the historical reality of the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Without these as real historical events our 'faith is in vain' (1 Cor 15:14). The Church has always vigorously defended the physical historicity and reality of Christ's Incarnation against all forms of docetism. This means, too, that Mary was a real, concrete and historical person who gave birth to Christ *as a woman*, as 'one of us.'

However, much has been done in Church tradition to try to eradicate the humanity of Christ's entry into the world, including, for example, the almost docetic insistence on the perpetual virginity of Mary, speaking not just of her 'spiritual' virginity, but of her physical virginity. The reality of the human relationships into which Christ was born means that Mary was actually his mother ('blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed,' Luke 11:27). Of course none of this is denied and is, in fact, what is portrayed in almost all icons of Mary.<sup>536</sup>

However, there is a danger of over-spiritualisation. Where Mary is used to personify the Church she understandably represents the Church. But beyond that her elevation as a real person into the heavenly realms, and becoming personally the Queen of Heaven and Bride of Christ seems to translate the reality of her historical personhood into the realm of myth. Bulgakov accuses those who do not see eye to eye with him on this as suffering from 'satanic dementia.'<sup>537</sup>

He sees her personal presence in heaven, as the Unwedded Bride, as actually the guarantee that humanity is not obliterated in the presence of divinity and that *she* is the necessary bridge between heaven and earth,<sup>538</sup> rather than Christ (which fear is actually the consequence of a weak christology). However, in the face of historical human particularity, i.e. the fact that Mary is a real person, really was Jesus' mother, and really

535 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p413

536 Excepting the interpretation of the three stars on her headdress as representing her perpetual and abiding virginity.

537 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p460. His over-elevation of Mary was one of the grounds on which he was criticised in 1935 by St John Maximovitch, who stated 'Although Mary is a chosen vessel, still she was a woman by nature, not to be distinguished at all from others.' [http://orthodoxwiki.org/Sergius\\_Bulgakov](http://orthodoxwiki.org/Sergius_Bulgakov) (15 July 2011)

538 E.g. 'But for the human race, She [Mary] is the living bridge that connects it to Her Son and God, conducting to heaven those who are on earth.' Bulgakov, *Bride*, p460

was wedded to Joseph, such assertions adopt an Oedipal aspect that cannot just be swept aside as irreverent. To say these are simply figures for speaking about spiritual forms of relations and cannot therefore be compared with earthly ones is to undermine them.<sup>539</sup> Not only is the spiritual the ontological ground of the earthly (see Eph 5:31-32), but Mary really *is* Christ's earthly mother – that is precisely why she is given the title. If we are to say, with the Athonites as well as Bulgakov, that Mary, as the real human person, is personally the hypostatic Bride of Christ at the same time as being his Mother, we need to be very careful what this says concerning the nature of human relationships. They cannot be so easily divorced from each other.

But there is also a disconcerting exclusivity to the elevation of this young Jewish girl (or middle-aged Jewish woman) to heaven. Although Bulgakov has referred to the fall as the disintegration of the perichoresis of humanity, he has not said much about its restoration. Christ is the All-hypostasis who therefore includes every human hypostasis within himself, and all humanity is included in the Jesus-Mary conjunction through baptism. Nevertheless his exclusive treatment of the Mother of God (her presence in the parousia is 'essentially different' from that of everyone else) implies that there is a hierarchy of holiness that remains after the parousia. Mary will not stop being the Theotokos after the parousia, nor will she cease, personally, from being the 'wife of the Lamb.' The nature of the rest of humanity's participation in this relationship remains unexplored by Bulgakov. He does say that each soul both seeks after Christ as its bridegroom, and seeks to give birth to Christ as his mother. But these are pre-parousia categories that will no longer be meaningful when Christ is everywhere present as the light of the city.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The Church is the fulfilment of God's eternal plan concerning creation and the salvation, sanctification, glorification, deification, and sophianisation of creation. In this sense, the Church is the very foundation of creation, its inner entelechy.<sup>540</sup>

The Church lies at the centre of the cosmos: it is that which gives being and future to the whole of creation. It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Church in

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539 Eg. 'The Church applies very different terms like "Mother" and "Bride" to Mary as the personal incarnation of the Church. Of course, these terms are incompatible if one translates them in the language of sex and sexual relations, but this incompatibility is eliminated in spiritual relations.' Bulgakov, *Burning Bush*, p103

540 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p253

Bulgakov's theology. And it is accomplished through the salvific work of incarnated Christ in the Holy Spirit.<sup>541</sup>

The three principal images of the Church as body, temple, and bride are, for Bulgakov, three interrelated aspects ontologically describing the same reality.

According to the New Testament doctrine, the Church as the mystical body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the Bride of the Lamb is God-manhood, eternal and historical, heavenly and earthly, divine and creaturely, in the Chalcedonian union of the two natures in Christ. The whole of christology and pneumatology watches over this idea of the Church.<sup>542</sup>

In each of these descriptions the different aspects of Idea and Nature are conjoined, not in synthesis, but in antinomy in such a way that the creaturely aspect is not destroyed, but required. This contrasts starkly, for example, with the eclipse of the primary vehicle of historical ontology in the eschaton in both Congar and Balthasar: the hierarchy. Bulgakov is able to maintain the historical alongside the eternal because he locates it in action of the Spirit in *constituting* the Church as Spirit-filled people, not in a temporary hierarchy. Both the institution and the constitution of the Church are the dyadic work of the Logos *and* the Spirit, the 'two hands of God'. This is why he insists 'First the Church, then the hierarchy, not vice versa.'<sup>543</sup>

The Church as body is the Church as Christ's nature, 'eternal and historical', hypostasised by him and male in the creaturely Sophia. The Church as temple is the Church as the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, 'heavenly and earthly', and female in the creaturely Sophia, hypostasised by Mary as the Spirit-bearer. Together the Church as male body and female temple, as Jesus-Mary, in the creaturely Sophia corresponds to the hypostatic bi-unity of the Son and the Spirit as the revelation of the Father in the Divine Sophia. In this sense the Church is the 'all-sacrament' as being, herself, God-manhood. She is 'the Incarnation and the Pentecost of the Spirit, with their abiding power.'<sup>544</sup>

The Church as bride, 'divine and creaturely', is the union of Divine and creaturely Sophias, the two natures of Christ, but also is creaturely Sophia hypostasised by Mary to be united with Christ, and thus participate as creature in the communion of the Trinity.

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541 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p255

542 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p270

543 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p281

544 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p273

The restoration of life in the Church means that the life of Christ as the new All-man becomes the life of each person. Thus humanity is united in Christ: the life of each person is also the life of Christ and therefore extends to the life of all.<sup>545</sup>

Hypostatically, humanity is created and called to be the image of the kenotic, but tri-hypostatic, God in creation. Specifically this means to answer God's call in love, and thus to find itself, not through self-love or knowledge, but outside the self – through the hypostatic 'other:'

The image of God [is] the image of sacrificial and self-renouncing trihypostatic love, in which each of the hypostases acquires its own personal center not in itself but outside of itself, in other hypostases.<sup>546</sup>

This life not only extends throughout each member of the entire human race, past, present and future, uninterrupted by death, but also all the angels and, through human nature which is an intrinsic part of creation, to include the whole of creation, which 'has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now' (Rom 8:22).

In the Church man thus becomes a universal being; his life in God unites him to the life of all creation by the bonds of cosmic love.<sup>547</sup>

This extensive unity finds its ground of being in, and is a reflection of, God's own being as tri-hypostatic unity.

The Church is...an all-embracing unity, as a life unique and integral, as universality, after the pattern of the oneness of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.<sup>548</sup>

Dangerously, but refreshingly and boldly, Bulgakov insists that personal creativity, gifts, missions, inspirations etc. comprise the authentic manifestation of the Church of the NT. Institutions and hierarchy (referring to the Church in both the East and the West) 'appear(s) not to exist at all in the NT or in other canonical writings of the Church' and that this 'free ecclesiality was established by God himself.'

This organic and creative life of the Church ontologically precedes the hierarchical principle. In an organised form, this principle appears in the Church only later. This life is the ontological prius for the principle (and not vice versa) or, at least, the condition of its being, as its necessary medium.<sup>549</sup>

But the hypostatic centre of the Church is the transfigured historical person of Mary, the Mother of God. She *is* the bride of the Lamb. The signification of the Church as the new

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545 Bulgakov, *Church*, p5

546 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p156

547 Bulgakov, *Church*, p6; *Bride*, p525

548 Bulgakov, *Church*, p5

549 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p262

Jerusalem and the bride finds its fulfilment in both the union of the Christ and the Church, and of Christ and his Mother. Speaking of this 'agglomeration' of images in the Apocalypse he asks

Does it express the great, final mystery of Christ and of the Church, and then of Christ and of the Mother-Virgin, the Unwedded Bride, in the revelation of the final accomplishment and of the glory of the world?<sup>550</sup>

In the culminating passage of *The Bride*, Bulgakov asks rhetorically if the Church does not find its own personal fulfilment in Mary, that she will return as the 'tabernacle' in whom the presence of God dwells in its glory as the resurrected and glorified Spirit-Bearer.<sup>551</sup>

For him, Mary is the hypostatic centre of the Church, already resurrected, elevated and glorified. If we ask him, 'Is the Church a person?' he answers, 'No. But...it has a personal centre in Mary.' Nevertheless, we are left with an ambiguity in the postulate of the 'all-person' that comprises the whole of humanity. Bulgakov reflects that this all-person is the image of the tri-hypostatic person 'God.'

Bulgakov's discussion specifically relating to the restoration of humanity in his writing on the nature of the Church is intensified when his description of the creation of humanity is considered.<sup>552</sup> Humanity is the 'fourth' hypostasis, created out of the ecstatic movement of the kenotic love of the 'three hypostases,' called as the creaturely response of creation to communion with God. For Bulgakov this hypostatic response is given jointly by Christ and by Mary, the Mother of God, who remains united to her Son as the 'Unwedded Bride.' Jesus provides the male response, Mary provides the female response, and together they form the response of the 'fourth' hypostasis.

But the question remains: If the hypostasis of Christ is the Logos, the Second Hypostasis, can he also form part of the free response of the 'fourth,' created hypostasis?

In conclusion, Bulgakov, by uniting the dyadic Logos and Spirit in the institution and constitution of the Church, has come much closer to establishing the ontological space necessary for Creation to respond freely in love to the Creator's invitation.

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550 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p525

551 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p526

552 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p89, pp92-93

He has also developed a central place for the personhood of the spirit, whose manifestation is bodily. The whole of Creation is therefore caught up into the redemption of the world through the materiality of the Incarnation.

The kenotic nature of Christ's love is a manifestation in the economy of the nature of love in the Trinity. Identity of personhood in the Godhead is received, rather than defended as in Balthasar's conception. Likewise, the redemption of personhood in the economy is achieved through the reversal of the atomisation of humanity resulting from the fall. Instead each person is fulfilled, not through their individual union with God, but in becoming one with Christ and so shining with their unique hue of the pleroma of God. Humanity, itself, is united with God in Christ and thus becomes divinised. Each person becomes transparent, not in the sense of ceasing to exist, but in the sense of imaging the love of God, a note of harmony in the symphony of the transformed universe.

However, while his sophiology allows him to include the whole of creation in Christ's redemption by making it an image of God's own being for the world, Bulgakov's resulting ecclesiology is nevertheless fraught with tension. The two principal NT images of the Church with which he is most comfortable, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, fit very well with his insistence on the dyadic nature of the Revelation of God. Each is a description of the way in which the Second and Third Persons, as hypostases, possess the creaturely Sophia. The Logos possess the creaturely Sophia in Christ as his Body. The Spirit inhabits her through Mary who is the Temple par excellence.

Yet neither description is a hypostatic one – they remain descriptions of creaturely Sophia as such, not the Church. In this sense they fail to reflect the essential nature of the relations of the Son and the Spirit as hypostases, either with each other or with creaturely hypostases. That is, they fail to describe the hypostasised Church in the same way that a description of Divine Sophia as 'Glory' fails to describe the hypostasised Godhead.

The greatest tension in his ecclesiology, however, is in his interpretation of the Church as 'Bride'. Despite this being the only potentially hypostatic description of the Church of his three NT images, he defines it precisely as unhypostasised Sophia, both Divine and creaturely. Since divinisation of creation is accomplished through the uniting of the two, Bulgakov speaks of them as two brides that are to be wedded to each other!

This forced interpretation destroys the one description of the Church that naturally speaks of her as a hypostasis in her relation to God. Instead, his gender-constrained system of hypostatically imaging the Revelation (of male Logos and female Spirit) in the economy (male Christ and female Mary) means that 'bride' cannot be interpreted in a hypostatic manner, since it potentially destroys this imagery.

## **Chapter 4 Chavasse and the Biblical Background to the Bridal Metaphor**

### **4.1 The Spouse and Body of Christ**

At the same time that Bulgakov was working on the last volume of his Great Trilogy, *The Bride of the Lamb*, in Paris, Claude Chavasse published *The Bride of Christ: An Enquiry into the Nuptial Element in Early Christianity* (1940).<sup>553</sup> The purpose of his book was to inspire the Liturgical Movement of the Anglican Church at that time to return to a richer, and at the same time more primary (and more primitive), understanding of the ontology of the Church as Christ's Bride.<sup>554</sup>

Chavasse's method, typical of his time, is historical and theological. He begins by undertaking a survey of the notion of marriage in the religious thought and practices of the ancient near east, especially Hebrew thought and prophecy. He goes on to look at the bridal language of the Gospels, followed by St Paul's development of Christ as the second Adam and the Church as the new Eve, his bride. He argues that the metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ is derivative from this understanding. After looking at the book of Revelation he briefly outlines the interpretation of the great Church doctrines of atonement, salvation, redemption, baptism, incarnation, and eucharist in the light of this understanding of the Church.<sup>555</sup>

He then turns to trace the historical development of this doctrine through the early church fathers in both the East and the West, to Augustine, in whom he finds its zenith.<sup>556</sup> He believes that for Augustine the Church is almost always body and bride, both of which are equivalent terms referring to Christ's marriage to the Church. But the real high point of Augustine's doctrine is the recognition that the bridal chamber in which the marriage takes place is the Virgin's womb: the marriage is primarily about the Incarnation, the union of divinity, the bridegroom, with humanity, the bride, in

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553 It is extensively referred to as the main exposition of the bridal metaphor, including by Congar.

554 Chavasse, p222. In this his legacy appears to be a spectacular failure: the only references to the Church as 'bride' retained anywhere in *Common Worship* are: one mention in the marriage service; a version of the creed based on Revelation 22; the prayer for Psalm 45; four psalm canticles (34, 69, 70, 72); and readings drawn from Revelation 21 and 22. This compares with the routine description of the Church as the Body of Christ throughout *Common Worship*.

555 Chavasse is supported in finding reference to Church as bride or woman throughout the NT by Preston, who says 'Practically all the books of the New Testament reflect it in some form.' *Faces*, p78

556 Chavasse, *Bride*, p135



Christ.<sup>557</sup> Although Chavassee does not question Augustine, this interpretation is challenged in Chapter 5 of this study.

From this point on, he claims, there is a decline in the understanding of the Church as bride brought about by two developments: one through individualistic spirituality; the other through liturgical development.

The first of these, Chavassee contends, was due to the spiritual individualism of the monastic movement of the East arriving in the West through Jerome and Rufinus and popularised in the West by Ambrose in the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>558</sup> With the arrival of monastic spirituality comes the notion of the *soul* as the individual bride of Christ, rather than the Church. Although this idea was present in Tertullian and also Cyprian, it was from the teachings of Alexandrian neo-Platonism in the East that it gained popularity through Origen<sup>559</sup> and thence into monasticism through Macarius of Egypt,<sup>560</sup> and on into Gregory of Nyssa in his commentary on the Song of Songs.<sup>561</sup>

Chavassee believes that, alongside this development, arose the parallel notion that Mary as an individual, rather than the Church, was the second Eve, and consequently co-redemptrix with Christ, and thus the royal Queen of heaven. This was argued first by Irenæus,<sup>562</sup> and later by Cyril of Alexandria at the Council of Ephesus (431AD).<sup>563</sup> As a consequence of this official sanction of Mary as the Theotokos liturgical development took place that led to her replacing the Church as the bridal presence in heaven, and she, personally, became at once Christ's mother and his bride.

It is probable that Chavassee is being over-simplistic, particularly in his analysis of the role of Mary, who rather became a figure for the Church than its replacement. Nevertheless, the intense personalising of Mary's place in soteriology as found, for example, in Bulgakov, does lend some weight to his ideas.

He goes on to claim that these two developments, one populist, the other liturgical, ousted and eclipsed the Church's place as the Bride and second Eve throughout much of the rest of the Church's history in both the East and the West. This was especially so in the Middle Ages, although with one or two notable exceptions, at least until the Reformation when it was, to a degree, re-instated. Thus in the Anglican Book of

557 Chavassee, *Bride*, pp152-3

558 Chavassee, pp177-8

559 Chavassee, pp173-6

560 Chavassee, p176. He quotes from Macarius' *Spiritual Homily* 4.

561 Chavassee, p177

562 Chavassee, pp162-3

563 Chavassee, p164

Common Prayer the introduction to the marriage service refers explicitly to the union of Christ and the Church as the ground for Christian marriage. In the ordination of priests the Church is twice referred to as ‘the spouse and body of Christ.’<sup>564</sup> In the Communion service references to ‘abide’ and ‘dwell’ in Christ, being ‘very members incorporate in the Mystical Body’, coming to the ‘heavenly Feast in the marriage garment’, not being ‘absent from the Marriage of the King’s Son’, all demonstrate the re-integration of the primitive notion of the Church as the bride and body of Christ, rather than the soul or Mary. Likewise, the edited chapter headings for many of the psalms and the nuptial passages in Isaiah are, in the Authorised Version of the Bible, specifically attributed to the Church as Christ’s bride.<sup>565</sup>

Apart from the Reformation, Chavasse refers to an entry under ‘Marriage, Mystical’ in the (Roman) *Catholic Encyclopædia*, dated 1910, to demonstrate the almost complete absence of any concept of this subject relating to the Church, instead focussing almost exclusively on the marriage of the soul to Christ. The nuptial relationship had come to relate almost exclusively to the mysticism of an individualistic personal spirituality, coupled with the idea that Christ has many brides.<sup>566</sup>

He goes on to demonstrate that liturgically in the Roman Church the royalty that originally belonged to the Church has been exhaustively handed over to Mary as the Queen of Heaven.<sup>567</sup> Likewise in the Russian church, for whom he takes Bulgakov as his authority, Mary is identified liturgically as the heavenly bride of Christ,<sup>568</sup> an interpretation also found in this study of Bulgakov’s work, although nuanced to identify her as the personal centre of the Church.

His appeal is that we return to the corporate understanding of the Church as the personal bride and body of Christ, thus recovering the rich antidote to individualism and the inclusivity of the bridal ‘I’ of prayer in the psalms, and salvation of humanity in bridal flesh of Christ.

Before going on it is worth recapitulating, and occasionally developing, some of the biblical ideas on which Chavasse draws to demonstrate that the bridal motif was central to the early church’s self-understanding. The purpose of this is not to critically review all the biblical evidence or the historical origin and development of the nuptial

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564 Cf. *Common Worship*. See footnote 18.

565 Chavasse, *Bride*, pp76, 108-9, 216-221

566 Chavasse, *Bride*, pp211-4

567 Chavasse, pp214-6

568 Chavasse, pp165, 214, footnotes

metaphor, but rather to indicate its importance both to Israel and hence to the early Church. There is much that could be debated in his assessment, and indeed, elaborated, but Chavasse's thesis is robust enough, even after 70 years, to demonstrate that this is an often overlooked because not overt, but central, theme in the biblical narrative of God's relationship with humanity.

## **4.2 The Bride as Metaphor in the Old Testament**

Chavasse's approach to the OT nuptial references is to show that they are not an incorporation of pagan fertility rites from neighbouring religions, mainly on the grounds of Israel's monotheism. Although these elements were undoubtedly present in Israel it was this pagan religious activity that was described by the prophets as 'adulterous,' the 'prostitution' of the nation instead of its fidelity to Yahweh.

He identifies the emergence of the first true nuptial idea with Moses, through whom God makes a covenant with his chosen people. From here on they are considered the Bride of Yahweh, and are forbidden to enter into the nuptial fertility rites associated with the surrounding tribal nations.<sup>569</sup> The bridal metaphor is contained in all the major and many of the minor prophets but reaches its zenith in Hosea (8<sup>th</sup> C BC, which is the first biblical prophet to have compared, explicitly and systematically, the relationship between God and Israel to a marriage)<sup>570</sup>, Psalm 45, and the Song of Songs.<sup>571</sup> In the case of the latter two, a Messianic interpretation began to be observed in which 'the Bridegroom was understood as the Messiah.'<sup>572</sup>

The point of his survey of the OT is to demonstrate that the nuptial metaphor 'in primitive Christian thought is a legitimate inheritance from the Old Testament,'<sup>573</sup> and the notion that the Messiah was understood to be the bridegroom was already in existence.

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569 Chavasse, p23

570 Satlow ML, *Jewish Marriage*, p42

571 Chavasse, pp27-45

572 Chavasse, p44. Although Best considers the evidence slight (*Body*, p169), more recent scholarship has confirmed the messianic interpretation, especially found in the targum. See De Moor, *Love of God*, 1993.

573 Chavasse, p49

### 4.3 *The Bride in The Gospels*

John the Baptist, in John's Gospel, without any explanation, refers to himself as the 'friend of the bridegroom,' Christ as the 'bridegroom', and Israel (or, given that this is a Gospel, the Church) as the 'bride.'<sup>574</sup> From the beginning 'Bridegroom' is the natural and primary metaphor for speaking of the Messiah, and the Baptist is described as understanding his own role in terms of the preparation for the great marriage between Israel and Yahweh.<sup>575</sup> Similarly in the Synoptic Gospels, the prophecies cited concerning John the Baptist can be seen in the context of Yahweh coming for his bride.<sup>576</sup> That the coming of the Messiah is heralded in the Gospels in this way *requires* the nuptial metaphor to be taken as the guiding and primary interpretive background.

Furthermore, the importance of ceremonial baptism and washing in the Jewish marriage rite, *mikveh*, implores a little-considered dimension to the meaning of baptism and the ministry of John the Baptist. Preston points out that baptism is *explicitly* interpreted as *mikveh* in Ephesians 5:26.<sup>577</sup>

In the Synoptic Gospels, when Jesus is challenged about John the Baptist's disciples fasting while his do not, he responds by referring to himself as the Bridegroom and his disciples as the 'sons of the bridechamber,'<sup>578</sup> a specific group of friends who accompany the bridegroom to his wedding.<sup>579</sup> Jesus refers, on several occasions, to Israel as an adulterous generation, echoing the common theme of OT prophets' understanding of the Covenant as the marriage of Yahweh with Israel.<sup>580</sup> In a footnote Chavasse observes that the Songs of Songs forms the background to the parables of the husbandman and the vineyard,<sup>581</sup> and wonders in another footnote if the cleansing of the Temple is a 'sign' of the coming marriage between Christ and the Church.<sup>582</sup> In the great parable of the marriage banquet Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to the king's wedding feast for his son, a clear reference to the Messiah.<sup>583</sup> These references to a divine marriage are so natural and casual, incidental, almost, to the immediate point of the parables, Chavasse argues, that people must have already been familiar with the

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574 John 3:25-9

575 Chavasse, *Bride*, pp50-51

576 Is 40:3-4; Mal 3:1

577 Chavasse, pp50, 51, 53

578 Mark 2:19, not 'wedding guests' as translated in the ESV or 'guests of the bridegroom' in the NIV. See also Matt 9:14-15 and Luke 5:33-35

579 Chavasse, *Bride*, p54

580 Chavasse, *Bride*, p53; Mark 8:38; Matt 12:39, 16:4

581 Chavasse, *Bride*, p53, fn 2; Matt 21:33-45; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 13:6-9, 20:9-19

582 Chavasse, *Bride*, p50, fn 2

583 Matt 22:1-14. See also Luke 14:7-11 and 12-24

reference to this as the relationship between the coming Messiah and the ‘Daughter of Zion’. Certainly it was never one that aroused any comment as being unusual, even by those most fastidious of critics, the Pharisees.<sup>584</sup>

The royal wedding of Psalm 45 forms the background to Jesus’ parable of the ten virgins,<sup>585</sup> where Jesus comes closest to explicitly mentioning his ‘holy Bride,’ since ‘the virgins are her companions, not his.’<sup>586</sup> He goes on to point out that this parable is set in the context of Holy Week, two days before the Passover<sup>587</sup> and just after the triumphal entry and the cleansing of the Temple,<sup>588</sup> when ‘the air was vibrant with expectation. The Messiah had already ridden into Jerusalem to conquer and to claim his Bride,’ as both Matthew and John make explicit in quoting Zechariah 9:9.<sup>589</sup>

In the first of Jesus ‘signs’ in John’s Gospel, which of course takes place at a wedding,<sup>590</sup> Chavasse sees Jesus’ reply to Mary, not so much as a personal rebuke (he points out that she certainly doesn’t take it as such), as an address to humanity and a reference to his own forthcoming ‘hour,’ on the cross – the ‘hour’ of his own wedding. The implication is that after ‘his hour’ he will have to do with ‘Woman.’<sup>591</sup> Chavasse does not build much on this interpretation and could have made more of the location of the ‘first sign’ and its determinative place in the Gospel, linking it directly to the cleansing of the temple as the bride (or possibly bridal chamber), which follows immediately.<sup>592</sup> However, he does go on to note that Jesus takes the water of purification and turns it into the wine of Marriage, in anticipation of his own ‘hour of glory.’<sup>593</sup>

Chavasse sees the entire Passion narrative in terms of the marriage between the Messiah and the Church. Focussing primarily on the Fourth Gospel he identifies the Last Supper as the solemnisation of the Marriage. He states

Essentially the Passover itself was nuptial. The foundation of the Marriage between Yahweh and his People was the Covenant between them. That Covenant was made and ratified by the Passover.<sup>594</sup>

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584 Chavasse, *Bride*, pp50, 51, 53

585 Matt 25:1-13

586 Chavasse, *Bride*, p56

587 Matt 26:2

588 Matt 21:1-17

589 Chavasse, pp57, 60; Matt 21:5; John 12:15

590 John 2:1-11

591 Chavasse, *Bride*, pp59-60

592 See Barker M, *Temple Themes*, pp53-54

593 Chavasse, *Bride*, p63

594 Chavasse, *Bride*, p60

He then notes several features about the supper that ceremonially reflect a wedding feast, including the preparation of the house, hand-washing and benediction, the cup of wine and the blessing. However perhaps the most important element to which he draws attention is the content of Jesus' Farewell Discourse in the context of the wedding feast. Chavasse uses this context as a foil for interpreting Jesus' speech, but the whole probably makes more sense in the context of a betrothal feast, the first stage of the wedding, where the bridegroom addresses his bride to be. His opening words 'In my Father's house are many rooms... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also'<sup>595</sup> make sense only in this context.

Satlow has demonstrated that the Palestinian rabbinic tradition, with which Jesus and his disciples would have been familiar, located Jewish marriage firmly within the context of Genesis 2, the creation and bringing together of Adam and Eve by God. He also shows that the betrothal feast is the setting for the 'groom's blessing,' which again is explicitly based on Genesis 2.<sup>596</sup> The primal marriage of Adam and Eve and the marriage relationship of God to Israel thus form the context in which these events are located.

Seen in this light, the Last Supper and many of the major themes of John 14 to 16, such as those concerning love, God as Father, not leaving the disciples as orphans, making homes, vines and fruit, abiding, coming from and going to the Father, the coming 'hour,' all make sense in a coherent manner. This context of betrothal and marriage also provides the background continuity between Jesus and Paul for the future development of Paul's more explicit theology of the Second Adam, Christ's Body, and the Bride, as well as John's bridal language in Revelation.

Chavasse interprets the crucifixion as the consummation of the marriage after the marriage feast. Using St John's approach to the cross as the glorification of Christ, he sees the ascent of Christ bearing his own cross to Golgotha (John 19:17) as the royal bridegroom of the 45<sup>th</sup> psalm going to his wedding. The ransom paid by Hosea for his bride prefigures the ransom Christ pays for his Church (Hosea 3:2-3, Mark 10:45). And as Hosea foresees the Temple sacrifices being superseded through his marriage (Hosea 3:3-4) so it is fulfilled as the veil of the Temple is rent asunder (Mark 15:38). All this is in the context of the Passover.<sup>597</sup> However, it would make more sense of Christ's own

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<sup>595</sup> John 14:2-3

<sup>596</sup> Satlow, *Marriage*, p61ff

<sup>597</sup> Chavasse, *Bride*, pp64-65

teaching, especially in relation to his departure and subsequent return, to see this as part of the same betrothal event as the Passover meal.

#### **4.4 The Bride in St Paul**

Chavasse, like Satlow, identifies in Paul's writings a fully developed nuptial theology built on the OT idea of marriage between God and Israel and the marriage myth of Genesis 2.<sup>598</sup> Chavasse attributes the introduction of the 'type' of the Edenic marriage as applying to that between Christ and the Church to Paul. However Satlow has shown that the Edenic marriage was already being utilised in the Qumran community as the basis for understanding contemporary marriage: it was not, therefore, so great a step to link the Edenic marriage to the marriage metaphor between Christ and the Church.<sup>599</sup>

Nevertheless, Chavasse traces a development in Paul's nuptial theology from an early dependence on the Prophetic tradition of the marital metaphor (for example, Gal 4:21-31) to a comprehensive Adamic interpretation. He observes that, although the theology is never centre-stage, it is an assumed given, known to Paul's readers, and he is constantly using it to give context to his arguments, for example on Christian unity, against fornication, love in family life, spiritual constancy, the pre-eminence of Christ over all creation.<sup>600</sup> Paul's theology of Christ as the Second Adam, prefigured by the First (Rom 5:14), naturally extends to Eve prefiguring the Bride of Christ, which he identifies explicitly in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3.<sup>601</sup> This is an important point: Paul's use of Adam as 'type,' particularly in the context of the fall, *must* include Eve implicitly, since she is central to the story. 2 Cor 11:3 is simply the verification of that fact.

Once it is identified, Chavasse easily finds this nuptial theology throughout Paul's theology of the Incarnation, in which Christ's body is extended to give rise to the Bride in the same way that Adam's was extended to give rise to Eve. Thus, references to Christ's 'body,' and Christ as 'the head of the body,' should be understood in the context of Genesis 2:23: 'bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh.' Indeed, it is this that underlies 'the whole elaborate doctrine of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.'<sup>602</sup> Furthermore, this marriage of Christ and the Church is the archetypal marriage from

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598 Satlow, *Marriage*, pp48-49

599 Satlow, p60

600 Chavasse, *Bride*, p66: 1 Cor 12:27; 1 Cor 6:15-20; Eph 5:22ff; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 1:22-25. Best admits as much when speaking of Eph 5:22ff., *Body*, pp172-173

601 Chavasse, *Bride*, pp68-69. Best notes that in this passage the marriage has not yet taken place although the betrothal has. *Body*, p171

602 Chavasse, *Bride*, pp70-71: e.g. Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 6:13-20; Eph 4:4-5; Col 1:24; Col 3:15

which all human marriages derive their significance. This is the point of Ephesians 5:22ff.<sup>603</sup> And this background then requires the theological interpretation of Paul's discussion on the relationship between husbands and wives to be seen as a discussion about Christ's relationship with the Church – husbands and wives are types, not genders, since there is 'neither male nor female in Christ.'<sup>604</sup>

Chavassee goes on to point out that in the Hebrew Bible (and in the Septuagint) Eve is 'built' from Adam's rib in Genesis 2:22, a point that both later rabbinic midrash and Augustine also develops.<sup>605</sup> He claims that Paul uses the exact same language to speak of the Body of Christ being 'built up,'<sup>606</sup> and that this may also form the prophetic link between the Bride and the city of Zion,<sup>607</sup> which later in Revelation, is the New Jerusalem, where the two are explicitly equated (Rev 21:9-10).

Christ's death on the cross is thus prefigured by Adam's sleep, and the new Bride, who replaces the old Bride (Israel) widowed through the death of the Law, is prefigured by Eve being built up from his side. However, the notion of redemption and reconciliation in the OT prophets shows that the nuptial idea is not enslaved to a rigorous single line of thought, but an amalgam of several different, but related, strands: the Bride is both old and new.<sup>608</sup>

Nevertheless, Chavassee believes Paul has broken away from the prophetic tradition in three ways:<sup>609</sup>

1. The prophets spoke of the Church as a fallen wife restored to honour. For St Paul she is a new Bride.
2. The prophets called her a mother of children. St Paul says that Christians are members or parts of her.
3. For the prophets the Nuptial Idea is only an allegory. For St Paul it is the great reality.

The first point is not beyond dispute: there is evidence that Paul sees the Bride of Christ as continuous with the restored remnant of the Bride of Yahweh. For example in

603 Chavassee, *Bride*, pp72-75

604 Chavassee, pp76-77; Gal 3:28

605 Satlow, *Marriage*, pp62-63; Augustine, *The City of God*, XXII.17

606 A point fully supported by other scholars, eg Best, *Body*, pp160-161

607 Chavassee, pp77-78; eg 1 Cor 6:19; Eph 2:20-21, 4:12-16,29; Col 2:7,19

608 Chavassee, pp79-81. It is not something Chavassee considers but in John's Gospel the opening three events in Jesus' ministry of wedding, Temple cleansing, and being born again (Jn 2-3) co-inhere and make integral sense when considered in terms of the Bride of Yahweh being 'born again,' complemented by the nuptial washing in Jn 13.

609 Chavassee, p82



speaking of the restoration of Israel in Romans 11:26-27, just after he has spoken of the Gentiles being grafted on to the olive tree of Israel, Paul quotes the beginning of the great passage in Isaiah (59:20-62:12) which can be read in the light of Isaiah 61:10-11 and 62:2-5 as the nuptial celebration between God and Israel. Furthermore, the Bible can happily refer to a 'bride' as a 'wife' and vice versa.<sup>610</sup> Thus the new bride is the one tree comprising Israel and the Gentiles.

Chavasse, however, prefers to see a development in Paul's thinking as he moves away from the prophetic idea in his earlier writings (Galatians, Corinthians, although also present in Ephesians, which he attributes to Paul) towards the Edenic and Adamic in his later writings, but the evidence is not compelling. For example in Romans 9 (vv24-29) Paul uses Hosea and Isaiah to make the point that Jews and Gentiles are brought together to become God's 'beloved,' and 'sons of the living God.'

Chavasse identifies the marriage of the individual soul to God as possibly being found in some of Paul's writings as a secondary dogma.<sup>611</sup> However, even here the primary referent is still the Church rather than the individual. But a careful exegesis of, for example, 1 Cor 6:13-20 (especially vv15-17) demonstrates that the only coherent interpretation is not that of individual souls joining to Christ, but that of the catholicity of each person. A person is both a 'member' of Christ's Bridal body (v16), but also the whole Bride resides in each single concrete body (v17), since Christ, himself, is united with the prostitute (v15, and thus by implication, in the context, so is the rest of his 'body') through the individual's actions. Paul moves freely between the singular catholic body (v18) and the singular corporate body (v19, = temple, which follows on from 1 Cor 3:16-17 in which 'you' (pl.) are 'God's temple' (sing.)), identifying the two: being joined to the Lord means being one spirit with him, and therefore there is one body – physically single and yet corporate, and so catholic.<sup>612</sup>

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610 Eg Mary is referred to as Joseph's wife even though they are only betrothed (Mt 1:24), and the heavenly Jerusalem is the both 'wife' and 'bride' of the Lamb in the same verse (Rev 21:9) although the wedding has yet to take place.

611 Chavasse, *Bride*, pp83-85: eg Gal 2:20, 1 Cor 6:16; Rom 7:4; 2 Cor 11:2. However Muirhead insists there is no basis in the NT for this understanding. He states 'In the NT the Bride is collective, never the individual Christian. The mystical marriage of the believer to Christ has no basis in the NT and it must be regretted that its extravagant language has done a great deal to bring into disfavour the proper NT symbolism.' *The Bride of Christ*, 175-187. Cf. Best who believes Rom 7:4 is precisely about the marriage of the individual to Christ (*Body*, p53).

612 See, eg. Bulgakov, *Bride*, p255 and Volf's discussion in *Likeness*, pp142-143. See also p187 and footnote 627, below.

## 4.5 *The Bride in Other New Testament Writings*

Chavasse finds further signs of the ‘Nuptial Idea,’ as he terms it, in Hebrews, which opens with the nuptial Psalm 45, and in the epistles of Peter and James, including the themes of living, growing, buildings and begottenness, dwelling, vines, fruitfulness etc.<sup>613</sup> He also devotes a full chapter to the book of Revelation.<sup>614</sup>

Acknowledging the diversity of imagery and genre within this apocalyptic writing he describes the overarching picture as one of a contest between two groups of three characters: one on the side of Righteousness, the others being caricatures on the side of Evil. On the side of Righteousness are God with his angels, Jesus the Lamb, and the Bride, the New Jerusalem; opposite these are Satan with his demons, the Beast, and the Whore, Babylon. Without going into the detail of his interpretation of the imagery, which he bases on the work of Henry Goudge,<sup>615</sup> he identifies the Mother of Christ in Revelation 12:1-6, which is clearly Israel, with the Heavenly Bride in Revelation 19:6-9, the Church.<sup>616</sup> This identification is far from obvious, especially as he also equates the Babylonian Whore with Israel, or ‘the Jewish Church,’<sup>617</sup> although he does justify the identity between the Mother and the Bride by noting that ‘the Christian Church is the “Faithful Remnant” of the Jewish Church.’<sup>618</sup> Thus there are two women: the fallen Bride of Yahweh, Babylon, the unfaithful Jewish nation, eventually destroyed and devoured by the Beast upon which she rode (Rome);<sup>619</sup> and the new Bride, called out of Babylon (Rev 18:4), the faithful remnant, she who gave birth to Christ, the New Jerusalem, the Church.<sup>620</sup> The idea of the faithful remnant being identified with the new Bride has strong echoes with Paul’s theology of the salvation of the Jews in Romans 11 (see above).

He concludes by interpreting the closing scenes Revelation 21 and 22 as the Pauline vision of the New Eden, with the New Adam and the New Eve, in the garden in which are the Water of Life and the Tree of Life, but no longer with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.<sup>621</sup>

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613 Chavasse, pp85-88

614 Chavasse, Ch 4, pp89-98

615 Oxford Regius Professor of Divinity, 1923-39

616 Chavasse, p96

617 Chavasse, *Bride*, p93

618 Chavasse, p95

619 Chavasse, pp93-94

620 Chavasse, pp96-97

621 Chavasse, p98

In the following section of his work, Chavassee seeks to identify nuptial themes in each of the major Christian doctrines: atonement, salvation, redemption, baptism, incarnation and eucharist.<sup>622</sup> In particular, the Eucharist is the consummation of Christ's marriage with his Church, the true communion between Christ and his Bride, not the adultery of fellowship with demons that provokes jealousy (1 Cor 10:20-22). He finds support for this understanding in several prayers and exhortations in the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>623</sup>

## 4.6 *New Testament Scholarship*

Perhaps Chavassee's work is so old that modern NT scholarship no longer needs to consider his findings.<sup>624</sup> However, in the past several studies have attempted to discount his thesis, notably those of Best and Batey.<sup>625</sup> Best's is the earliest and most comprehensive. Batey simply agrees with Best, who writes:

Chavassee deduces the description of the Church as the Body of Christ from the nuptial idea as found in both Old and New Testaments. The Church 'is only the Body of Christ because she is primarily the mystical Bride of Christ' (p71). If this is so, then it is difficult to explain why Paul put so much emphasis on the former idea and so little upon the latter. The two ideas are only related in his last Epistle (if for the moment we assume Paul did write Ephesians). It is much easier to suppose that the two metaphors were connected after each had been used separately rather than that either was the cause of the other.<sup>626</sup>

However, this dismissal is not quite so complete and satisfactory as has been assumed. For example, it ignores all the rabbinic nuptial teaching based on Adam, which understood marriage in terms of 'becoming one flesh' and 'bone of my bones.' If Paul is interpreting Adam as a forerunner and type of Christ, the link between Adam and Eve and Christ and his Bride is already there. If Chavassee is right, the contrast in emphasis between the body and bride metaphors described by Best is a false one: references to Church as the Body of Christ *are* references to the Church as Bride – the bridal metaphor, which is by far the older, is the boat in which the body metaphor sails. The greater use of the body metaphor is just a product of the occasional nature of the

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622 Chavassee, pp99-109

623 Chavassee, pp108-109

624 Eg. JDG Dunn's 800 page monograph on *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (1998) does not have a single reference to Chavassee, or even to the Church as bride. Neither do NT Wright's *The New Testament and the People of God* (1992), D Wenham's *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity* (1995), or B Witherington III's *Paul's Narrative Thought World* (1994). However, neither does the much earlier, but shorter, Pauline theology of CK Barrett, despite its focus on Adam (1962), *From First Adam to Last*.

625 Batey RA, 'Jewish Gnosticism and the 'Heiros Gamos' of Eph V:21-33', 1963; Batey RA, 'The *Μία Σαρξ* of Christ and the Church', 1967

626 Best, *One Body in Christ*, p92

epistles: it has more ethical applications relating to the internal relations within the Church than the bridal one, which is more eschatological, and therefore ontological, in nature. However, when issues of false worship arise, which is what threatens the Church's relation with God, and hence its ontology, it is often the bridal metaphor to which recourse is made, as it was in the OT.<sup>627</sup>

In particular, Paul, in writing to the Corinthians to elucidate the *ontological* significance of bodily activities in our relation with Christ, explicitly links the OT prophetic bridal metaphor of idol worship as nuptial adultery with the body metaphor of Genesis 2 (1 Cor 6:15-20). Most commentators consider this passage to simply refer to civil prostitution or promiscuity, and therefore treat it only from the perspective of sexual morality. They are left with rather perplexed, uncertain and lame explanations for the references to 'food' and 'stomach' in v13.<sup>628</sup>

However the passage must refer to *temple* prostitution, for under what other conceivable circumstance would Paul describe a *man* as becoming a '*member of a prostitute*,' i.e. a woman, through an act of sexual union, in contrast to a '*member of Christ*.' In all other cases where this Edenic metaphor is used, the woman becomes a member of the man – the bride becomes the body of the husband who is the head, and thus the two are 'one flesh.' In this case, however, the reverse happens, and the man takes the place of the woman, becomes the female, as it were, becomes one of *her* members. God is always the male in the prophetic nuptial descriptions and the creature always the female. Christ is the male in this passage, and yet the men (and they are men here) being addressed are considered as female in the metaphor – both in relation to Christ *and to the prostitute*. The prophetic metaphor is most often used when speaking about Israel's fidelity to Yahweh in the context of worship: the nuptial metaphor is a description of divine worship. In this case the man, through sexual union, becomes a member of 'the prostitute' rather than the temple deity because 'we know that an idol has no real existence' (1 Cor 8:4, see also Brueggemann on the OT usage of this metaphor, e.g. *Theology*, p360). So Paul has used the combined prophetic and Edenic descriptions of the nuptial relationship to speak of the whole body participating in worship, and thus becoming one with the deity being worshipped. And he has done so without any background explanation being required: the inner workings of the metaphor are just assumed common knowledge.

627 Eg 1 Cor 6:15; see p184, above. Eg also 1 Cor 10:6-22 (esp vv 8-9, 14-22), 2 Cor 11:2, although cf Col 2:19.

628 Eg Best, referring to κοιλία (stomach) says 'presumably it is therefore something whose nature is entirely physical.' *Body*, p74

This then also makes sense of the body, united with Christ through the presence of the Spirit, being described as the temple of the Spirit in this context (1 Cor 6:19). The Spirit is the betrothal gift given to the bride, thus joining the bride to Christ, and who is therefore no longer her own person having been ‘bought with a price’ (1 Cor 6:20) – precisely the point made in the following passage concerning the relation between husbands and wives (1 Cor 7:4). Thus the notions of ‘temple’ and ‘bride’ are also identified with each other, again making sense of the Jewish notion of Eve being ‘built up’ from Adam, the bride being ‘builded’ from the husband, the two together forming ‘one building,’ one flesh.<sup>629</sup>

Furthermore, this exposition of the divine marriage also forms the introduction to the next two chapters on human marriage and idolatry, including a discussion on the moral implications, but ontological unimportance, of eating food offered to idols, which ontology Paul has already dismissed in one line in 1 Cor 6:13 in his introduction to the section. These are, as shown, both intimately related to, and expressions of, the divine marriage. Thus the whole central section of this letter to the Corinthians has, as its theological entelechy, the conjoined notion of the OT prophetic and Edenic bridal images.

Paul also speaks of the ‘joining’ between ‘members of Christ’ and Christ in terms of nuptial (or sexual) union in this passage, again based on Adam in Genesis 2 – a point made by Best, himself. Best concludes that this being ‘joined’ to Christ means that his (Christ’s) members ‘form rather one person,’ which is the point of Paul’s argument in referring it to Genesis.<sup>630</sup> Furthermore, he notes the similarity of language interchange between *σῶμα* and *σάρξ* in this passage and the great nuptial passage in Ephesians 5.<sup>631</sup> He even concedes that Paul might see the Church as the second Eve:

The reference to Eve in 2 Cor 11:3 suggests the possibility that Paul regarded the Church as the second Eve, just as he regarded Christ as the second Adam; as God presented Eve to Adam, so Paul presents the Corinthian Church to Christ,<sup>632</sup>

However, he concludes by saying that, because Paul cannot be said to have ‘begotten’ the *whole* Church, he cannot present the whole church to Christ. In consequence he must be addressing only the Corinthian church and ‘we cannot therefore accept the idea that the [whole] Church is the second Eve,’ and later ‘if Eve is identified with the

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629 Cf Eph 2:21 where the saints ‘grow’ into a temple. See Chavasse, *Bride*, pp77-78

630 Best, *Body*, p76

631 Best, *Body*, p177

632 Best, *Body*, p171

Church, she is identified with the local congregation and not with the whole Church.<sup>633</sup> Best's line of reasoning leaves unanswered alternatives, including the possibility of Paul seeing himself as a type of the Forerunner as the apostle to the Gentiles, a point made by Chavasse, supported by Augustine, and unaddressed by Best.<sup>634</sup> More importantly, it demands that Paul conceives the individualisation of congregations into a multiplicity of virgins, each of which has been betrothed to Christ by its founder, and each of which will be presented to him as a bride. Thus Christ must have many brides since there are many churches. Perhaps we are supposed to think of Christ as a type of Solomon but with an almost infinite harem!<sup>635</sup> Such a conception of the Church is wholly at odds with Paul's theology as expressed elsewhere (e.g. 1 Cor 12:13). If this is a serious proposition a similar argument ought to be advanced that Christ must also have many bodies, but not even Best suggests this.<sup>636</sup> To insist that Eve should therefore be identified with a single congregation but the Body of Christ is the whole church is inconsistent logically, theologically, and ontologically.<sup>637</sup> Given this evidence, Best's easy dismissal of Chavasse's understanding seems a little premature.

Later Best tackles Chavasse's arguments more systematically, although the proposition he addresses concerns the extent to which, in Ephesians 5:22ff, Paul is more reliant on the prophetic tradition or Genesis.<sup>638</sup> It is worth considering the more important of these objections because they are not quite as robust as they might appear, and Chavasse's notion that the body metaphor is derivative from the bride, and that this underlies much New Testament and Early Church ecclesial ontology, is, again, not so easily ruled out.

Best lists six arguments made by Chavasse in support of his idea that the nuptial metaphor in Ephesians 5:22-33 depends more on Genesis than the prophetic tradition. The point of the debate is that the Genesis tradition sees the union of husband and wife as the creation of one flesh, one body, of which the husband is the head, thus linking the body and bride metaphors. Nowhere in the prophetic tradition of Yahweh and his bride is the union envisaged in this way: indeed it would have been considered blasphemous to speak of Israel as the 'body' of Yahweh, although parallels between Paul's use of

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633 Best, *Body*, p180

634 Chavasse, *Bride*, p69

635 Indeed, St Francis of Sales (1567-1622) sees in Solomon a figure of Jesus' marriage to a vast number of souls, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Book X, Ch IV.

636 Although see Volf who argues that each local church is indeed the body of Christ, but in a nonorganic sense, *Likeness*, p 142

637 See, for example, Dulles' comment 'According to the New Testament...it would be out of the question for Christ to have several bodies, several brides, or for there to be several Temples or new Israels,' *Models*, p131

638 Best, *Body*, pp180-181

Eve's disobedience (2 Cor 11:3) and the frequent description in the prophetic tradition of Israel's infidelity have been noted.<sup>639</sup>

Chavasse's argument does not depend on which tradition was pre-eminent, since both were obviously used by the early church. His point is that the Edenic tradition became metaphorical rather than merely allegorical, and thus ontologically definitive for the early church. This Edenic tradition already existed in Judaism and was taken up by the Church, so the 'body' metaphor was naturally derivative for Paul. However, Best wants to demonstrate that the prophetic tradition was being used because there is no 'body' associated with that tradition and therefore 'body' and 'bride' must come from different sources.

He begins by denying Chavasse's claim that Gen 2:24 lies at the heart of this Eph 5 passage. Instead, he believes it is only an OT quotation introduced 'to corroborate an argument which has already been established.' But he has himself already said that 'the subjection of the Church to Christ and its relationship to him as wife is assumed as known' at the beginning of the passage. An argument is established, in v23, whereby the husband is head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body. But on what is it based? The 'given' is that 'Christ is the head of the church, his body' *is a bridal metaphor*. This understanding is not defended: it is simply a statement of what everyone already knows to be the case. From where does this metaphor come? Best offers no explanation. It is just assumed. This is precisely Chavasse's point – the Edenic bridal metaphor that links the body and the bride forms the backdrop, is part of the 'presupposition pool' of the early church to which the Ephesians letter is addressed. The argument is not 'finally clinched'<sup>640</sup> by the quotation from Genesis 2: it is the natural ground of all that has gone before, the vocalisation of the assumed background. As Best, himself, concedes it refers 'to the general thought of the whole passage' (vv22-33). That is because it is the theological idea underpinning it.

Best's next point concerns doubts over whether Paul does identify the church with Eve in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, and in any case 'if Eve is identified with the Church, she is identified with the local congregation and not with the whole Church.' As discussed above,<sup>641</sup> if we are to consider a degree of consistency in Paul's thinking and ontology of the Church, Best's argument is unacceptable.

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639 Batey, *Paul's Bridal Image*, p177

640 Best, *Body*, p179

641 p188

The third point relates to whether the body metaphor is dependent on the bridal metaphor (Chavasse), or they are independent of each other but combined in this instance (Best, supported by Batey<sup>642</sup>). Best rejects Chavasse's argument because he believes the reasoning in Ephesians 5:22-33 runs thus:

from the nuptial metaphor the author sees Christ and the Church as husband and wife; but the Church is also his Body; therefore she must be his Body; therefore the two are one; and he clinches the matter with the quotation of Gen 2:24.<sup>643</sup>

But this logic is simply not in the text. The opening line of the argument (v23) is that Christ *is the head* of the Church, his body: in the same way the husband is the head of the wife. The logic is just that to be a husband is to be the head, to be the wife is to be the body. Right from the outset husband and wife, Christ and his Church, are head and body, and this is just assumed, not explained. There is no linear reasoning here, but, as previously explained, the whole passage is an exposition of a presupposed doctrine.<sup>644</sup>

The main point of Best's last argument appears to be that

the essence of Chavasse's argument boils down to the statement that Paul works from the divine marriage to the human, and not vice versa. That must be admitted as true. Does it necessarily follow, however, that the divine marriage is not allegory but reality?...it is permissible to alter a metaphor but not to change reality. Thus we conclude that in Eph 5:22-33 we are not faced with reality but with metaphor or analogy.

Elsewhere he uses a similar line of reasoning to dismiss reality on the basis of metaphor.<sup>645</sup>

The contention that reality and metaphor are mutually exclusive has been shown to be a fallacy.<sup>646</sup> Furthermore, if there was no ontological basis to the description of the Christ's relationship with the Church as groom and bride, vv31-32 become devoid of any meaning or content, and the whole passage loses its integrity – it becomes mere moralising.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the objections raised against Chavasse's interpretation of the bridal metaphor are not without their own serious difficulties. There remain compelling reasons to suppose that, at least in broad outline, he was correct. Indeed, there has been

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642 Batey, *Μία Σαρχ*, p270 n3

643 Best, *Body*, pp180-181

644 pError: Reference source not found

645 Best, *Body*, p101

646 Eg. Gunton, *Actuality of Atonement*, 1988



renewed interest recently, both theologically and biblically, confirming his premise, with Tait quite explicitly weakening Best's rejection and arguing in favour of Chavasse.<sup>647</sup> The most significant detail where Chavasse is perhaps too hasty is in the over-realisation of his nuptial eschatology. Best and Batey are right in pointing out that for Paul the wedding has not yet happened – only the betrothal has taken place.<sup>648</sup> the bride, although bought with a price and endowed with the earnest-money of the Spirit, is still being 'built up.'

This recognition, that the combined OT prophetic and Edenic bridal metaphor forms the theological background to much New Testament imagery, in turn opens up a plethora of possible allusions to it, as recognised by Tait. Language referring to being 'washed' and 'sanctified,' 'belonging to Christ,' 'paid for,' 'faithfulness,' provoking God to 'jealousy,' 'fellowship,' 'household,' 'being clothed in righteousness,' for example, can all be readily and illuminatingly interpreted in this light. Indeed references to the law and the covenant will resonate more strongly in the context of the nuptial metaphor, since this was one of the primary means of interpreting the covenant in Israel. There is therefore much work still to be done in sounding these themes and metaphors in the light of this nuptial ontology.

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647 Eg Volf, *Likeness*, 1998, p243; Tait, 'The Two shall become One', 2008

648 Although Tait notes a fluidity in the language of bride/wife that probably depends on the degree of eschatological realisation required in the force of the argument, 'The Two shall become One', p86

## **Chapter 5 Towards A Personal Ontology Of The Church**

*“And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.” (sic)*

One of the fundamental questions of ecclesiology relates to the *who* of the Church.

Bulgakov’s description of the her as body and temple appertain to the hypostasis of the Logos and the presence of the Spirit. Some prominent theologians believe there is nothing else to say. Zizioulas, for example, insists that Christ, and Christ alone, is the I of the Church. For him, the Church is entirely somatic – it is the Body of Christ, gathered around him in communion. To say otherwise would endanger the identity of the catholicity of Christ and the overcoming of individuality. For this reason he never refers to the Church as Bride.<sup>649</sup>

But this means that the free response of Creation to God’s invitation *has not been answered*. The Logos and the Spirit *issue* the Invitation from the Father. The work of the Word and the Spirit within Creation, in the kenotic love of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Pentecost, *enable and empower* it to respond through Baptism and Eucharist. But, with reference to Rublev’s icon, they are already seated around the table – the eternal perichoresis of the Holy Trinity has never been, could never be, disrupted. There is no need for them to answer the Invitation. The Invitation, then, which was issued in the very act of creation, is to the *Other*. It is not the Logos, who is the hypostasis of Jesus Christ, that needs to respond: it is that which was created by God in freedom and called to respond to God in love. That is the whole point of the bridal image throughout Scripture.

But do we participate as many, or as one?

### **5.1 Incarnation, Baptism, and the Birth of the Bride**

The conversation with Congar and Bulgakov has, to a great extent, revolved around the nature of the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit in the immanent and economic Trinity on the one hand, and between God and creation on the other. Since the Church is born out of the work of both the Son and the Spirit in creation, an understanding of the nature of these relationships is crucial to understanding the nature,

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649 See McPartlan P, ‘Who is the Church’

and hence ontology of the Church. In particular, the question arises as to whether the Church can be considered to have, in any sense, a hypostatic existence over and against that of Christ that answers ‘Yes’ to his invitation to the wedding banquet, or whether the ‘Thou’ of the Church is already included in the hypostasis of Jesus, himself.

There are two key events in the life of Jesus in which both these relationships are fundamentally exposed: the Incarnation and the baptism of Jesus. Speaking of Jesus’ baptism, Irenæus brings them together:

For inasmuch as the Word of God was man from the root of Jesse, and son of Abraham, in this respect did the Spirit of God rest upon Him, and anoint Him to preach the Gospel to the lowly (Is 61:1). But inasmuch as He was God, He did not judge according to glory, nor reprove after the manner of speech...For He called all men that mourn; and granting forgiveness to those who had been led into captivity by their sins, He loosed them from their chains...Therefore did the Spirit of God descend upon Him, [the Spirit] of Him who had promised by the prophets that He would anoint Him, so that we, receiving from the abundance of His unction, might be saved.<sup>650</sup>

For Irenæus both the Incarnation and the baptism of Jesus were soteriological events in which the Word and Spirit were active, but they fulfilled different functions which were manifested at his baptism. The Word became flesh through the Spirit (‘inasmuch as He was God’) in order, not to judge according to glory, but to grant the forgiveness of God to humanity (Is 11:1-5). But in his baptism his flesh, his humanity (‘inasmuch as He was man’), received the anointing of the Holy Spirit that the rest of humanity might receive restoration and new life in the Spirit (Is 61:1-3). Thus, in his divinity Jesus faces the world, offering God’s forgiveness from among us. In his humanity he faces God with us, receiving the gift of God – the Holy Spirit, God dwelling in man that man might dwell in God – that we too might receive.<sup>651</sup> So in the person of Jesus God and man face each other, as it were, divinity and humanity brought into communion in a single hypostasis. And the incarnating agent in both cases is the Holy Spirit.

### **5.1.1 Incarnation – Augustine and the Bride**

The Incarnation, through the work of the Holy Spirit, unites the Word of God with the flesh of humanity. Bulgakov notes that Theodore of Mopsuestia describes the union of the two natures of Christ as a marriage.<sup>652</sup> Disappointingly, and somewhat inexplicably,

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650 Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, III.9.3

651 Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, III.19.1; III.20.2

652 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p38

however, he never explores Augustine's rich and pervasive nuptial theology anywhere in his trilogy, which is exactly an exposition of this theme.<sup>653</sup>

For Augustine, as Chavassee points out, the great marriage spoken of in the Gospels is the wedding of divinity with humanity, which takes place in the Incarnation.<sup>654</sup> The location of this wedding, its union and consummation, takes place in the bridal chamber, which is the womb of the Virgin Mary:

The nuptial union is that of 'the Word,' and the flesh. The Bridechamber of this union, the Virgin's womb. For the flesh itself was united to the Word: whence also it is said, 'Henceforth they are not twain, but one flesh.' The Church was assumed unto Him out of the human race: so that the Flesh itself, being united to the Word, might be the Head of the Church: and the rest who believe, members of that Head.<sup>655</sup>

This marriage, in which the Word is the bridegroom and humanity the bride, is a marriage of natures. Although Augustine speaks of the Word as the bridegroom, which is a hypostasis, the flesh he unites with himself in the bridal chamber becomes 'one flesh' with him, such that there is one person, not two, 'henceforth they are not twain.' There remains one person, Jesus Christ. That Augustine is speaking about human nature is made clear by the fact that he always goes on to speak of Christ as the head of the body in an organic, albeit mystical, sense. The rest of humanity becomes clothed with the flesh of Christ's humanity, and in this way they become his body of which he is the head. For example:

For the Word was the Bridegroom, and human flesh the bride; and both one, the Son of God, the same also being Son of man. The womb of the Virgin Mary, in which He became head of the Church, was His bridal chamber.<sup>656</sup>

The Church is joined to Christ's flesh, his human nature, and thus becomes his body – but the marriage, itself, is between the two natures of Christ. Augustine bases this interpretation on the passage from Isaiah in which one person speaks as both bridegroom and bride, an interpretation which he probably takes from Tyconius' First Rule with which he was so impressed:<sup>657</sup>

For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.<sup>658</sup>

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653 He is, however, quite ready to criticise Augustine's doctrines of original sin, human freedom, and predestination. (see *Bride*, eg. pp166ff; pp204ff; pp212ff)

654 Chavassee, *Bride*, pp152-153

655 Augustine, *Hom. Ps.* XLV.3; see also *Hom. Ps.* XIX.6; *Hom. 1 John*, I.2

656 Augustine, *Tract. John*, VIII.4

657 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, III.31.44

658 Is 61:10

Thus he interprets the bride and the bridegroom as a single person, but with two natures: the bridegroom is the Word of God in his divinity while the bride is the humanity (the ‘Flesh’) to which he joins himself in the person of Jesus.

There are at least three difficulties with Augustine’s interpretation of the marriage as between the divine and human natures of Christ. Firstly, the union is seen as between two different natures. Secondly, in Genesis the union refers to persons not natures. Thirdly, the marriage has already been consummated and completed in Mary’s womb, leaving no place for the eschatological dimension prevalent in the New Testament.

#### **5.1.1.1     *The Union of Natures***

Firstly, the unity of which is spoken in the passage in Genesis 2:24, from which he continually quotes, does not refer to two different natures, but one common humanity. The union only exists as ‘one flesh’ precisely because, as Adam says in the preceding verse, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’ (Gen 2:23). The union derives from the fact that the female is taken from the male (Gen 2:21-22) – they are of the same nature and thus belong together. For Augustine’s interpretation to make any sense of this context the ‘female’ that is united to the ‘male’ to create the one flesh must derive, be taken from it. That is, the ‘humanity/flesh’ (female) must be taken from the ‘divinity’ (male) in order to be re-united with it to make the one flesh. Otherwise the two becoming ‘one flesh’ makes no sense. While Bulgakov might make sense of this understanding with his concept of God-manhood, Divine and creaturely Sophia, Augustine does not. Instead, he transfers this aspect of the passage to refer to the cross.

Augustine interprets the phrase ‘Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife’ (Gen 2:24) as referring to the Word, who leaves the Father in heaven, and his mother, the Jewish church, to be united to the Church in his flesh:

He left His Father, not that He forsook or departed from His Father, but that He did not appear unto men in that form in which He was equal with the Father. But how did He leave His mother? By leaving the synagogue of the Jews, of which, after the flesh, He was born, and by cleaving to the Church which He has gathered out of all nations.<sup>659</sup>

However, when he refers to the previous verses in which Eve is created from the rib of Adam he translates the scene to the piercing of Jesus’ side on the cross:

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659    Augustine, *Tract. John*, XIX.10

Adam sleeps, that Eve may be formed; Christ dies, that the Church may be formed. When Adam sleeps, Eve is formed from his side; when Christ is dead, the spear pierces His side, that the mysteries may flow forth whereby the Church is formed.<sup>660</sup>

The Church, for Augustine, however, is already formed in the Virgin's womb, the bridal chamber in which the marriage has already taken place. The bride is Christ's 'flesh,' his humanity *is* the Church:

For all the Church is Christ's Bride, of which the beginning and first fruits is the flesh of Christ: there was the Bride joined to the Bridegroom in the flesh.<sup>661</sup>

This formation on the cross, therefore, is not the origination of the bride, but merely her extension as the 'flesh' of Christ who, in his own flesh, is the first fruits of the bride.

Augustine has thus both reversed the ontological order of Genesis and, at the same time, introduced into it an ontological hiatus. First, humanity, 'flesh,' is married to divinity in Mary's womb such that they become 'one flesh' in Jesus (Gen 2:24). The bride, 'Eve,' the Church, is *subsequently* formed (Gen 2:21-22), or more correctly, extended, from Christ's pierced side on the cross. The Church is then formed from this flesh through the Eucharist as the organic, but mystical, body of which he is the head. The context and ontological flow, the 'Therefore,' of Genesis 2:24 has become incomprehensible. Furthermore, the description of the Church as Bride is entirely dependent on its participation in Christ's 'flesh,' that is, as an extension of his Body. The proper ontological description for the Church in Augustine's theology is the Body of Christ: the Church is 'bride' only insofar as she partakes in Christ's 'body.'

For the Church is His body, as the apostle's teaching shows us; and it is even called His spouse.<sup>662</sup>

Second, in describing the heavenly marriage as the union of divine and human natures, Augustine has introduced an ontological chasm into the midst of the Genesis story, for human nature can in no wise be described as the 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' of divine nature. Furthermore, in both cases 'Eve' is not a person but a metaphor for speaking of renewed human nature in Christ. This brings us to the next difficulty.

### **5.1.1.2    *The Union of Persons***

Secondly, the marriage in Genesis 2 is a union of hypostatic persons, not just of natures. A man and a woman come together to form one flesh. The woman is created from the

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660    Augustine, *Tract. John*, XIX.10

661    Augustine, *Hom. 1 John*, II.2

662    Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.16.15

man's side to be his friend, helper, and lover. These are personal actions and categories, not abstract or conceptual ones. Perhaps it is for this reason that Bulgakov never refers to Augustine's nuptial imagery. For while the union of the two natures of divinity and humanity in Jesus *may* be a valid referent for the heavenly marriage in a theological treatise (although see above), it is certainly not *the* referent either in the Gospels or in the rest of the New Testament literature. The union of the two natures of Christ is a theological construct to explain both the full humanity and the full divinity of Christ existing in one person, which has become church dogma. But it was only developed through a long and painful history over several hundred years. The heavenly marriage in the NT had another referent that grew out of both the 'prophetic' and Edenic traditions already present in the Judaism of the First Century: that between Yahweh and Israel, which later developed into that between the Messiah and the Church. Certainly this was the way it was interpreted by the NT writers.

The Bride, for Augustine, however, is *never* a hypostatic person, even when he assigns to her personal pronouns: these are merely allegorical tools to fit within the imagery he is using.<sup>663</sup> Thus, for Augustine, the heavenly marriage is *not* an ontological reality, in the sense that there is no union between hypostases: without hypostases, persons, there can be no ontological marriage.

One of the principal contributions Bulgakov makes to theology is the insistence that creation is hypostasised by humanity. He draws this out as the implicit meaning in the creation story of Genesis 2:

The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.<sup>664</sup>

It is the presence of God's 'breath' in the dust of creation that distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation, which is created solely by God's 'word,' 'And God said...'. This 'spirit' combined with 'nature' is what makes a hypostasis, a person. The spirit comes from God, is God-breathed, and is thus the only thing in creation that is capable of responding *personally* to God's 'Thou.'<sup>665</sup> This, perhaps, is one of the most remarkable aspects in all creation, that a human person, creaturely, temporally and

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663 Even where he appears to treat the bride as over against Christ, this must be modified to understand his insistence that Christ is both bride and groom, eg. 'Ye know the Bridegroom; it is Christ. Ye know the Bride; it is the Church. Pay honour to the Bride, pay honour to the Bridegroom. If ye pay due honour to them both, ye will be their children.' Augustine, *Sermons*, XL.6

664 Gen 2:7

665 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p115

spatially constrained, is competent to address the infinite and eternal God, that is, in some sense is created equal to the hypostatic task of answering God, as an 'I.'<sup>666</sup>

From this Bulgakov goes on to insist that there is no such thing as non-hypostatic human nature. For this reason he gives to Mary the special significance of the one who gives *herself*, not just her nature, to Jesus and is therefore included in the matrix of soteriology with Christ. However, to use a hypostatic category, marriage, to describe a non-hypostatic action, the co-existence of the two natures in Christ, as Augustine does, is to confuse inappropriately subject and predicate.

### **5.1.1.3    *The Eschatological Wedding***

Thirdly, it is difficult to see how there is any eschatological dimension to Augustine's concept of this marriage if it has already taken place and been consummated in Mary's womb. In commenting on the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee (Jn 2) he refers to Christ dying to give his blood for his bride:

What wonder if He came to that house to a marriage, having come into this world to a marriage? For, indeed, if He came not to a marriage, He has not here a bride. But what says the apostle? 'I have espoused you to one husband, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ.' ...Thus has He here a bride whom He has redeemed by His blood, and to whom He has given the Holy Spirit as a pledge. He has freed her from the bondage of the devil: He died for her sins, and is risen again for her justification. Who will make such offerings to his bride? ...For if one should give his own blood to his bride, he would not live to take her for his wife. But the Lord, dying without fear, gave His own blood for her, whom rising again He was to have, whom He had already united to Himself in the Virgin's womb.<sup>667</sup>

The passage continues with the quote in which he elucidates the marriage as between the Word and the flesh.

It is difficult to obtain a coherent picture of Augustine's thinking on the Church as the bride here. On the one hand he refers to Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (11:2) which speaks of an eschatological wedding that has not yet taken place, and on the other, that the marriage has already been consummated: 'whom rising again He was to have, whom He had already united to Himself in the Virgin's womb.' The address to the Corinthian church presupposes that they have not yet been given and that they are to be presented to Christ as his bride. That is, that Christ, here, is the bridegroom and not the bride. This is despite the fact that they already are Christ's body, by Augustine's definition, since they have been baptised and partake in the Eucharist, and that Christ, himself, is both bridegroom and bride.

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<sup>666</sup> Bulgakov, *Bride*, p91

<sup>667</sup> Augustine, *Tract. John*, VIII.4



Furthermore, it is difficult to see in what way Christ's blood is being given for the bride, who, as Augustine says in this passage, is his own 'flesh' or humanity:

the Lord...gave His own blood for her...whom He had already united to Himself in the Virgin's womb.

This makes sense in the context of Christ's sacrifice and redemption of humanity, but in the context of his bridal imagery, what does it mean? He gave his blood for himself? There seems to be a distinct lack of internal coherence or logic that appears to derive from mixing allegory (the union of the natures in Christ is like a marriage) with metaphor (humanity is a person – the bride). In any case the marriage is not in an eschatological future, despite the Spirit being given as 'a pledge.' The pledge pertains, not to the consummation or fulfilment of the marriage, but to safe passage through judgement.

Augustine tends to associate the eschatological wedding feast of the Gospels with the Day of Judgement. For example, commenting on the parable of the wedding feast in Mat 22:11 he says,

Keep then that 'wedding garment,' put it on, and so sit down in security, when He comes to inspect. The Day of Judgement will come; He is now giving a long space, let him who erstwhile was naked now be clothed.<sup>668</sup>

He does also refer to the future presentation of the Church by Christ to himself in the context of justifying present sufferings, yet even this is dependent on the Church's primal definition as his body:

His body, then, which has many members, and all performing different functions, He holds together in the bond of unity and love, which is its true health. Moreover He exercises it in the present time, and purges it with many wholesome afflictions, that when He has transplanted it from this world to the eternal world, He may take it to Himself as His bride, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.<sup>669</sup>

Even when commenting on the passage in Revelation that speaks of the new Jerusalem as the heavenly bride (Rev 21:2) he makes no reference to her.<sup>670</sup> There is no sense, for Augustine, that the bride has an eschatological reality or presence *as bride*.

For both Bulgakov and Congar, however, the Church's description as 'bride' is primarily an eschatological one, and eschatology is ontologically definitive. As Bulgakov claims:

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668 Augustine, *Sermons*, XLV.7

669 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.16.15

670 Augustine, *The City of God*, XX.17

[Eschatology] is the last word of Christian ontology and can be expounded only in connection with the latter.<sup>671</sup>

And as Congar states:

The union that should be consummated in one spirit (or Spirit) is still imperfect. The Church must also experience an Easter event of death and resurrection in the power of the Spirit. Her wedding will only be perfect eschatologically.<sup>672</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that both in the New Testament and for Bulgakov and Congar eschatology plays a defining role in ontological reality. This ontology exists in the present through the Spirit, which is why the Spirit is the ‘guarantee of what is to come’ (2 Cor 1:11, 5:5; Eph 1:14).

#### **5.1.1.4 Conclusion**

These three weaknesses in Augustine’s nuptial theology (the union of two different natures; the non-hypostatic character of the marriage; and the absence of a robust eschatology) ultimately undermine the personalness of his soteriology. His primary, and ontological, category for describing the Church is ‘the body of Christ,’ a category that has almost completely obliterated the memory of the ‘bride’ from the Church’s self-understanding, especially in recent years (e.g. *Common Worship*).<sup>673</sup> This is seen particularly in the somatic theology of Congar’s *Mystery of the Church*, but even in Balthasar’s nuptial theology, where the hierarchy defines the visible Church as Christ’s body because it extends from his Incarnation apneumatically. The bridal metaphor, as an ontological category, is relegated to the level of the individual.

One of the most significant difficulties to which this gives rise is that, by defining the Church metaphorically as the organic body of Christ, there is no affirmation of the hypostatic persistence, either of each person, or of the Church as a whole. Instead, each person is defined in terms of their organic relation to each other, to the rest of the body, and also to Christ. As Bulgakov rightly insists, nature is not the same as hypostasis, and ‘body’ is a category of nature, which, while capable of being hypostasised, is not a hypostasis. As a consequence the Church’s relationship with Christ is primarily defined in organic terms in which there is no ontological place for freedom, creativity, even love, which are exclusively personal, and hence hypostatic, actions. For these to exist

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671 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p379

672 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, p56

673 See Footnote 81

the Church's relationship with Christ, and hence relations with each other, *must* be defined hypostatically.

A danger arises from an overbearing emphasis on non-hypostatic relations between Christ and the Church, and consequently within the Church. They will lead, on the one hand, to predominantly functional relations in the institution (seen for example in the hierarchical source of unity in the Roman Catholic Church, and in the growth of 'management' or 'business' models and practices in the Church of England). On the other, they will give rise to a deep spiritual individualism as people struggle to express their own personhood (as validated, for example, by Congar, and seen in all forms of Protestantism, especially Evangelicalism). None of these developments is competent, or worthy, of bursting into the hypostatic joy and delight envisaged by Bulgakov's cosmic vision of redemption and transcendence.

Bulgakov insists, on the other hand, on the role of the Spirit, particularly in settling on Mary, as the agent of incarnation. Accomplishing this activation and enabling is the self-emptying kenoticism of the Logos as he descends to partake of Mary's humanity.

In this reading, the Logos becomes all but invisible to the world, in keeping with the way he is portrayed in the Gospels. His actions and activities, his wisdom and authority, are all the derivative on his obedient, spirit-anointed humanity, not his divinity, which in any case was only read back into his life post-Pentecost.

Understanding the Holy Spirit in this way, as the incarnating agent leads to the recognition and affirmation that he is also the enhypostasising agent (Gen 2:7). Christ was enhypostasised in Mary by the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35). If the role of the Holy Spirit in Creation and the Incarnation is enhypostasising, then so too, in the New Creation, his role is no different. The Spirit is the One who gives life (Rom 8:11). To live is to love (1 Jn 4:7) and to be known by God (1 Cor 8:3), that is, to be a 'person'. If the Church is born from the flesh of Christ, given life by the Spirit, called to love and is known by God, she must be something more than simply a 'body', even if 'of Christ'.

### **5.1.2      *Baptism***

Jesus' baptism has afforded a multitude of interpretations over the centuries, from the descent of Christ into Jesus in the 2<sup>nd</sup>C.,<sup>674</sup> to a simple empowering for mission in the

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674 E.g. Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, I.26.1

20<sup>th</sup>C..<sup>675</sup> But the relation of the Spirit to Jesus, and specifically to his divinity and humanity, is vital to understanding its relation with the Church.

To a certain extent the role given to the Spirit in the act of incarnation already defines the relationship between the Word and the Spirit in the world and especially in the interpretation of Jesus' baptism. If the Spirit is understood as the agent of hypostatisation (Gen 2:7) this will translate into a more dynamic role for the Spirit working through Jesus' humanity in his subsequent ministry. The greater the emphasis placed on Jesus' divinity as the agent of his earthly ministry, the less space there is to acknowledge the work of the Spirit. The result tends towards a church that is hierarchical and institutionally heavy, since the authenticity and continuity of Jesus' ministry is located in his direct commissioning; and a Lord that is regal and remote. The Church is more naturally understood in relation to him as an extension of his body on the one hand, and there develops a pastoral need for a more intimate intermediary on the other – usually Mary.

Conversely, the more Jesus' divinity is understood in kenotic terms, the more is given to the Spirit as the hypostasising agent of Jesus' ministry, working through the 'sinful flesh' of his humanity with his divinity remaining hidden, the greater the constitutional role of the Spirit in the Church. The result is a Lord who is much more approachable and a church, which, while instituted by him, has a more dynamic relationship with him. In this case the Church can be more easily seen as creatively responding to Christ in hypostatic love and freedom: as bride.

The role assigned to the Spirit in Jesus' incarnation, baptism and subsequent ministry thus has a determinative effect on the ontology of the Church.

#### **5.1.2.1    *The Anointing Spirit***

The effect can be discerned in Congar's ecclesiology, throughout which there is a hierarchical relationship between the Word and the Spirit based explicitly on the subordination of the Spirit to the Son, as expressed in his interpretation of the *filioque*.

Congar's understanding of the gift of the Spirit as *arrha*, or earnest-money, however, opens up the Pauline theme of the eschatological nature of the Church and the constitutive role of the Spirit in its existence.<sup>676</sup> The place of baptism in the life of Jesus

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675 E.g. Menzies RP, *Empowered for Witness*, 1994

676 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p16

is, for him, one of the primary reasons for the Incarnation – so the gift of the life-giving Spirit might be given to humanity for its enlivening. However, the Spirit always remains at the level of ‘enlivening,’ never ‘constituting.’

The result is that the Church, for Congar, despite his denial, is primarily an extension of the Incarnation of Christ, instituted by him, embodied in the apostolate, but animated by the Spirit.<sup>677</sup> For this reason the Church is identical with Christ, first as his visible, then as his Mystical body, understood almost exclusively in an organic sense.

This is seen most clearly in *Mystery*, where the Spirit’s involvement in the Son’s mission (and hence in the Church) derives from Christ’s baptism, rather than his Incarnation (in which the Spirit’s involvement was all but absent), reflecting the order of procession defined by the *filioque*. This led to a separation of Word and Spirit that followed through into the apostolate and the Spirit.

In *I Believe*, Congar argues for an involvement of the Spirit in the Incarnation as well as Christ’s baptism, but with distinctive roles in each. He would undoubtedly agree with Bulgakov concerning the soteriological necessity of the Son’s kenosis in the Incarnation. Indeed, he gives a greatly enhanced and visible role to the Spirit in the Incarnation as the agent enabling the Word to take human flesh to himself. However, he sees a change in the role of the Spirit pre- and post-incarnation from one of external activity in Creation to internal activity within human souls.<sup>678</sup>

Here is a fundamental distinction between the pneumatology of Congar and of Bulgakov. For Congar, the difference for the Spirit’s relationship with the world between pre- and post-incarnation lies in its relation with the interiority of the individual soul. For Bulgakov, the difference lies in the glorification of creation since creation has now been united to divinity in the two natures of Christ: Creation is now the receptacle of the Spirit and has therefore returned to the path of deification.

The commencement of this latter or new mission of the Spirit, for Congar, is Jesus’ baptism. The Church therefore still remains a function of the Word as the body of Christ, in keeping with the *filioque*, but interiorly animated by the Spirit, who is its principle of unity, i.e. which joins the body together and to Christ.

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677 A point precisely made by Bulgakov who criticises the consequent ‘one-sidedness’ or ‘christocentrism’ of the Roman Catholic Church, e.g. Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p131-132

678 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p16

Right at the heart of Congar's earlier ecclesiology is a fundamental difficulty in allowing the Church any existence over against Christ: the description of the Church as 'bride' is not compatible with a hierarchical order that derives its *esse* from the authority of Christ as its head. This naturally leads to the description of the Church in terms of his *organic* body.

If the *filioque* is understood in a mutually constitutive sense, rather than hierarchical, in keeping with the identity of the Spirit as the hypostatic bond of love between the Father and the Son, these difficulties tend to evaporate. In the act of spiration the Father, as it were, lovingly 'breathes' the Word. Thus the Word and the Spirit ontologically together, inseparably and yet unconfusedly, proceed from the Father, as a word is the content of, but different to, a breath. The Word thus constituted returns that hypostatic 'Breath' in love. In doing so the Son constitutively names the Father as such. The Spirit can thus be understood as the love proceeding from both the Father and the Son, while yet all three persons are mutually, and non-hierarchically, constituted by each other, albeit with the Father as the ontological ἀρχή.

In this case there would be no difficulty in understanding the Church as Christ's 'body' in the nuptial sense, that is, hypostatically constituted by the Spirit, taken from Christ's body. The historical continuity of the Church hierarchy becomes of secondary importance since it is the Spirit who 'takes what is mine and declares it to you' (Jn16:14-15), not the hierarchy, as Bulgakov advocates. But, most importantly, God's dealing with creation, its ontological salvation, redemption, and divinisation, becomes a free, hypostatic and personal response in love – an impossibility if the Church remains nothing more than an extension of Christ's body.

Even in Congar's later theology where the Spirit is given a constitutive place in the Incarnation, the anointing by the Spirit at Jesus' baptism is for a new mission of interior sanctification, which he contrasts with the 'old disposition' of exterior activity.<sup>679</sup> The anointing for us, the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, therefore remains at the level of interiority of an already constituted body.

Nevertheless, his ecclesial pneumatology in Vol.2 of *I Believe* demonstrates a radical reversal in his ontology of the Church. Referring to Irenæus and Augustine he comes much closer to Bulgakov in prioritising the Spirit over the apostolate:

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679 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.1, p16

it is not because there is one body that there is only one Spirit – it is rather because there is only one Spirit of Christ that there is only one body, which is the Body of Christ.<sup>680</sup>

However, he does not build on this reversal, and it stands in opposition to his statements in Vol.1. Congar's ecclesial ontology therefore ultimately fails to provide a place for the hypostatic response of creation to the love of God: the only personal response to God remains at the level of the individual.

However, the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit did not happen at some inconsequential location, but precisely at his baptism, the foreshadowing of his death. This event, accomplished for us, marks the dividing line in Jesus' life. Before his baptism the Kingdom of Heaven had not come, afterwards it had: 'Behold, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me...' (Lk 4:18).

Anointing by the Spirit accompanies baptism, but not just for inner sanctification. Baptism is passing through death and into the life of the Spirit. It therefore ushers the eschatological Kingdom of God into the world, through the death and resurrection of Christ, in the life of the one being baptised. Anointing by the Spirit, then, is the bestowing of the eschatological life of the risen Christ – it is *the* constitutive act. The presence of the Spirit in the Church must, therefore, be constitutive of life – that is the Spirit's gift, in all its different guises.

### **5.1.2.2    *The Constituting Spirit***

For Bulgakov, Christ's baptism is different again. In the Incarnation the Word and the Spirit descend hypostatically together, the one being incarnated, the other incarnating. They abide together 'without separation and without confusion.' However the abiding of the Spirit is with the divine Logos, not with his human nature: this only receives the Spirit in stages, and finally, hypostatically at Jesus' baptism, which is *not* adopted by the Father until then.<sup>681</sup>

Bulgakov therefore recognises two *modes* of descent of the Spirit. First, in the Annunciation, it descends upon the humanity of Mary. Second in the baptism of Jesus it rests on him and he 'becomes *Christ*, i.e. the Anointed by the Spirit, the Spirit-Bearer.' This is Christ's Pentecost. Prior to this time only the *grace* of God rested upon Jesus' humanity in increasing degree (Luke 2:40, 52) and the Spirit 'overshadows Jesus' human essence only.' Whatever the merits of this extraordinary distinction between the

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680 Congar, *I believe*, Vol.2, p15

681 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p249

Spirit's relation with the divinity and the humanity of Christ, the point remains similar to Congar's: the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism is in some way ontologically definitive for the descent of the Spirit upon the rest of humanity.

The consequence of Jesus' baptism is twofold. Firstly, it prepares and enables creation to bear the 'fiery tongue' of the Spirit's presence without being consumed by it. The initial descent of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism, and subsequently at Pentecost, are kenotic descents, in which the Spirit, who is the glory of God, remains hidden, only occasionally revealed at events such as the Transfiguration. The parousia of Christ is the end of the hiddenness of both the Son and the Spirit, and is accompanied by the transfiguration of the world by the Spirit, who participated in the creation with the Son.

Here, we must remember all that we know about the action of the Third Hypostasis at the creation of the world. The life-giving Spirit clothes the Word, by whom all things were made, in being and reality; and It thereby clothes the world in beauty: 'Let it be' and 'it was good.'<sup>682</sup>

Referring to Jesus' baptism and its fulfilment at the parousia he relates both of these to the Incarnation through the Spirit, in which the ground is prepared for the coming of the Spirit.

Both this reception and the sending down of the Holy Spirit into the world depend upon the Incarnation, upon the profound, radical transformation of the world's natural being: The flesh of the world became the flesh of Christ in His humanity. Therefore, the world became capable of bearing the Pentecost, of receiving the fire of the Holy Spirit without being consumed by it.<sup>683</sup>

Secondly, Jesus 'accomplishes this [entire] ministry as one filled by the Spirit,' which 'inevitably culminates in Golgotha, where "through the eternal Spirit, [he] offered himself without spot to God" (Heb 9:14).'<sup>684</sup>

Thus, in the days of His earthly ministry, Jesus is the Spirit-bearer; He has upon Himself the anointment of the Holy Spirit...He Himself grounds His ministry and His working of miracles on the fact that He has the Holy Spirit, as is attested by the Forerunner (Jn 1:33).<sup>685</sup>

This anointing by the Spirit is far more than an anointing for ministry, however. It is the presence of the Father with Jesus during his earthly ministry:

the Father who is in heaven abides with the Son (who has descended to earth) in the Holy Spirit...the Holy Spirit is this union of the Father and the Son.<sup>686</sup>

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682 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp418-419

683 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p419

684 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p250

685 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p308. See also pp324-325

686 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p252



The Spirit thus enables Jesus to do the Father's will, which, in turn, leads his humanity towards deification through the Spirit:

By the Holy Spirit, Christ works miracles and preaches the good news, does the will of the Father, and is thereby Himself sanctified and deified in His humanity.<sup>687</sup>

Bulgakov's interpretation of the role of the Spirit here, particularly in its relation to Christ, is very different to that of Congar. In Bulgakov's anointing there can be no action 'proceeding direct from Christ' that is not mediated by the Spirit, since everything Jesus does, he does through the Spirit. His divinity has been kenotically diminished such that there is no discernible activity of the Word, as such, in his earthly ministry. This is the direct consequence of the procession of the Spirit *through* the Son (economically) or *upon* the Son (immanently), rather than *from* (in a subordinate sense) the Son.<sup>688</sup>

The consequence of all this is that the activity of the Spirit, precipitated at Christ's baptism, is as constitutive for the Church as it was for Jesus humanity:

With the coming of Christ on the earth, by virtue of His anointment in His personal Pentecost which is His baptism, the anointment becomes accessible in Him to the entire world, although as yet in a particular and limited manifestation.<sup>689</sup>

Christ's incarnation, the Father's presence with him, his entire ministry, including his obedience to the Father, his resisting of temptations, his teaching, his acts of healing and miracles, his holy living, his passion, death and resurrection, even his institution of the Twelve, are all accomplished through the presence of the Spirit. This was *not* the case in the OT Church, where the divinely-instituted priesthood *did* constitute the church:

The Old Testament hierarchism effectively arises as God's direct institution, as a law given on Sinai. The Old Testament Church is instituted through this hierarchism, whereas, in the New Testament, hierarchism arises in the Church and through the Church. The Roman conception of hierarchy as vicariate, adopted also by the Eastern Church, approaches in its 'juridicism' the Old Testament order.<sup>690</sup>

The kenotic divinity of the Word was precisely that – kenotic. All Jesus did, he did through his humanity in the strength and power of the Spirit. The only place in the Gospels where we can, perhaps, catch a glimpse of his divinity is in his forgiveness of sins. But even here the Spirit, as the presence of the Father (and after the resurrection also the Son), is the agent of forgiveness (Jn 20:22-23).

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687 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p309

688 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, pp307-308

689 Bulgakov, *Comforter*, p250

690 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p280

So too for the Church, her establishment, her constitution, the presence of the Father and the Son, the benefits of Christ's life, death and resurrection, the ministry of sacraments, the forgiveness of sins, new life in God, her holy living, in short *all* that was Christ's are given to the Church through the Spirit (Jn 16:14-15) in her baptism, Pentecost. This, also, is the role given to the Spirit in the writing of St Paul.

The great weakness in Bulgakov's theology of baptism is the absence of any notion of death. Instead he associates baptism exclusively with the Incarnation and being clothed with Christ.<sup>691</sup> But the entire ritual associated with cleansing and baptism in First-Century Judaism, in the New Testament, and in church liturgy describes baptism as a type of death, albeit a passing through death from one form of life to another. Jesus described his death as a baptism (Mk 10:38), and baptism as being born again from water and the Spirit in the context of his death (Jn 3:3,5,14).

This link between Christ's death/resurrection and the Spirit in baptism forms the core of biblical soteriology. Jesus has taken our sin into his 'sinful flesh' and *died*, cursed on the tree. The resurrection is the first fruits of the new creation that has grown out of the old seed that died. Our baptism is the same as Christ's baptism – where we receive the Spirit of life who will take us through death. The baptism of Christ in the Spirit is precisely our baptism into and through his death, to his resurrection.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.<sup>692</sup>

The Spirit is the one sent by the *Father* to the Son at his baptism *before* his death to enable him to bring the life of new creation into the old creation (the kingdom of God) and thus carry him (Jesus) through death into the resurrection of new creation. The Spirit is then sent back by the *Son* from the other side of the abyss of death at our baptism for exactly the same purpose. He (the Spirit) is the guarantee that as we, too, participate in Christ's death, so we will be resurrected to new life. The giving of the Spirit, which is conjoined with baptism (Jn 3:3, Acts 10:47), is thus the *arrha* or earnest-money, the betrothal promise of the gift of new creation through death, which is then a sleep, to be presented to Christ as his bride (Rom 7:4). But the reality and horror of death, itself, is highlighted if we ask the question, what if the Spirit is *not* received?

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691 See discussion in Section 3.4.7, above.

692 Rom 6:3-4

However, Bulgakov's view of death as 'a *transcensus* into another life,'<sup>693</sup> which necessarily derives from the immortality of the spirit, appears not to give due weight to the full force or the horror of death that he describes as being 'ontologically inseparable from human nature.'<sup>694</sup> So for him baptism is about restoration, healing the weakness introduced by original sin through being clothed with Christ's humanity.

### **5.1.3      *Birth of the Bride***

Amen, amen. I say to you unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.  
Amen, amen. I say to you unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.<sup>695</sup>

And you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.  
You shall be called My Delight Is In Her, and your land Married.<sup>696</sup>

The empirical relationship between 'the bride of Yahweh' and 'the bride of Christ' has been fraught with a confused and ambivalent history. This history has been justified at each turn by the Church through recourse to a theology of blame, castigation and rejection at one time, and of inclusion and continuity at another. How are we to understand this relationship?

Chavasse interprets, in the book of Revelation, two distinct and separate brides, one of which has a future. The other, the harlot who rides the Beast (Rev 17), does not. This latter, he says, is the 'tragic' fallen bride of Yahweh:

On the one side there is 'The Bride,' who becomes the 'Lamb's Wife,' the Spouse of Christ. On the other, there is that most tragic character in the drama, who is called 'Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots, and of the Abominations of the Earth.'...She is none other than the beautiful, pure, and holy Bride of Yahweh, the Jewish Church, but utterly and hopelessly fallen since 'the kings of the earth committed fornication with her.'<sup>697</sup>

Without going into a detailed exegesis of the book of Revelation, this interpretation has great difficulties, with both internal and external evidence, and theologically. Firstly, in v18 of this same chapter John explains that 'the woman you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.' This, patently, is *not* the 'Jewish Church.'

Secondly, when John does refer to the 'Bride of Yahweh' he does so in an unmistakable way, and in very positive terms:

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693 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p349

694 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p353

695 Jn 3:3, 5

696 Is 62:2, 4

697 Chavasse, *Bride*, p93

A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars...she gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule the nations...and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.<sup>698</sup>

*This* is the ‘Jewish Church,’ although she is better described, with Bulgakov, as the ‘Old Testament Church.’<sup>699</sup> She is *attacked* by the dragon ‘with seven heads and ten horns’ (12:3) such that she has to flee into the wilderness – the same beast upon which the harlot named Babylon rides (17:3). These are not the same characters.

Thirdly, as Chavasse notes, Hosea and Ezekiel only foresee *one* bride who is redeemed, not the two brides that he believes John has described. This, he acknowledges, ‘creates a difficulty’ since the ‘Christian Church’ ‘is the “Faithful Remnant” of the Jewish Church,’ in which Jesus was both born and raised.<sup>700</sup> However, he offers no solution as to the origin of the second (faithful) bride or of her relation to the first.

Fourthly, Paul’s attitude towards the ‘Jewish Church,’ which he describes in much the same terms in Romans 9:5, is completely incompatible with Chavasse’s interpretation. This means he must be restricting his theology of the relations between the OT and NT churches exclusively to Revelation. To be fair, he is exegeting Revelation, but this incompatibility nevertheless represents a grave weakness.

Chavasse’s understanding of the relation of the two brides is not at all clear. From his exegesis it would appear to be one of parallel discontinuity, as it were, where both brides exist at the same time. The ‘Faithful Remnant’ bride, who gives birth to Christ, goes up to heaven to await his second coming, while the ‘Bride of Yahweh’ ends up being destroyed by her false lovers (Rev 17:16).<sup>701</sup>

However, in his ‘very tentative hypothesis’ on Paul’s theology he suggests that the Bride of Yahweh is now widowed since ‘the Law died (Rom 7:1-6)’ when Christ came. She is thus free to marry again. The implication in his thesis is this happens through Christ’s death and passion. He, as the Second Adam, falls asleep and the new Bride is built up (Eph 2:16; 4:24; Col 3:10) from his rib (Col 1:22, 27). She ‘may thus be said to have slept and woken (cf. Rom 13:11; Eph 2:1-6; 5:14) again with the new Adam.’<sup>702</sup> It would appear that the new Bride is somehow the same as the Bride of Yahweh, who goes through a marriage/creation event.

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698 Rev 12:1, 5, 6. cf Song of Songs 6:10

699 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p254

700 Chavasse, *Bride*, p95

701 Chavasse, *Bride*, p94

702 Chavasse, *Bride*, p79

Quite what is going on in the second interpretation is difficult to gauge for he offers no further explanation, but the idea that the Bride of Yahweh was married to ‘the Law’ is an interesting reading of Romans 7. The principal difficulty with his interpretation is not that it refers to the Bride of Yahweh (in the context it refers to fallen humanity), but that he has the wrong person dying. It is not the Law that dies, but the bride who has died *through the body of Christ dying*.

The question still remains, however, of the nature of the relationship between the two ‘brides’ of the Church. The presence of the genealogies in the Gospels should be sufficient to dispel notions of ‘opposition’ or ‘displacement’ of the Bride of Yahweh by the Bride of Christ: some other relationship must exist.

Chavasse found the central point of connection between the two in Paul’s letter to the Romans (Rom 7:1-6), but his interpretation did not make sense of the context. Paul’s line of argument in this passage is notoriously difficult to follow.<sup>703</sup> However it is interpreted, though, it nevertheless contains a crucial concept concerning sin, the world, Christ’s death and the Church.

The crux of the logic revolves around the first part of v4, ‘Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law *through the body of Christ*, so that *you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead*.’ This astonishing verse carries an enormous weight of theology, for in it the whole nuptial process is summed up. The illustration of marriage sets the scene (vv1-3). For a marriage to be dissolved one partner has to die. Regardless of who is what in the illustration, in v4 fallen humanity is joined with the body of Christ in his death so that it is released from its marriage to sin (Rom 6:20-23). But this fallen humanity, which dies to sin through being joined to Christ’s body, is released from this marriage *in order to be presented to Christ as his bride*. This is the bride, humanity, being joined to Christ in his death, so being released from her previous marriage to sin, and being born again from the Spirit (v6) through Christ’s resurrection. The first marriage bore fruit for death (v5); the second marriage is to bear fruit for God (v4).

This understanding sheds light on much else of Paul’s description of our relationship with Christ and the way in which his death and resurrection relate to Jesus’ self-description as bridegroom. It also opens up a way for understanding the relationship between the Bride of Yahweh and the Bride of Christ – that in Christ, because he is

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703 So, e.g., Best, *Body*, p52

born and raised a Jew, the Bride of Yahweh joined to him dies and is born again as his bride, thus receiving a new name (Is 62:2, 4). This is the point of baptism. They are one and the same, just as Christ is one and the same before his death and after his resurrection. But the Bride of Yahweh, which was always intended to be a blessing (i.e. the first-fruits) for all nations, is, in Christ's body, extended to include the world. This is why Paul, with reference to Israel, can talk about the first-fruits of the dough and the root of the olive tree being holy, both of which refer to Christ (cf. Rev 22:16), into whom all else (i.e. the world, Rom 11:15) is joined or grafted (Rom 11:16ff).

Christ is both the first-fruits and the one through whose death and resurrection the world has been reconciled to God (e.g. 2 Cor 5:19). Nevertheless, it is clear from Paul's discussion, for example in Rom 11, that the process of appropriating this reconciliation, for both Jews and Gentiles, and thus for all creation (2 Cor 5:17),<sup>704</sup> is ongoing.

In Edenic nuptial language this means that the bride, *as hypostasised, reconciled world*, is still in the process of being born again (Rom 8:22),<sup>705</sup> not in the sense of multiple births, but in the sense of being built up, of becoming, from the side of Christ, from which flowed the water (baptism) and the blood (eucharist).<sup>706</sup> This is the purpose of the sacraments of baptism (cleansing from sin through death and rebirth), and Eucharist (the building of the bride from the Adamic body and blood) accomplished through the zephyr of the Spirit.

Thus Augustine's interpretation of the cross, seeing it prefigured in the creation of Adam and Eve, makes sense of Paul's nuptial theology of baptism and Christ's death:

For at the beginning of the human race the woman was made of a rib taken from the side of the man while he slept; for it seemed fit that even then Christ and His Church should be foreshadowed in this event. For that sleep of the man was the death of Christ, whose side, as He hung lifeless upon the cross, was pierced with a spear, and there flowed from it blood and water, and these we know to be the sacraments by which the Church is 'built up.' For Scripture used this very word, not saying 'He formed' or 'framed,' but 'built her up into a woman;' whence also the apostle speaks of the edification of the body of Christ, which is the Church. The woman, therefore, is a creature of God even as the man; but by her creation from man unity is commended; and the manner of her creation prefigured, as has been said, Christ and the Church.<sup>707</sup>

704 lit. 'so if anyone is in Christ: new creation – the old has passed; behold, the new has come!'

705 Strictly, Paul's view here is that Creation is the mother, groaning as she gives birth to the new creation through the Spirit. Furthermore, that we are part of that groaning creation giving birth, having the first-fruits of the Spirit, which will be the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23), all through Christ's body; another example of his 'now and not yet' eschatological perspective.

706 Augustine, *Tractates on John*, CXX.2

707 Augustine, *The City of God*, XXII.17

Augustine also sees in the blood and the water the presence of the two revealing hypostases of the Father, acting to build the bride. The blood signifies the Son who was made incarnate, and through whom we receive the remission of sins; the water signifies the Spirit, in whom we are given the water of life.<sup>708</sup>

Thus the transformation of the Bride of Yahweh into the Bride of Christ is the work of both the Son and the Spirit. The re-birth of the bride is prefigured in the ‘birth’ of Eve. But where, then, is the Bride of Yahweh prefigured in the Genesis narrative? In one sense she is not. But that is because the Genesis story is a story of creation, not re-creation, of the first creation that prefigures the new. Jesus, although the second Adam, is not made like the first Adam, directly from the soil and without (human) parents: he was born of a virgin and the Holy Spirit. However, having died the resurrection of Jesus is like the birth of Adam. For Adam was born of the earth and the spirit. Likewise, the New Adam is born from the womb of the earth (the garden tomb, Rom 8:22) by the Spirit (Rom 8:11). Thus the Genesis story is not a blueprint, but a true myth, one that opens up and reveals the cosmic significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection; like the stories of Noah and Jonah, that also prefigure rebirth through the waters of death, and to which Jesus alludes in his conversation with Nicodemus (and castigates him for not recognising).

In another sense, though, the Bride of Yahweh is already embodied in Jesus, in the same way that Eve was embodied in Adam before being built from his side. The genealogies in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke make the point *in extremis* that not only is the Bride of Yahweh specifically included in his humanity (Matthew), but the whole bride of creation (Luke).

What of the hypostasis of the Bride of Yahweh, if we are to conceive of such? How are we to understand her in relation to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection? What happens to her hypostasis in and through his ‘event?’ This question is difficult to answer, but no more or less difficult than understanding in what way *all* hypostases are included in him. The *all*-hypostasis of the bride is a broken and disrupted hypostasis, resulting from the disintegration of the perichoretic communion of hypostases that give rise to her. Yet despite this, God still calls to her, calls her to *be*, still makes promises to her, in the Psalms and the Prophets, and most profoundly in the Song of Songs.

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708 Augustine, *Contra Maximinum*, Lib. II.C.22.3 in *Homilies on 1 John*, X

It is exactly this, the image of God in humanity, which Christ came to restore. The genealogies, precisely as *names*, testify to the inclusion of all hypostases in Jesus. So to the extent, and in the same way, that all hypostases are included in Jesus, even though they are *other* than him, the all-hypostasis of the bride is included in him. Thus, the bride, too, must be re-born from water and the spirit, that she may be one, even as the Father and the Son are one.

### **5.1.4 Summary**

***Incarnation*** – the Holy Spirit is the agent of incarnation and hypostasisation. It establishes personhood in bringing the Son to birth in Creation.

***Baptism*** – the Holy Spirit is the one that brings life out of death, carries life through death, enabling participation in the Son's humanity and constituting new life: new creation.

***Bride*** – Jesus, as a Jew, takes the flesh of the bride of Yahweh to the cross. As the Second Adam he dies and rises. The Second Eve is drawn from his side in the sacraments.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit – to hypostasise and give life.

## **5.2 The Ontology of the Bride**

So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.<sup>709</sup>

‘This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man.’  
Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.<sup>710</sup>

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.<sup>711</sup>

Whatever else we say about the ontology of the Church, the language of oneness, which, like the image of the bride, runs from the opening pages of the Bible to the closing, is always a way of speaking about the communion of persons, names, about

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709 Gen 1:27

710 Gen 2:23-24

711 Jn 17:11



love, which is the essence of God, and out of which and for which he creates. For this, organic and somatic metaphors are wholly inadequate bearers of ontology, however useful they might be for explaining praxis. Worse, when understood autonomously or independently they are deceptive and destructive for they deny an ontological place for freedom, love, response, and joy. It is only in the context of an ontologically prior metaphor of hypostatic relations that the organic or somatic metaphor can provide life.

One of the attractions of Bulgakov's approach to ontology is that, despite, or perhaps because of, the influence of German Idealism and particularly Russian sophiology, it makes sense of much of the biblical narrative.<sup>712</sup> The result swells into the cosmic response of an orchestrated symphony of fathomless harmonies that re-sound the glory of God in a free and temporal creation founded on the eternal kenotic love of God, beckoned into the communion of the Holy Trinity as the 'Fourth' hypostasis. But can it be said there is a Fourth?

Much depends on the definition employed for a 'person'. For Congar, following Balthasar, it is to be 'a spiritual centre of consciousness of free and rational acts.' While this shares something of Bulgakov's 'hypostasis' it is, nevertheless, a Cartesian-type definition with its emphasis on rationality.

For Bulgakov a 'person', or spirit, is a hypostasis with its nature. This is true for the persons of the Godhead as it is for created persons. Thus God is three hypostases with one nature. This nature is love; it is God's essence. This *ousia* of God, which is divine love, is the Divine Sophia. It is God's nature hypostasised by the tri-hypostatic godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hypostasis is the personal centre of self-consciousness and gives to the nature its personhood.

So if the Church is to be, in some sense, a 'person' in Bulgakov's terms, it must comprise both a 'nature' and a 'hypostasis'.

### **5.2.1 Nature**

The account of creation in Genesis 2 describes humanity as bipartite – soil and spirit, humus and breath (Gen 2:7). Bulgakov understands the soil to refer to humanity in its created aspect; that is, its physical body, its psycho-corporeal characteristics, its entire 'nature.'

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712 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p426. Although this is weakened by several important aspects of his theology, in particular his definition of Jesus' 'flesh,' his gendered soteriology which requires the inclusion of Mary, and his theology of death which fails to take seriously the NT emphasis with its related soteriological events, the cross and the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist.

man by his composition is not only spiritual but also psycho-corporeal or natural. In him there lives not only his spirit, but also his nature; and the latter also lives by its own life.<sup>713</sup>

The reference to man's nature living 'by its own life' draws from the ancient understanding that humans are animated by a soul, *ψυχή*, as well as a spirit. The soul is not hypostatic, not personal, nor immortal, unlike the spirit that is. If this were not the case 'nature' would be an inanimate construct. However, 'nature' is not static and lifeless for 'God did not create death.'<sup>714</sup> This phrase is one of Bulgakov's favourite quotations, used at least seven times in *The Bride*. The same principle extends throughout all creation. Thus creation has its own animating principle by which life is lived and replicated throughout the plant and animal dominions. But not only the obvious forms of life; every aspect of creation, Bulgakov maintains, even inanimate creation, does not contain anything 'not alive' for 'God did not create death.' There are only degrees of life. This 'life' that drives the existence of creation he calls 'the world soul.'

The 'world soul' is not hypostatic life, that is, not personal life. It is the pulsating exuberance that manifests in a billion different life forms, continually forming, shifting and changing, dying and being reborn. The world itself is in the process of *becoming*, of growing in complexity (contrary to the laws of the physical universe), following the entelechy of its own inner reality, the creaturely Sophia.

This capacity of even inanimate creation that carries the *potential* to participate in life holds the key to understanding the notion that all creation is the periphery of man's body. This is the point of the Genesis creation narrative, confirmed in Genesis 3:19, 'for you are dust and to dust you shall return,' and the fact that it is the earth that bears the curse of humanity's fall (Gen 3:17).

The intimate connection between the earth and humanity means that humanity shares in the fabric of the whole of creation, and reciprocally, creation shares in the being of humanity. Bulgakov's point is not that this is an interpenetration of species, as it were, that humanity and the rest of creation mutually co-inhere in each other's existence. Rather, that humanity was created to *be* the hypostatic presence of creation before God.

This universality must necessarily extend from man and *for* man. Man does not exist separately from the universe. On the contrary, he is its heart and centre, a 'microcosm,' and human nature includes all of creaturely nature.<sup>715</sup>

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713 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p92

714 From the Apocryphal book, Wisdom of Solomon 1:13

715 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p267

Thus humanity is a microcosm of the whole universe – animated stardust: man’s body cannot be defined in terms of molecular or physical boundaries. What is true physically, or atomically, holds for all ‘creaturely nature.’ This is the realm of creaturely Sophia, including the ‘world soul,’ which extends as the living principle, including the realm of psychology,<sup>716</sup> throughout all life, and thus all matter, since ‘God did not create death.’

It follows from this that in some sense the whole universe must be involved in humanity’s fall, and is affected by it. Bulgakov’s definition of sin refers to the disruption of the correct balance or relationship between nature and spirit. In the case of original sin, spirit, through disobedience to God, becomes subject to nature rather than its lord. Nature becomes a blind leader, following its own entelechy, which, without the guidance of the spirit, leads no longer towards deification.<sup>717</sup>

Since God’s hypostatic communion with creation is through spirit, which resides exclusively in humanity, this disruption necessarily affects the whole of creation’s relationship with its creator. The corollary is that the universe needs restoring if it is ever to fulfil its potential of deification, or sophianisation, which restoration can only be accomplished through its hypostatic, that is, personal, existence. The universe, therefore, in all its fullness, is the object of the Incarnation.

The humanity taken by the Word from Mary thus includes the extension of that humanity to its very limits – an extension that, as Bulgakov states, is limited only by the power of the Word and the Spirit, the Incarnation and Pentecost. The assumption of humanity by the Word reaches to the limits of his creation. Likewise, the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost is limited to that which was incarnated. These limits comprise the limits of the Church. Thus the Church, as the eschatologically restored work of the Word and the Spirit, has the same ontological limits as the Incarnation and Pentecost.

The domain of the power of Divine-humanity coincides with the limits of the Church. More correctly, these limits do not exist at all, for the whole universe belongs to the Church. The universe is the periphery, the cosmic face of the Church.<sup>718</sup>

The *nature* of the Church, therefore, is the creaturely Sophia – the universe in all its createdness, to which baptism and the Eucharist are the attestation. However, in saying this, is there the danger of the discussion becoming meaningless? As Bulgakov puts it:

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716 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p223

717 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p173

718 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p267

But, in such a definition of the catholicity of the Church, all dissolves in limitlessness. It gives too much, and therefore too little.<sup>719</sup>

He goes on to delimit the Church through a discussion of the institutional structures of the Church as ‘sacramental and hierarchical organisation,’ limits that ‘distinguish the Church (and the churches) as an institution of grace from the rest of the world that lies outside the Church, ‘in darkness and in the shadow of death’ (Ps. 107:10).’<sup>720</sup>

Is such a distinction warranted? Does the cosmic limit of the Church dissolve its existence into a meaningless description? Must we be forced so quickly into defining institutional boundaries that speak of an inside of light and an ‘outside in darkness?’ Perhaps one of the dubious benefits of being a national church means that, for the Church of England, within the constraints of its nationalism, these boundaries do not exist, unless they are erected by others who wish to exclude themselves.

The early Second Century Letter to Diognetus is helpful here because it works with similar categories to those of Bulgakov, but reflects more of Jesus’ focus, not on boundaries, but on permeating the world, with his parables of salt and light.<sup>721</sup>

Notwithstanding the Platonic idea of ‘imprisonment of the soul,’ the Epistle is quite extraordinary in its soteriology of the world: ‘Christians are...the preservers of the world.’ Although it uses similar language to Bulgakov, its content is very different. In the Epistle ‘soul,’ in referring to Christians, relates to restored hypostases. The ‘world’ refers to everything else – unrestored hypostases and the rest of creation. The ‘boundaries’ between Church and world here, however, serve, not to delineate the limits of light and darkness, but rather to describe a life-giving relationship that reflects John 1:4-5:

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Thus, far from ‘giving too much’ by describing the cosmic limits of the Church’s nature, it rather sets an agenda for bringing life, a task that has no limits, to which there is no ‘outside.’ There is no place in the cosmos from which the Spirit is absent (Ps 139:7-12), and as Irenæus says,

For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church.<sup>722</sup>

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719 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p268

720 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p268

721 Epistle to Diognetus, 6

722 Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, III.XXIV.1

It is apparent from all this that the ‘nature’ adopted by Jesus *must* be the very nature of which the universe is constituted, and not some other pre-existent or unique nature. That is, it must be nature in all its fallenness, human ‘flesh’ in all its sinfulness. Bulgakov’s reluctance to admit the reality of the temptations for Jesus (i.e. they weren’t tempting), and his denial that certain types of temptation could affect him (such as sexual desires), mean that a *different* nature was adopted by Jesus than the one with which fallen humanity, and the cursed universe, struggles. And if that is so, then ‘what is not assumed is not saved.’

To say such things while insisting on Jesus’ sinlessness and divinity requires careful definition of terms such as ‘sinful nature’ and ‘original sin.’ Bulgakov, himself, is far from clear in his own terminology, or consistent with his definitions, which makes discussion difficult. However, his high Mariology, and its derivative ‘holy’ flesh, seems to interfere unduly with his keen insights into the kenoticism of the Incarnation itself. Unfortunately space precludes such a discussion here other than to make the assertion that the flesh adopted by Jesus was nothing less than the full, fallen, sinful flesh with which we all struggle, and that the temptations he faced were real, which must mean he struggled with them. Such a struggle implies the possibility of failure, as we see in the struggle in Gethsemane. Yet these were overcome through obedience in the strength of the Holy Spirit. It is this presence of the Spirit, upon which Paul’s theology so heavily relies, which contains the key.

This, then, is the ‘nature’ that is baptised into Christ’s death and resurrection. This is the ‘nature’ of the Church, of the Bride, that is born again from the Holy Spirit and water, built from the side of Christ, in the new creation.

### **5.2.2 Hypostasis**

The hypostasis is the personal centre of a personal being. But what comprises this ‘personalness’? What makes someone a ‘person’?

#### **5.2.2.1 Personhood**

‘Who is the Church?’

Balthasar’s question presupposes the possibility that the Church might, in some sense, be a person, a hypostasis. Balthasar, Congar and Bulgakov all share the German Idealist axiom of ‘self-consciousness’ as an essential aspect of ‘spirit’ or ‘person’. The

enormous difficulty with this definition is that only the subject, themselves, can know if they are self-conscious. Do certain animals, for example, display self-consciousness and even act in 'rational' ways? Who is to decide whether a chimpanzee, then, is a person? As biological and neuroscientific knowledge increases, non-theological experience-based definitions become less and less satisfactory.

The Incarnation defines human being in the image of God. It also reveals God as triune. Our definition of a 'person' must, therefore, take Jesus Christ as its starting point.

Among several possibilities, the definition central to Jesus' testimony is a being's relation to the verb 'love', either as subject or object. 'Love the Lord your God...Love your neighbour...'. More fundamentally, it means being the object of God's hypostatic love since 'God is love,' (1 Jn 4:8): it means to be 'named' by him. This 'naming' *by God* as a 'Thou', being loved by him, is what constitutes ontological personhood.<sup>723</sup>

It is difficult to underestimate the importance of the name in the biblical narrative. From the opening passages of Genesis, where Adam (not God) 'names' the animals, to the angelic forenaming of Jesus and John the Baptist, to the closing passages of Revelation where the Rider on the White Horse bears the name 'King of kings and Lord of lords', names have acted, not just as signifiers of relationality, but as bearers of ontology. Christ has been exalted and 'given the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow' (Phil 2:9-10).

And you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.  
You shall be called My Delight Is In Her, and your land Married.<sup>724</sup>

The prophetic testimony of Isaiah looks forward to a time when the bride is given a new name by God, that is, called into new life. For the Church to be so named by God means, therefore, that she must have a real existence, not merely a collective, nor even a metaphorical unity, but a being proper to herself.

To be a 'person' in the ontological sense, she must not only be named by God, but be the object of his love. As Bulgakov states,

This revelation testifies that the Church *is*, that being is proper to her; as *ens realissimum*, she is the object of divine love.<sup>725</sup>

The revelation to which he refers is the Song of Songs, in which the Church is called the Beloved of the Lover, and is both a loving Subject and the Object of God's love, or

723 Which is why people are 'named,' given Christian Names, at baptism.

724 Is 62:2, 4

725 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

more specifically, the Son's love. That the Lover is, and has been for virtually all the Church's existence, identified as the Second Person of the Trinity means that at least one of the parties in the song has a concrete hypostatic existence. That the song is a song of love, of which it is said that 'God is love,' therefore also means that God is also present in the song as *act*. For this reason Bulgakov says that the Holy Spirit is the invisible presence throughout the song.

So we have a song in which both the subject and the verb are real and concrete hypostases. The song is thus metaphorical in the ontological sense, referring to the Second and Third Hypostases of the Trinity. We are not permitted, therefore, to say that the song is pure allegory. The object of the song must also be ontologically hypostatic, must be competent to partake in this dance as a hypostasis, delighting in, receiving and giving love. For, unless the song is to be individualised, it is otherwise devoid of any concrete meaning: love cannot be an allegory of love.

This marvellous and mysterious love clearly presupposes not a psychologism, not an affect or an emotion, but an ontology: the reality of the inter-relationship of spiritual realities.<sup>726</sup>

This brings us to the question of participation. If we are to consider the Church as a 'person', a hypostasis, what is her relation to us as 'persons'? Are we many individual brides, as Congar and Balthasar maintain, or do we lose our own personhood being swallowed up in some greater entity? Is this person 'Church' some *tertium quid* that is other than us, other than the humanity of the Incarnated Son? Essentially these questions revolve around the nature of personal identity and freedom.

#### **5.2.2.2 Participation**

The question of individualisation, so abhorrent both to Zizioulas and to Bulgakov, relates directly to the nature of hypostatic existence. Again, however, language is an issue. For Zizioulas the word 'individual' specifically means a disintegrated and unconnected form of hypostatic being. Bulgakov sometimes also uses it to refer to the particularity of natural (non-hypostatic) being, that which distinguishes one form of living being from another in a sophiological sense (although it can also be used both positively and negatively in a hypostatic sense). The direct opposite of 'individual' (negative) is 'person' or 'hypostasis' (positive).

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726 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p265

In *The Lamb* Bulgakov states ‘Persons must be transparent for one another: all in all and everyone in all. That is the ontology of personality.’<sup>727</sup> Here he sets out the nature of the fall and thus sets the agenda for the primary work of the Incarnation. It is a theme that he picks up in *The Bride* where he identifies what Zizioulas would describe as the ‘catholicity’ of personhood as the image of the tri-hypostatic Triune God:

The image of God [is] the image of sacrificial and self-renouncing trihypostatic love, in which each of the hypostases acquires its own personal center not in itself but outside of itself, in other hypostases.<sup>728</sup>

This image is obscured in the fall. In consequence, hypostases seek their centres inside themselves.<sup>729</sup> This ‘individuality’ is, in *The Bride*, precisely what is to be overcome by humanity on its journey to deification. The process was begun in Eden, but interrupted in the fall.

To explain how everyone shares personally in Adam’s guilt, Bulgakov postulates Adam as an integral hypostasis in which everyone participates, while still recognising the uniqueness of each person. Trying to make sense of Paul’s theology (and the Church’s doctrine) of original sin in Romans 5, he describes each human hypostasis as belonging, not to a series of disconnected occurrences, but to a genus that shares one nature, and for whom the world is one. In language reminiscent of Zizioulas, and criticised by Behr, he says this genus bears the hypostatic image of the Trinity, and thus corresponds to the ‘trihypostatizedness [which] is the perfect manifestation of the divine person, as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’ But for Bulgakov, unless this correspondence exists, Christ could not have born the sins of every person that has been or will be.<sup>730</sup>

In the original creation, Bulgakov maintains, this ‘multi-unity’ was not ‘given’ but was rather a task. He relates John 17:21-22, ‘That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you...that they may be one, even as we are one,’ as the task of this original creation. Thus, the Incarnation, itself, is about a restoration of process, not state. Here, then, are also the seeds of eschatology, wherein the entelechy finds its purpose and fulfilment, that fulfilment being the image of God in humanity, that is, where each hypostasis finds itself kenotically in ‘the other.’ The end envisaged by the process is the hypostatic reflection of the Trinitarian God in the creaturely Sophia – a multi-unity hypostasis in which the fullness of God’s pleroma permeates and saturates creation in its otherness, without consuming it:

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727 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p204

728 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p156

729 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p92

730 Bulgakov, *Bride*, pp185-186



This individual, qualified ray, which hitherto has shined only in its own colour, now begins to shine with the light of the pleroma and participates in the wholeness in which God is all in all.<sup>731</sup>

This process is restored in Jesus, through his death and resurrection. Although Bulgakov postulates the need for a single multi-hypostatic nature, for Paul it is simply by the Spirit in baptism that we are joined to Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom 6:5, 1 Cor 12:13). Through baptism in Christ we *have died* to sin, so that we *will be* raised with him (Rom 6:5), again, through the Spirit (Rom 8:11). In between times, it is through the one Spirit that we partake of the one body (1 Cor 12:13), the body that is being formed of Christ and will be united to Christ as his bride (Rom 7:4). The Spirit is the one through whom God's love is poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5). It is therefore through the Spirit that the process of kenotic hypostatisation, learning to love in the image of God, that is, in the image of the Christ, proceeds.

Congar echoes this idea in Vol.2 of *I Believe* where he understands the Spirit as the catholicising agent:

God dwells in us and we dwell in him. There is no confusion of persons. This is the way in which there is a realisation of the mutual interiority of the whole in each which constitutes the catholic sense: *kath' holou*, being of a piece with the whole. The Spirit enables all men to be one and unity to be a multitude.<sup>732</sup>

Through the Spirit-imbued Gospel sacraments of baptism and Eucharist the bride grows and is built, coalesces, as it were, into a single multi-hypostasis, who is already eschatologically named. This happens as each free hypostatic centre, or person, journeys towards life 'in the Spirit:' to love, to serve and so become truly free,<sup>733</sup> thus bringing creation, through their bodies and the Eucharist and extensively beyond, into the communion of God. In the Liturgy we learn to sing and speak 'with one voice,' and our hypostases become transparent as we sing the 'I' of the Magnificat or the Nunc Dimittis.

Deification thus means that, through the process of kenotic love, undertaken in the Son and through the Spirit, as the single hypostatic voice of the Church responds in freedom and joy to the invitation for the whole of creation to join the communion of God, so the pleroma of God will permeate the universe, revealing the new creation.

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731 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p92

732 Congar, *I Believe*, Vol.2, pp17-18

733 Cf. 'O God...whose service is perfect freedom,' Second Collect, Morning Prayer, *Book of Common Prayer*, Church of England

The reading of the Song of Songs (and indeed the Psalms), then, can be undertaken with either a 'bad' individuality or as the eschatological all-hypostatic 'I.' And although for Congar the Song can *only* be sung ontologically as an 'I' at the level of the individual, for Zizioulas and Bulgakov this would be anathema. 'Would be' because it is not certain *how* Zizioulas would sing it at all, for who would be the subject or the object?

### 5.2.2.3 *Identity*

So we return to the question, *who* is 'The Church?'

For Congar the answer remains unclear. Sometimes it is the 'I' of Christ, sometimes the 'I' of the Spirit. However, he is certain it is not another 'I.' The great difficulty with these answers lies in Christ's own identity. Who is Jesus? The answer to this question has long been given:

His *human* hypostasis, that of Jesus, 'the son of Joseph and Mary,' 'the son of a carpenter,' having an earthly parentage, is the hypostasis of the Logos.<sup>734</sup>

If the hypostasis of Jesus is the Logos of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of the Father, those who insist he is also the 'I' of the Church face an insurmountable ontological difficulty. He *cannot* also be Creation's free and loving response to his own invitation. To do so would be an ontological denial of God's own being as expressed in creating Creation. That God's kenotic love freely results in the ecstatic movement that creates the 'Other' as free to love, necessarily means that the freedom to respond to God's love is the ontological foundation of creation's existence. The invitation of God to Creation, to be drawn into deification, cannot be answered by God, himself. It can only be answered by the Other, by that which is created by the Second and Third Hypostases in their image, that is, by the 'fourth' hypostasis.

To the question, then, who is 'The Church?' the answer can only be 'The "Yes" of Creation.' And this Answer must be both hypostatic and other than the Logos. This is the inescapable consequence of the identification of the hypostasis of Jesus as the Logos. Furthermore, it means that describing the Church ontologically as the Body of Christ, without its corresponding nuptial qualifier, is both a denial of the ontological freedom of creation, and thus of God's love (since the hypostasis of the Church is then the Logos). It is therefore a denial that the fundamental relation between God (through Christ and the Spirit) and his Creation is personal and hypostatic.

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734 Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p233

Such a claim, far from being a denial, is an affirmation of the axiomatic centrality of the New Testament's, and the Church's, teaching about Christ. It fully affirms both his humanity and his divinity, his soteriological centrality, the dependence of Creation upon his redemptive work, as both source and *telos* of new creation, as the Alpha and Omega, as the new Adam who restores that which was lost by the first Adam. The Genesis story of the first Adam, and his Eve, in their creation as well as their fall, forms the narrative soil out of which the story of the second Adam, and his Eve, grows (cf. 2 Cor 11:2-3).<sup>735</sup>

Zizioulas' concern that, according to McPartlan, to consider the Church as bride necessarily means to individualise Christ, seems to forget an important principle: the hypostasis of Jesus is the Logos. Is it possible to individualise Jesus? Only by individualising the Logos. But to do this would be to break the communion of the Holy Trinity. In what way, then, is it possible to individualise Jesus?

We *cannot* turn him into an 'individual', whatever we do, because as he says 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' (Jn 14:10,11). The Logos is never, can never be, an individual in isolation – he is always, even in the depths of Gethsemane or in the darkest hour of the cross when abandoned by God, still constituted through his perichoretic communion with the Father and the Spirit, still *the Son*.

If we consider Jesus from the perspective of his *humanity*, we can only regard him as an individual in abstraction from his hypostasis. But even here, as the bridegroom giving his life and flesh from which his bride is fashioned, he cannot be separated from her in the new creation, even if the unity of the 'one flesh' of husband and wife, the 'image of God', can be 'put asunder', in the present. Christ and his bride are *one*, not the same, but together.

So to consider the Church as Bride, far from individualising Christ, is to speak of the gentle hand of the Son guiding his bride into the eternal dance of the Holy Trinity: 'Love took my hand, and smiling did reply...' <sup>736</sup>

#### **5.2.2.4 Of the Name**

This answer to the question of the Church's identity as Creation's 'Yes,' however, will not suffice on its own, simply for the reason that it not a Name. That is, it has not been named by God as such. The name given by God in Isaiah is 'My Delight Is In Her' – the

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735 See Ch 4

736 George Herbert's poem, Love III

name of the bride.<sup>737</sup> Inseparable from her is the rest of Creation, for Isaiah continues ‘and your land “Married.”’ The Church’s identity as a person is the bride of God.

The obvious name given to the bride in both the East and West is Mary.

However, for Bulgakov the image of the Church associated with Mary is ‘Temple’, not ‘Bride’, since she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It complements the Church’s description as Christ’s ‘Body’ since it is to the Logos we are joined. This complementarity is required by his soteriology in which both Christ and Mary are co-redemptors. Hence Body and Temple belong necessarily together. In this scheme there is no obvious place for the bride.

‘Body’ and ‘Temple,’ however, can both be understood as biblical descriptions of the ‘Bride’, depending on the latter for their interpretation.<sup>738</sup> In Genesis 2:23 we find the bride being formed from the body of Adam (who thus *becomes* the groom), and affirmed as a metaphor for the Church in Ephesians 5:23. In Genesis 2:7 we find the man as the dwelling of the breath of God – the temple of the Spirit, and in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 body and temple are presented as the basis of the nuptial union between Christ and his bride.<sup>739</sup>

Congar is interesting in this respect for he rarely talks about Mary in the context of the bride. In fact, Mary is distinctly quiet in his ecclesiology in general. Some Catholic theologians, who have recently been advocating the nuptial metaphor as the primary identity of the Church, are abrasive in their advocacy of her.<sup>740</sup> Congar is more content to use biblical data to develop his dogmatics. Mary, for him, is representative and typical in the defining sense. He describes her as ‘the first and even fundamental type,’ and of the Church as ‘imitating’ and ‘prolonging’ the attitudes originating in her. This is much more gentle and participative language than the functional structuralism evident in others.<sup>741</sup> For him, she remains the cynosure of salvation *as one of us*, responding to Christ who remains the focus of adoration, praise and worship. At the risk of suffering from ‘satanic dementia,’<sup>742</sup> this hypostatic openness is not unique to Mary, but is the entelechy of all hypostases, is the realisation of the image of God in humanity.

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737 Is 62:2, 4

738 See Barker M, *Temple Themes*, p53

739 See Section 4.6, above

740 E.g. Calloway C, ‘Bridegroom Christology’, 2003

741 Congar, ‘La personne’, p629

742 Bulgakov, *Bride*, p460

Biblically, this should be apparent from the fact that, while Luke's Gospel focuses on the kenotic response of Mary to the angel's visit, Matthew focuses entirely on Joseph and his equally kenotic response (Mt 1:24-25). For The Gospels the Incarnation took place within a family, within the context of a betrothal relationship that required the costly consent of both the husband and the wife.<sup>743</sup>

The work of the Spirit is to infuse Creation with the work of Christ (Jn 16:14). This means appropriating Christ's death on the Cross and bringing the new life of resurrection. In this the *becoming* of deification is restored, although not, apparently, in an observably progressive manner for the Church, as Congar observes. The gift of personhood, by the Spirit at baptism, to each person is the promise of eschatological fulfilment in which each will be transparent for the other, without losing their own lustre, and Creation will be imbued with the brilliance of God.

The Name of the bride is therefore an eschatological name, in which God will be all in all. Can she be named with the name of any *one, historical* person? Will there be a 'hierarchy of holiness' within the bride, crowned by one who will give her name? Will some shine with greater brilliance than others? We do not know. We do know that 'God does not show favouritism,'<sup>744</sup> but that whatever has been built will be tested by the Spirit (1 Cor 3:13). We have seen Bulgakov is strident, aggressive even, not in naming the Church 'Mary,' but in identifying the historical virgin mother Mary as the personal bride of Christ. Congar will not name the Church other than to say Christ and the Spirit are her hypostatic centres, but sees in Mary the forerunner and archetype of the response that is the Church. Mary, undoubtedly, has a very special place in the Church. Indeed, we participate in her hypostatic 'I' every evening in the Magnificat. And perhaps this is the foretaste of the eschatological transparency of circumincession and love.

But perhaps it is best to leave her name as 'Hephzibah,' 'My Delight Is In Her' (Is 62:4).

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<sup>743</sup> Bulgakov denies Joseph any particular special status, e.g. *Friend*, pp177-188

<sup>744</sup> Mt 20:1-16; Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:23-25

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion**

***“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour.”***

Does the Church have an identity? What is the nature of her relation with the triune God and the World?

Worsening global economic, environmental, and societal crises, corporate domination, violence, and unparalleled inequality, indicate a deep malaise in our conception of human relations with God, the world and each other, with our identity as humanity.

The Church maintains humanity is made in the image of the triune God by the Logos through the Spirit. Genesis describes the communion of man and woman, bride and groom, husband and wife together as the invitation to be the icon of God. The creation of humanity is spirit-imbued soil, deified dust, invited to be God’s presence in creation and to be creation’s personal communion with God. It goes on to speak of the disruption in all three sets of relations by human wantonness, sin. The New Testament presents the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ as God’s response to this disruption, and the renewed possibility of answering the threefold invitation. The result is the Church.

The question of the Church’s identity, then, has a degree of urgency, recognised by the focus of Vatican II on the Church. *Lumen Gentium* describes her as the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The overriding difficulty with each of these primary descriptors is that none of them is personal. They cannot give ontological space for the *Church’s* response of love to God’s invitation; ‘love’ is a personal and ontological category. They are not.

### **6.1 Congar and Bulgakov – a Summary**

The exploration of the ecclesial ontologies undertaken here demonstrates marked similarities and differences. Both Congar and Bulgakov display the deep influence of German Idealism. Bulgakov is more explicit in this language; Congar’s is mediated by Möhler. Both grapple with the issue of the relation between the visible and the invisible, history and experience, matter and spirit. While remaining unhesitatingly committed to their Traditions, both, certainly in their later writings, speak of the priority of the Spirit over institutional authority. Both identify the ontology of the Church as eschatologically

conditioned, in which institution is not present. And both, to a greater or lesser extent, understand the destiny of each person in terms of the catholicity of transparent love.

Nevertheless, the ecclesiology and ontology of salvation that arises from each take divergent forms. Both are conditioned by their Traditions and the difference in their creeds, notably the *filioque* clause. Within the context of his tradition, Congar begins both his ecclesiology and his soteriology in the Gospels, with the ‘mission’ of Christ. He identifies this mission primarily in terms of interior renewal. Consequently the focus is more ‘spiritual’ in the platonic sense. Ultimately for him, salvation consists in the uniting of souls with God, of which the nuptial metaphor is the crowning depiction, and Mary the first example. His principal metaphor of the Church is the Body of Christ. In his early ecclesiology the visible Body as Institution exists prior to, and for the purpose of building up, the Mystical Body as ‘saved souls’. It derives directly from Christ and therefore carries his immediate authority. Drawing on the *filioque*, he subordinates the activity of the Spirit to the authority of the Institution, although this relationship is ambiguous in his later pneumatology. The result is that the Church has two strands – one institutional, hierarchical, and causal but temporary, the other mystical, personal, resultant but eschatological. The visible Body, as keeper of the sacraments, is the mediator between God and the soul.<sup>745</sup> The Mystical Body is vivified by the Spirit working through the sacraments. The unity of the eschatological Body is the unity of loving souls that derives from being united with Christ through the Spirit. Christ, or the Holy Spirit, is the ‘I’ of the Church. She does not have an answering ‘I’ of her own. Due to the focus on interiority there is little in his ecclesiology or his soteriology that explicitly relates to the rest of Creation.

For Bulgakov, on the other hand, soteriology and ecclesiology are defined by creation. The principal task of humanity is to *become* the image of the Trinitarian God through the process of learning to love. Taking Genesis 2:7 as axiomatic, soteriology of necessity includes materiality, ‘nature’ in its essential sense. Deification is therefore a cosmic process accomplished through humanity. Because he sees the act of creation as the exercise of the kenotic love of the Trinity, it is created in freedom to respond in love. The image of God therefore corresponds to kenotic love in humanity, the telos of which is hypostatic transparency; that is, personal hypostatic freedom to love and be loved. Thus the entelechy of creation is towards hypostatic multi-unity, through which

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745 So also for Balthasar and of Scola, another Catholic theologian developing the nuptial metaphor of the Church in an attempt to reconcile these ‘Petrine’ and ‘Marian’ ontologies, but nevertheless whose principal description of the Church is ‘intrinsic medium.’ A Scola, ‘The Theological Foundation’, 2007

the pleroma of God will imbue the whole of creation. The Incarnation is the continuation of the task given to Creation. Through participation in Christ the path to deification is restored. The Church, then, is the realisation of this entelechy, in which Creation becomes united with God through Christ as his Bride (personified in Mary), in the Spirit: Bulgakov's vision of the Church is cosmic and eternal. The Church exists prior to the hierarchy, which effectively forms the temporary 'backbone' of the spirit-filled community.

Where, for Congar the Church is the Body of Christ, for Bulgakov this description is incomplete without the balancing Temple of the Holy Spirit. The two descriptions refer to the Church's relation with the Logos and the Holy Spirit in the Divine Sophia on the one hand, and with Christ and Mary, respectively, in the creaturely Sophia on the other. The biblical description of the Church as 'bride' refers purely to the (unhypostasised) Divine and creaturely Sophias.

Both Congar's and Bulgakov's ecclesiologies have brides, plural. For one it is souls, for the other, Sophias. Neither is adequate. However, in terms of offering an ontological response to the identity of the Church, Bulgakov has more to say. Briefly summarising and building on this, we can sketch an outline towards a personal ontology of the Church.

## **6.2 Towards an Ontology of the Bride**

God is spirit – personal and hypostatic: three persons, Father, Son, Spirit; one God. The revelation of God in the New Testament at Christ's baptism is that the Three mutually and kenotically constitute each other.

The creative *ecstasis* of the Father's love through the Logos (as content) and the Spirit (as act) gives birth to creation out of nothing. Humanity is created as free and hypostatic, as spirit embedded in nature, invited to bring Creation into perichoretic communion with God through the free and joyful response of kenotic love. The *communio* of male and female in Adam and Eve is thus an emanation of the *communio* of God with Creation, specifically through humanity. The union of Adam and Eve, 'they shall become one flesh,' is epistemologically and substantially grounded in the union of the Logos and his bride, hypostasised Creation. Calloway summarises it thus:

Within the first three chapters of the book of Genesis the theme of nuptiality serves as the basis of both creation and salvation. As the overflow of divine love, creation is given from a



God who expresses himself as a divine *communio personarum*, that is, ‘us’ (Gen 1:26). Since man is made in the image of God, the interpersonal communion of the Triune God as nuptial ‘we’ is placed in man as a fundamental given. What this reveals is that man, male and female, has been made for communion, communion with God and with one another.<sup>746</sup>

What he omits in this summary, typical of so much western (iconoclastic) theology, is the participation of the rest of creation in this drama through humanity’s relationship with the soil.

The ‘image of God,’ humanity, is created in freedom and love to be kenotically, mutually constitutive, a multi-hypostasis, a single voice with a single name, like white light comprising the spectrum of human hypostases, of which the primal marriage between Adam and Eve, the ‘one flesh,’ is the prolepsis. Each ray realises its own hue, paradoxically, as it becomes transparent to all others, learning to love. This *becoming* is the work in Creation of humanity and the Spirit. Because it is the fulfilment of the image of the Triune God, it is the ontology of humanity, hypostasised Creation.

The communion of man and woman is located within the Garden of which they are a part. They are invited to be God’s presence in his Creation, tending and caring for their own extended bodies – The Gardeners. The ontology of Creation is therefore the ontology of the Church, multi-hypostatic and cosmic.

For hypostasised Creation, love is not a necessity but a possibility. Love is both the path and the destination, for God *is* love, the fulfilment of which is the image of God, deification, life. The invitation is thus at once the way, the truth and the life. Jesus is the invitation, the eternal incarnated Logos of God, in whose image we are made.

The invitation of God extends through humanity to the whole of creation: humanity is nothing other than enspirited humus. This invitation is to join the nuptial communion of the Three, as the ‘Fourth.’ As spirit, God communes with spirit, somehow breathing the Name of the creature as a ‘Thou’ without obliterating it, for only a ‘thou’ can commune with the ‘We.’ The ‘Thou’ is therefore hypostatic – a oneness of being: in the eyes of God, a ‘person.’

The fall is the turning away from God, the Source of life, which results in death. It is the nuptial promise between the ‘one flesh’ of man and woman, and God, broken. It is the atomisation of humanity and the destruction of the path to perichoretic communion. The nuptial relation between them (Gen 2:25) disintegrates (Gen 3:7). God’s blessing upon them (Gen 1:28), becomes a curse. Not only their relationship with each other, but the

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746 Calloway, *Bridegroom Christology*, p15

very ground from which they have come has to bear the curse (Gen 3:16-19). And yet the redemption of Creation is foretold to be the fruit of this disrupted nuptial relation (Gen 3:15). The entire narrative concerns the fabric of perichoretic relations between humanity, its nature, and God, of which marriage is the metaphor.

In the OT narrative God calls to himself a bride from humanity. Marriage is the metaphor of worship. Through her he will restore the road to *κοινωνία* for all of humanity. The promise is given in terms of the blessing of creation, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’ The curse on the land is to be broken. And the Bride of Yahweh will give birth to the promised Messiah of David (Rev 12:1-6).

The Father sends his Son, the Christ, the Bridegroom of God, who takes the human nature of the Bride of Yahweh in ‘the likeness of sinful flesh’ as God took the dust of the earth. Not the *unlikeness*, not a ‘special’ nature, not a privileged or a different nature,<sup>747</sup> but an *identical* nature, in all its weakness and depravity, taken from one who, like all of us, had ‘sinned and fall(en) short of the glory of God’ (Rom 3:23).<sup>748</sup> Humanity and the rest of creation are not saved through *any* special endeavours on our part, no matter how difficult, incomprehensible, or distasteful the theology. This is the *Gospel*, however much the Church tries to protect God from our worst vices – ‘that which is not assumed is not saved.’

The Logos *embodies* the Bride of Yahweh, unites this depraved human nature with divine nature to redeem it and rescue it from death, through death. This embodiment is not the wedding, as Augustine suggests, but its prolepsis. The Logos baptises it with the Spirit, the breath of God, while still in its ‘sinful nature’ before death. In the strength of the *Spirit* he faces anew the temptations of divinisation through the flesh to which the first Adam succumbed, without sinning. It is precisely through the Spirit’s presence and life, uniting Jesus with the Father, that the temptations are overcome. This is why the same Spirit, given to us, enlivens us to follow in his footsteps, to become like him. That is, to become persons that love kenotically, whose hypostases becomes transparent to each other, to God, and to Creation.<sup>749</sup>

Jesus takes the ‘sinful nature’ to the cross and dies. On the cross he sleeps, like the first Adam, his body broken, the blood and water flowing from his side signifying it given to form his bride. In resurrection Christ is ‘born again’ from the womb of the earth, like

747 Cf. Bulgakov, *Lamb*, pp298-299

748 How could Rom 3:9-12 possibly be more explicit? Cf. Bulgakov, *Lamb*, p243

749 In this regard it is interesting how frequently the theme of friendship with the animals is regarded as a sign of holiness in the hagiographies of saints.

the first Adam, but reborn as spiritual (1 Cor 15:42-49). The Resurrection is witnessed, first by Mary Magdalene who thinks he is The Gardener, the Second Adam, and then by a cloud of witnesses, some of whom are named, many of whom are not. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit is given to all who are present, not just the apostles, as the down-payment for the marriage that is to come – Christ’s presence in his absence. The Spirit baptises, breathes the breath of God into the dry bones and body taken from Christ’s side – and creates the community, the *κοινωνία* of his disciples in the upper room. So the Bride of Yahweh is born again of water and the Spirit as the Bride of Christ; multi-lingual and multi-hypostatic at her first appearance, yet one.

The flesh Christ united to himself was born again from the womb of the earth, and ‘birthed’ as a spiritual body by the Spirit. This ‘spiritual body’ is not some ‘other’ body. The new creation is not a replacement for the old. Rather it is the old creation ‘groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now’ to reveal the spiritual glory of the creation that was created ‘very good.’ It is the removal of the veil, as witnessed by Moses with the burning bush and at the Transfiguration – the spiritual ontology of creation imbued with the Glory (Holy Spirit) of God. The extraordinary testimony of Scripture is that this will be accomplished through humanity reborn in the image of Christ.

Who is the bride? Firstly, she *cannot*, ontologically, be the body of Christ, even though she is taken from his body, clothed in his flesh, and nuptially becomes his body.

Why? Because the Invitation cannot be the Response. ‘Love bade me welcome...’<sup>750</sup> The Invitation is from God, is of God, and is God. The invitation is *ontological*. What, then, is lacking? ‘A guest, I answer’d, worthy to be here.’ The guest is not the host, the created other than the Creator. The Logos is the invitation, his guest the unworthy, but ontological, other. This is the requirement of an ontology of freedom and the gift of love. ‘Love took my hand, and smiling did reply...’ The Lover and the Beloved are two, not one, are to become one. Yet both creation, ‘Who made the eyes but I?’, and redemption, ‘And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?’, are undertaken by the same One, the Logos, who therefore includes the other antinomically in himself in his death. ‘You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat; So I did sit and eat.’ The eschatological wedding banquet is proleptically celebrated at each Eucharist: the presence of the Spirit is the future present. It is also the historic present. The Spirit is therefore the bearer of ontology.

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750 The lines are taken from George Herbert’s poem, Love III.

The act of re-creation of the bride is *instituted* in the single dyadic event of Incarnation-Crucifixion-Resurrection-Pentecost of the Word and Spirit. But it continues through the work of the Spirit and the Word in the Gospel sacraments, and beyond, until the Parousia. At every baptism she is united with Christ in his death and given her new name as she rises again to life. At every Eucharist she continues to be built up from Christ's body, through hypostatic renewal in the Spirit, that she may be eschatologically 'one flesh' with him, and thus together form the Temple of the Spirit (1 Cor 6:17). She is thus *constituted* through the Spirit and the Word.

The question that remains concerns the nature of unity. Is the bride, as Congar, Balthasar and others maintain, really a multitude of brides, of souls united to God, who consequently become transparent to each other? Is she Augustine's singularity of 'humanity' united to divinity in the Incarnation, but thereby non-hypostatic? Or if she is to be allowed her own ontology, is this some *tertium quid*, neither Christ, nor the Holy Spirit, nor us?

If Creation is to sing with one voice, whereby 'our mouth shall shew forth thy praise', the Bride must be other than a multitude of souls united with God. Her unity must derive from her deified createdness, rather than God's own substantial unity, although that is its origin since she is created in its image. Her unity is entirely derivative on being clothed in the flesh of Christ's new creation and the gift of the Spirit who quickens life and love. And yet, once reborn, it must also be a unity of loving *response*. Therefore she must be other than Augustine's union of divinity and humanity in the Incarnation. But neither can she be something other than *us*, created humanity. The promise of Jesus is that each one is known and loved by the Father, more precious than many sparrows. The answer must, therefore, lie in the real unity of the restored *κοινωνία* of humanity, itself, through the Spirit-enabled process of love resulting in kenotic hypostatisation.

This process of kenotic hypostatisation, learning to love and growing in holiness, is the adorning and beautifying of the bride. It commences formally in baptism, in which a hypostasis, an enfleshed person, dies to self as a hypostatic fragment and is raised in Christ through the Spirit as the hypostatic Church. One plus one still equals *one*. Thus all believers are eschatological priests and Christ is present wherever there is *κοινωνία*. In dying and rising in Christ the bride is 'built.' As each person grows in kenotic love, so the bride grows in beauty.

The formal expression of the Church, her order and her sacraments are *not* her ontology, which is defined eschatologically. They are all temporally circumscribed and will cease at the Parousia. They exist in the time between times as the *representation* of eschatological hypostatic generation (sacraments) and transparency (orders), which are *only* effective through the operation of the Spirit who makes Christ present. Ordination exists, not as the representation of Christ to his bride, let alone as hierarchical authority, but as the representation of the kenotic and hypostatic unity of the bride to Christ.

The new Eve, formed from the body and blood of the new Adam, grows into his loving likeness to be presented to him as his bride (cf. 2 Cor 11:2-3), so the two will eschatologically come together as ‘one flesh’, head and body, the prolepsis of which Paul so often describes. At the Passover meal Christ blesses the bread and the cup, covenanting himself in the nuptial engagement, giving his body to form his bride. This giving washes and purifies her, which is itself an image of death and resurrection, in preparation for the marriage. The Eucharist is thus both the building of the bride from his body, and the eschatological celebration of the marriage.

Who is she? Revealed names describe relations: Father, Son, Spirit. The bride’s name is given by God in Isaiah simply as ‘Hephzibah,’ ‘My Delight Is In Her.’ And yet we already speak with the voice of one, share her hypostasis, ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord.’

This, then, is the one invited to the empty space at the table in Rublev’s icon.

(99,995 words)

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