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Divine Judgment in Pavel Florensky and Sergius Bulgakov¹

Abstract

In this article, the author analyzes the accounts of divine judgment in Pavel Florensky and Sergius Bulgakov. According to the Russian theologians, divine judgment consists in the act of disclosure of the person's "likeness of God," the comparison between the empirical self and the ideal prototype of the person that exists in Christ, and the separation of the sinful aspect of the empirical self from the person. They maintain that the separation between the sheep and the goats is a figure of speech that indicates a division within each human being, not



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the division of humanity into two groups. With this central point in mind, they mount a case for universal salvation. Drawing on Matthew 5:29–30, they argue that divine judgment entails spiritual amputation and purification, not the damnation of any person *in toto*.

Keywords

Pavel Florensky, Sergius Bulgakov, Divine judgment, Universalism, Image and likeness of God

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* offers a masterful depiction of a man-made hell on earth, exhibiting human nature at the extremes of wickedness and kindness, with wickedness decidedly prevailing over kindness. Since the subject of the Soviet labor camp system quite naturally yielded itself to an apocalyptic polarization between the forces of good and evil, Solzhenitsyn felt compelled to qualify this polarization: "If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. *But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.*"² The italicized insight, often credited to Solzhenitsyn, has a history in Russian religious thought. This paper aims at tracing the genealogy of this insight in the work of Pavel Florensky (1882–1937) and his friend, Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944).

Florensky adumbrated his eschatological views in the ninth chapter of his magnum opus, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*:

² Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 168; italics are mine.

An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters (1914). By choosing the genre of letters to an imaginary friend, Florensky was able to intersperse his theological treatise with digressions into liturgy, literature, and mathematics, as well as confessions of a deeply personal nature. The ninth chapter opens with what purports to be Florensky's mystical vision of his second death, an experience of being nearly swallowed up by the harrowing abyss of nothingness, from which the author is subsequently rescued by God's hand. Florensky's descriptions of this state were so graphic that some of his contemporaries suspected him of demonic possession. While the grounds for such suspicions were dubious, it could not be doubted that Florensky took the realm of the demonic and the hold that evil had over human life with utter seriousness.

How will God deal with human evil at the last judgment? In his account of the last judgment, Florensky operates with a rich repertoire of biblical texts, while focusing most of his exegetical efforts on 1 Cor 3:10–15, where Paul compares Christian life to a building which is built upon the foundation of Christ. At the last judgment, Paul tells us, “the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3:13–15). Florensky notes that the purpose of the divine fire is to test the building, to disclose its structural flaws, and to separate the unsound elements from the rest of the builder's work. He explains:

This fire is not punishment or vengeance but a necessary trial, a test, an investigation of how the man used the “foundation” given to him, the Divine condescension. It is a “proof” of the personality. If it turns out that

the innermost *image of God* has not been disclosed in a concrete *likeness of God*, if the man has buried in the ground the image of God he has been given without using it, without adding to it, without deifying his selfhood, without proving himself, then the image of God will be taken from his undeified selfhood. If his selfhood is transformed into the likeness of God, then the man will receive a “reward,” the inner bliss of seeing in himself the likeness of God, the creative joy of an artist contemplating his own creation.³

In his explanation, Florensky creatively develops a distinction that some early Christian authors make between the image of God and the likeness of God.⁴ According to this distinction, the image of God is the person’s original endowment at creation. The likeness of God is something that each person has an opportunity to attain throughout her life. Florensky connects the image of God thus understood with the Christological foundation of 1 Cor 3:11, and, in turn, compares the likeness of God to the building that can endure the test of divine fire. According to

³ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, trans. Boris Jakim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 168, (abbreviation: “The Pillar”).

⁴ See e.g. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V.6.1; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogos*, 1.97.2–3; Origen, *De principiis*, III.6.1: “Man received the dignity of the image in the first creation, but the perfection of the likeness is reserved for him at the end, he was to acquire this for himself through own industrious efforts by imitation of God” (translation mine). Cf. Diadochus of Photike, “On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination,” in G. E. H. Palmber, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, eds. and trans., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 1: 253: “All men are made in God’s image; but to be in His likeness is granted only to those who through great love have brought their own freedom into subjection to God.” See Arne J. Hobbel, “The *imago Dei* in the Writings of Origen,” *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989), pp. 301–307.

Florensky, the standard of divine judgment is not an external norm applied to all human beings without any distinction, but a unique divine likeness with which each empirical personality is compared individually. Florensky insists: "The standard for a person must be *he himself* and *only he himself*, because otherwise it would be possible to conclude *mechanically* from what is alien to and outside the person to his life, and to give him norms in this mechanical manner. The uniqueness of every person, his absolute irreplaceability by anything else, requires that he himself be the standard for himself."⁵ Florensky proposes to subordinate the juridical category of a general norm applied to all humans at the point of judgment to the ontological and personalist category of the likeness of God, which is applied in a unique manner to each person, accentuating the importance of particular judgment. He adds that the emphasis on personal uniqueness does not render the last judgment idiosyncratic, for each person's true self is grounded in Christ. While there may be some hints of such a move in the patristic thought, as far as I can tell, in modern theology this trope is unique to Florensky.

A quarter-century after Florensky's *Pillar*, Bulgakov developed this trope in *The Bride of the Lamb* (1939). Bulgakov maintained that the second coming, general resurrection, and last judgment were three inseparable aspects of one divine action rather than three distinct events, as they were usually presented.⁶ In the parousia, Christ and the Holy Spirit would appear in all their uncreated glory. If in the incarnation Christ's divine

⁵ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar*, p. 169; emphasis in the original.

⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), p. 455; Russian edition *Neviesta Agntsa* (Moscow: Obshchedostupnyĭ pravoslavnyiĭ universitet, 2005), p. 477.

glory was hidden and restrained, in his second coming all would immediately and clearly recognize Christ as Godman.⁷

The confrontation with the overwhelming reality of the glorified Christ spells judgment for all humankind. Bulgakov writes: “The judgment and separation consist in the fact that every human being will be placed before his own eternal image in Christ, that is, before Christ. And in the light of this image, he will see his own reality, and this comparison will be the judgment.”⁸ As with Florensky, the divine judgment is not about the application of general moral norms, but about the comparison that each individual makes between his empirical identity and his true self, as it is revealed by Christ. Bulgakov connects the image and likeness of God without differentiating them as neatly as did Florensky. Bulgakov writes: “For the image of God, given to man at his creation, is also the judgment upon man in relation to his likeness, which is the realization of this image in creaturely freedom. The ‘likeness’ is the book of life opened at the judgment.[...] The Judgment is the judgment of every human being in his true image upon himself in his ‘likeness.’”⁹

Bulgakov follows Florensky’s insight that divine judgment is not an externally imposed punishment. It is rather a self-judgment, a deep realization of what one can achieve with the help of Christ and what one has failed to become.¹⁰ The empha-

⁷ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 392–4, 397, 419–24. See my “Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005), 251–269.

⁸ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 457 (Russian edition: 479–480). Cf. Florensky, *Stolp i utverzhdienie istiny [The Pillar and Ground of the Truth]* (Moscow: Pravda, 1990), 230; G. Florovsky, “The Last Things and the Last Events,” in *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), 3: 255–6.

⁹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 458.

¹⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 360, pp. 456–8. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, p. 5: “In some way man is his own judge,

sis upon internalization, Bulgakov is quick to point out, does not make self-judgment subjective, since the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of conscience, enabling each person to see herself for what she really is and making the comparison with the eternal image of herself unavoidable and intrinsically convincing.¹¹ Bulgakov maintains the focus on the pneumatological illumination of the self quite consistently, offering a corrective to Florensky who in some cases expresses himself in a manner verging on Pelagianism. Bulgakov observes that while in this aeon self-knowledge is always partial and distorted, in the resurrection there will no longer be any place left for self-pity, spiritual blindness, or self-deception.¹²

Bulgakov follows Gregory of Nyssa in identifying the biblical “image of God” with the ideal prototype of each person eternally existing in Christ. This ideal image serves as a point of comparison and as a goal of deification for each human being in the eschaton.¹³ For Florensky, in contrast, the image of God is the Christological foundation, which requires the attainment of divine likeness as its fulfillment. For Bulgakov, the ideal image and the sanctified likeness are both reflections of the deified

because he passes sentence on himself by judging those subject to him.” Later in the same sermon Gregory draws a picture of the last judgment in which some humans are “dragged down into that black darkness by their evil conscience as by an executioner.” Trans. H. C. Graef, *St. Gregory of Nyssa* (Westminster: Newman, 1954), 140, 141. See V. I. Nesmelov, *Dogmaticheskaia sistema sviatogo Grigoriia Nisskogo* (Saint Petersburg, no publisher, 1887; reprinted in 2000), 608. This point was also stressed by Bulgakov’s contemporary Maurice Blondel, *La Philosophie et l’Esprit Chrétien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1946) 2: 353.

¹¹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 461.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 456.

¹³ Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione* PG 46. 152 A; Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 86.

human personhood fully disclosed in the glorified Christ. This rather subtle difference notwithstanding, it needs to be emphasized that Bulgakov followed Florensky's main insight, that is, his recasting of divine judgment in terms of a comparison between the empirical self and the ideal self.

According to both Russian theologians, the last judgment is not exhausted by the acts of disclosure and comparison. These two acts entail a third one, namely, a separation of the empirical self from its sinful deeds. Florensky's discussion of the act of separation is an extensive theological commentary on the already quoted passage from 1 Cor 3:15: "If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved but only as through fire." Florensky notes that John Chrysostom interpreted the words "the builder will be saved" as "the builder will be preserved" for eternal divine punishment. Taking exception to Chrysostom's interpretation, Florensky points out that Paul uses σωθήσεται, not τηρήσεται in order to capture the idea of salvation in a positive sense, rather than mere preservation in a neutral sense.

Having presented a significant number of biblical texts that speak of judgment in terms of separation, Florensky observes: "Such (though voluntary) *cutting off*, or *uprooting*, of the sinful part from the empirical person, is necessary even in this life, before this part infects all the other parts. This is like the amputation of a gangrenous member."¹⁴ Florensky suggests that the pain of parting with a deeply entrenched sin in this life could be viewed as analogous to the pain of divine punishment at the last judgment. He makes a distinction between two forms of universalism, what he calls "vulgar" and "true" Origenism. According to Florensky, vulgar Origenism is a belief that hell was invented as a scare tactic and that the last judgment will consist in God's

¹⁴ Pavel Florensky *The Pillar*, p. 174; emphasis in the original.

pronouncement of forgiveness over all humankind with no consequences to anybody. In contrast, true Origenism is a doctrine that “torments after death serve to educate persons and partly as retribution for their sins.”¹⁵ According to Florensky, this form of Origenism was upheld by Gregory of Nyssa, who viewed the torments after death as “only a necessary surgery, reforming the soul. As a rope drawn through a narrow aperture is cleaned of dirt, so a soul, in being subjected to torments, is freed from vices. This very same Gregory of Nyssa presents torments in an even more subtle form, that is, as an accidental consequence of purification, as a secondary phenomenon in the process of purification, like pain during an operation, like the unpleasant taste of medicine.”¹⁶ Florensky favored Gregory of Nyssa’s interpretation of the torments of hell as purgative and therapeutic.

Following Florensky, Bulgakov pointed out that whatever the historical vicissitudes of Origenism, Gregory of Nyssa’s universalist ideas had not received an explicit conciliar condemnation.¹⁷ Bulgakov recognized that the claim that all, including the

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 185.

¹⁶ Ibidem, 185.

¹⁷ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 495. A version of the Origenist doctrine of apocatastasis was condemned by the local council of Constantinople in 543. Whether the bishops of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553) anathematized this aspect of Origen’s theology explicitly is a murky question. Up to the late nineteenth century it was widely assumed that this ecumenical council did condemn universalism. See J. Daniélou, “L’apocatastase chez Saint Grégoire de Nysse,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 30 (1940), 328–47; Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 190; J. Sachs, “Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 54 (1993), 620–1. Bulgakov’s knowledge of the relevant patristic material was primarily from the dissertation of M. F. Oksiiuk, *Eschatology of St Gregory of Nyssa (Eskhatologiiia sv. Grigoriia Nisskogo)*, (Kiev, 1914; reprinted in 1999), which provided a comprehensive survey of patristic views on eschatology up to the time of the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553). Bulgakov also consulted the study of V. I.

fallen angels, would ultimately be saved represented a minority opinion, suspect of heresy on the grounds of its association with Origen. At the same time the Russian theologian emphasized that the Church had not issued any dogmatic definition on the subject of the final outcome of the last judgment and the eternity of hell beyond what was stated in the Nicene Creed. According to Bulgakov, in the absence of a conciliar definition, *consensus patrum*, even if it could be presumed to exist on this issue, was not enough to settle this difficult issue. In an important article, “Dogma and Dogmatics” (1937), written concurrently with *The Bride of the Lamb*, Bulgakov argued that only the doctrine of the trinity enshrined in the creed and the doctrine of the incarnation stated in the definitions of the seven ecumenical councils enjoyed the status of dogma binding upon all members of the Orthodox Church.¹⁸ It is a matter of historical fact that in the Eastern Orthodox tradition the doctrine of eternal damnation did not achieve the level of explicit articulation that it later found in the Roman Catholic conciliar definitions and Protestant confessions.¹⁹

Nesmelov, *Dogmaticheskaia sistema sviatogo Grigoriia Nisskogo* (Saint Petersburg, no publisher, 1887; reprinted in 2000).

¹⁸ “Dogmat i dogmatika,” in *Zhivoe predanie: pravoslavie v sovremennosti* (Paris: YMCA, 1937), 9. It is a separate question whether Bulgakov in practice followed his own limitation. Arguably, his sophiology is a significant modification of, even a serious departure from the Orthodox doctrine of the trinity. He relegated all other doctrinal questions, such as the veneration of the Mother of God and of the saints, sacramental theology, pneumatology, atonement theories, and eschatology, to the sphere of *theologoumena*, that is, of more or less authoritative patristic opinions.

¹⁹ The relevant documents include: the Athanasian Creed; Fourth Lateran Council, canon 1; Augsburg Confession, ch. 17; Second Helvetic Confession, ch. 26; Westminster Confession, ch. 33; Dordrecht Confession, art. 18. For the Roman Catholic conciliar decrees see J. Sachs, “Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell,” *Theological Studies* 52 (1991), 230–1; for the list of the Protestant con-

Distancing himself from “vulgar Origenism,” Bulgakov shared Florensky’s concern to provide an account of universalism that would be religiously and intellectually compelling.²⁰ Following Florensky, Bulgakov announced a terminological shift in eschatology from predominantly forensic to ontological categories.²¹ The end of the world must be understood primarily as the completion of creation, as the all-encompassing participation of creation in the life of God, as the transfiguration of the whole cosmos, as theosis, and only secondarily as judgment. For Bulgakov, forensic categories were too rationalistic and anthropomorphic, tending to reduce “the richness of Divine Wisdom to a manual of instructions for organizing an exemplary prison where the confinement is without end.”²² He warned that “the mysteries of God’s love cannot be measured according to the penal code.”²³

Besides the shift to ontological categories, the second important aspect of Bulgakov’s eschatology is its synergism. In the con-

fessions, see R. J. Bauckham, “Universalism: A Historical Survey,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 15 (1991), 22 n. 2.

²⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 380. Cf. Florensky, *The Pillar*, ch. 9; Berdiaev, *Filosofia svobodnogo dukha* (Moscow: Folio, 2003), ch. ix; *Ekzistentsial’naia dialektika bozhestvennogo i chelovecheskogo* (Moscow: Folio, 2003), ch. xiv.

²¹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 368; “Problema uslovnogo bessmertia,” *Put’* 52 (1936), 3; cf. Florensky, *The Pillar*, 211–12. Unlike Bulgakov, Florensky did not develop this point methodically. Berdiaev later followed this methodological move in *Istina i otkrovenie* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo RHGI, 1996), 115–19. This work was first published in 1948. Cf. id. *The Beginning and the End* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 238. On Berdiaev, see Gotthold Müller, “The Idea of Apokatastasis ton panton (Universal Salvation) in European Theology from Schleiermacher to Barth,” *The Journal of the Universalist Historical Society* 6 (1966), 62.

²² Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 382. Cf. Florensky, *The Pillar*, p. 254.

²³ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 382.

summation of all things, active creaturely participation in God's plan will continue. Bulgakov argues that individual souls will cooperate with God in reconstituting their own bodies.²⁴ Each soul is an organizing principle which functions as a "seed" from which the body grows like a plant. Bulgakov owes his development of this Pauline analogy (1 Cor. 15:44) to the Origenist tradition, although he does not acknowledge this fact directly. For Origen,

our bodies, like a grain of corn, fall into the earth, but implanted in them is the life-principle (*ratio*) which contains the essence of the body; and although the bodies die and are corrupted and scattered, nevertheless by the word of God that same life principle which has all along been preserved in the essence of the body raises them up from the earth and restores and refashions them, just as the power which exists in a grain of wheat refashions and restores the grain, after its corruption and death, into a body with stalk and ear.²⁵

Origen did not locate the enduring life-principle in the soul explicitly, but connected it with "the essence of the body," perhaps echoing the Stoic doctrine of *logoi spermatikoi*. It was Gregory of Nyssa who developed Origen's idea further and proposed that the soul reconstituted its resurrected body, since it remembered and retained the form (*eidōs*) of its earthly body.²⁶

²⁴ Ibidem, pp. 438–40.

²⁵ Origen, *De principis* II. 10. 3. Trans. G. W. Butterworth, *Origen: On First Principles* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), p. 141. It is very probable that *logoi spermatikoi* is behind Rufinus's *ratio*, which Butterworth aptly translated as "life-principle." See H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti, *Origène: traité des Principes, SC* 252–3 (Paris: Cerf, 1978), 252: 380; 253: 231 n. 14. Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, V. 23; V. 18, 19, 23; VII. 32. See Oksiuk, *Eskhatologija*, pp. 164–71.

²⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione*, 5; Nesmelov, *Dogmaticheskaia sistema*, 597–8; Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation: Es-*

Drawing further upon Gregory of Nyssa, Bulgakov speculated that the process of reconstitution of the body occurred not just in every individual soul, but concurrently in the world soul, which enabled the resurrected bodies to form “one common corporeality, proper to the integral Adam.”²⁷ The participation of all in the world soul and common corporeality secured the ontological and moral unity of humankind. The ontological unity of humankind did not destroy the personal uniqueness of each individual. Bulgakov emphasized this point by distancing himself from the view of Gregory of Nyssa, shared by some patristic authors, that gender distinctions would be eliminated in the resurrection.²⁸ Bulgakov argued that since gender was a part of the original state of humanity, not of the fallen human condition, the resurrection state would include characteristics associated with gender.²⁹ The transformation did not entail the obliteration of gender differences, but only the removal of the needs of stomach and sex that kept the body in bondage in this life.³⁰

The resurrection will be general and permanent for all. Bulgakov rejected the view defended by some nineteenth-century

chatology in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa and Karl Rahner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 69–70.

²⁷ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 446. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis* XX. 3–4; Nesmelov, *Dogmaticheskaia sistema*, p. 593.

²⁸ See, e.g., Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Enrico Peroli, *Il platonismo e l'antropologia filosofica di Gregorio di Nissa* (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1993); Gerhart Ladner, *The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

²⁹ Bulgakov emphatically rejected the claim, advocated by some ancient authors and in his time defended by Berdiaev, that the original state of humanity was androgynous. For Fr. Sergius, this was where biblical teaching parted ways with Christianized Platonism. See Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 448.

³⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 448.

theologians and his own contemporaries that the damned will be utterly annihilated instead of consigned to hell.³¹ Bulgakov argued that, on the one hand, God could not destroy his own fallen creatures, for this would indicate that he had erred in creating them. On the other hand, creatures could not destroy themselves, for the power to create *ex nihilo* and to destroy belonged to God alone.³² To admit that creaturely freedom was capable of such “metaphysical suicide” (an expression borrowed from Florensky) was to limit the power and goodness of God.³³ Bulgakov speculated that various groups of people would participate in the general resurrection differently: the saintly figures would do so actively and willingly, while the indifferent and the wicked souls would accept the resurrection as inevitable.³⁴

Bulgakov returns repeatedly to the insight of Isaac of Nineveh that “the torments of hell are the burning of love for God.”³⁵ He

³¹ Edward White, *Life in Christ* (London: E. Stock, 1878); E. Petavel-Olliff, *Le problème de l'immortalité*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1891–2); N. Berdiaev, *The Destiny of Man* (London: G. Bles, 1937), p. 344. The direct targets of Bulgakov's critique are White and Petavel-Olliff, not Berdiaev.

³² S. Bulgakov, “Problema uslovnogo bessmertia,” *Put'* 53 (1937), p. 11. Cf. *Filosofia khoziaistva*, p. 116.

³³ S. Bulgakov, “Problema uslovnogo bessmertia,” *Put'* 52 (1936), 17; 53 (1937), p. 14; *Apokalipsis Ioanna*, p. 282.

³⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 434; S. Bulgakov, “Problema uslovnogo bessmertia,” *Put'* 53 (1937), p. 18.

³⁵ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 459; cf. pp. 157, 464, 466, 473–4, 487; “On the Question of the Apocatastasis of the Fallen Spirits (In Connection with the Doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa),” 16, in Sergius Bulgakov, *Apocatastasis and Transfiguration*, trans. Boris Jakim (New Haven, CT: Variable, 1995), 27 (abbreviation: “Apocatastasis”). Bulgakov does not quote from Isaac verbatim. See Isaac of Nineveh, *Hom. 28*: “I also maintain that those who are punished in Gehenna are scourged by the scourge of love.” Trans. anonymous author, Holy Transfiguration Monastery, *The Ascetic Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syri-*

elaborates on the thought of the Syrian Father in the following way:

The judgment of love is the most terrible judgment, more terrible than that of justice and wrath, than that of the law, for it includes all this but also transcends it. The judgment of love consists of a revolution in people's hearts, in which, by the action of the Holy Spirit in the resurrection, the eternal source of love for Christ is revealed together with *the torment caused by the failure to actualize this love in the life that has passed*. It is impossible to appear before Christ and to see Him without loving Him. In the resurrection, there is no longer any place for anti-Christianity, for enmity towards Christ, for satanic hatred of Him, just as there is no place for fear of Him as the Judge terrible in His omnipotence and the fury of His wrath.³⁶

Love is the supreme divine attribute out of which flow all other attributes. The judgment of love, Bulgakov explains, encompasses wrath because sinners will experience God's love not only as his mercy, but also as his wrath. There is no conflict in God between justice and mercy, since both of them are different aspects of love. Those who have deliberately rejected God in this life experience his love as punishing wrath, which will burn the sins of all.³⁷

For deification to become a reality, the love of God has to be reciprocated by human love. Following Isaac of Nineveh, Bulga-

an (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), 141. Cf. Florensky, *The Pillar*, 251, 724 n. 420.

³⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 459; emphasis added.

³⁷ One finds a similar interpretation of divine wrath in the eighteenth-century Cambridge Platonists Peter Sterry and Jeremiah White. See D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964), pp. 111–13.

kov maintains that the most terrible torment is caused by the sorrow and longing of unfulfilled love.³⁸ The souls that were created for love and who have rejected love, are tormented by love, which constitutes the law of their inner being.³⁹ The torment that such a person experiences is internal and spiritual, rather than external and physical.⁴⁰

It is possible that Bulgakov drew his inspiration from Origen. Speculating on various forms of divine punishment in *De principiis*, Origen observed:

When the soul is found apart from that order and connexion and harmony in which it was created by God for good action and useful experience and not at concord with itself in the connexion of its rational movements, it must be supposed to bear the penalty and torture of its own want of cohesion and to experience the punishment due to its unstable and disordered condition. But when the soul, thus torn and rent asunder, has been tried by the application of fire, it is undoubtedly wrought into a condition of stronger inward connexion and renewal.⁴¹

Here Origen, like Bulgakov, emphasizes that the torment is caused by the internal conflict between what the soul has be-

³⁸ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 498, 503. Isaac of Nineveh, *Hom. 28*: "I mean that those who have become conscious that they have sinned against love suffer greater torment from this than from any fear of punishment...The power of love works in two ways: it torments sinners, even as happens here when a friend suffers from a friend; but it becomes a source of joy for those who have observed its duties. Thus I say that this is the torment of Gehenna: bitter regret," trans. Anonymous, *Ascetic Homilies*, p. 141.

³⁹ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 157.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 452.

⁴¹ Origen, *De principiis* II. 10. 5. Trans. Butterworth, 143; original spelling was retained.

come in its revolt against God and what God had made it to be. Bulgakov also followed Origen and Gregory of Nyssa in stressing the purgative and therapeutic, rather than the retributive dimension of this type of punishment.⁴²

For Bulgakov, the triumph of God's will meant that in the resurrection rational creatures would no longer be able to choose between good and evil, but only between different kinds of good. Progress towards evil would become impossible; only progress towards the greater good, the passing "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18) would remain a possibility.⁴³ Bulgakov insisted that such a state did not eliminate human freedom. On the contrary, freedom from evil is the greatest possible kind of freedom rational creatures can possess.

Is it possible to reconcile Bulgakov's optimistic universalism with the traditional view of the separation between the sheep and the goats? Bulgakov believes that the separation indeed occurs, but not between the two parts of humankind, but rather in each person. He advances a paradoxical idea that all will burn in hell and experience heaven:

We must therefore conclude that the very separation into heaven and hell, into eternal bliss and eternal torments, is internal and relative. Every human being bears within himself the principle of the one and the other, depending upon the measure of his personal righteousness. Since no human being is without sin, there is no one who does not have the burning of hell

⁴² Origen followed his predecessor Clement of Alexandria in emphasizing punishment as an instrument of purgation. See Nesmelov, *Dogmaticheskaia sistema*, pp. 610–11; Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, p. 47; John Sachs, "Apocatastasis in Patristic Theology," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993), p. 47; Morwenna Ludlow, *Universal Salvation*, pp. 2–6.

⁴³ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 478, 496.

within himself, even if only to a minimal degree. Conversely, there is no human being whose soul is not illuminated by the light of paradise, even if only at a single point or by a distant reflection.⁴⁴

For Bulgakov, as for Florensky, the separation between the sheep and the goats is a figure of speech that indicates a division within each human being, not the division of humanity into the two groups. Following Florensky, Bulgakov returned over and over again to 1 Cor 3:15, in which Paul, discussing the disclosure of all human actions on the day of judgment, said that even those whose works would be burned up would “be saved, but only as through fire.”⁴⁵ Bulgakov proposed that this text should be applied to the condition of those in hell, not in purgatory, as some Roman Catholic theologians of his time did.⁴⁶

It should be noted that Bulgakov departed considerably from a common critical Eastern Orthodox stance with regard to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory.⁴⁷ Although Bulgakov rejected the idea of purgatory as a third place separate from heaven and hell,⁴⁸ he recognized a deep affinity between the two traditions in a common practice of prayer for the dead. He proposed to understand the efficacy of such prayers synergistically, as influencing not only the judgment of God, but also the spiritual condition of the soul in the afterlife by enabling her to

⁴⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 465. Cf. Florensky, *The Pillar*, pp. 226–40.

⁴⁵ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 462–3. Florensky regarded 1 Cor 3:15 as the interpretative key to other biblical texts dealing with the last things. See *The Pillar*, 222.

⁴⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 489 n. 66. Bulgakov does not name his opponents.

⁴⁷ For an example of such a common polemical stance, see Florensky, *The Pillar*, 233.

⁴⁸ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 361.

become a more willing recipient of divine grace.⁴⁹ Since Bulgakov saw all suffering in hell as purgative and not eternal, he went so far as to call his interpretation of the Orthodox teaching a doctrine of “universal purgatory” (*vseobshchee chistilishche*).⁵⁰ Although Bulgakov never used the expression again—presumably not to alienate his predominantly Orthodox readers—in my judgment, “universal purgatory” describes the gist of his teaching remarkably well.

Bulgakov envisioned the eventual restoration of Satan and the fallen angels along with all human beings. Elaborating on the biblical idea that in the resurrection all evil would be rendered powerless and Satan would be expelled, Bulgakov claimed that the complete repentance and conversion of all angelic beings, including Satan, was inevitable. In the spirit of Origen, he warned that this was an esoteric doctrine that should not be divulged to simple-minded believers, since it could blind their conscience to the reality and power of the demonic evil in this aeon.⁵¹ Bulgakov pictured Satan as being bitterly divided between the awareness of his angelic creaturely nature on the one hand and his false pretense to be the “prince of this world” on the other hand. Bulgakov asked: “Can Satan’s battle with himself become infinite (and in this sense ‘eternal’), a bad infinity? Or must Satan lose his strength in this battle and at some point

⁴⁹ Ibidem, pp. 499–500.

⁵⁰ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, p. 361. The crucial adjective “universal,” present in the Russian edition of *The Bride of the Lamb* (p. 391), has inexplicably dropped out of Jakim’s otherwise very faithful translation.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 503; cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI. 26. For a similar move in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English theology see D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, pp. 5–7. Several years after Bulgakov’s death the apocatastasis of the fallen angels was advocated by Giovanni Papini, *Il diavolo. Appunti per una futura diabolologia* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1953).

lay down his arms in impotence?"⁵² Bulgakov's reply was that after Satan's expulsion from the world his resources were bound to be exhausted by this internal contradiction; the prince of darkness would give in to the power of divine love in the end.⁵³ God's limitless mercy and the sacrifice offered by Christ extend even into the realm of the demonic.⁵⁴

Following Florensky's reading of Matthew 5:29–30, Bulgakov proposed to understand the last judgment as spiritual amputation, not as death by execution.⁵⁵ No sin could be merely forgiven by God without the accompanying purifying suffering:

One must reject every pusillanimous, sentimental hope that the evil committed by a human being and therefore present in him can simply be forgiven, as if ignored at the tribunal of justice. God does not tolerate sin, and its simple forgiveness is ontologically impossible. Acceptance of sin would not accord with God's holiness and justice. Once committed, a sin must be lived through to the end.⁵⁶

It is clear that by emphasizing that God takes sin very seriously Bulgakov intended to meet the objection of those who could charge him with making light of human sin. However, it is highly questionable whether the charge could be best met by claim-

⁵² Sergius Bulgakov, "Apocatastasis," p. 12.

⁵³ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 506–10.

⁵⁴ Sergius Bulgakov, "Apocatastasis," p. 23. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio catechetica magna* 26; Nesmelov, 617. Bulgakov speculates that repentant Satan will be restored to his former place of glory and share his throne with John the Baptist. *Ibid.* pp. 24–5.

⁵⁵ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 463–4. Cf. Florensky, *The Pillar*, pp. 237–43.

⁵⁶ Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, pp. 475–6; cf. *ibid.*, p. 484: "Sin cannot be remitted *for free*, without suffering, for that would not be mercy but a denial of justice. God's justice does not tolerate sin. Sin cannot be merely permitted and forgotten; it must appear before the face of God's justice." Emphasis in the original.

ing, as he did, that “simple forgiveness [of sin] was ontologically impossible.” Bulgakov was certainly wrong to reduce the mystery of divine forgiveness to mere ignorance or indifference to evil.

For Florensky, eschatology was the realm of antinomies in the Kantian sense of the term. The recognition of the limitless character of God’s love moves one to embrace universalism, whereas the recognition of creaturely freedom to permanently reject God leads to the admission of eternal hell. These two antithetical statements, proposed Florensky, could not be solved rationally. The contradiction can be dissolved in the experience of sanctification, offered to believers in and through the sacraments.⁵⁷

In his early work *Unfading Light* (1917), written under the strong influence of Florensky, Bulgakov also emphasized the antinomic character of religious discourse. Since antinomic language is unstable, over time Bulgakov found it impossible to maintain both sides of the eschatological antinomy, the permanence and the temporal character of hell, consistently. He resolved the antinomy in favor of universalism on the grounds that creaturely freedom could not become a permanent barrier to the power and goodness of God. Bulgakov’s eschatology may

⁵⁷ P. Florovsky, *The Pillar*, pp. 209–11. Cf. Florovsky, “The Last Things and the Last Events,” pp. 263–4. Berdiaev similarly accentuated the paradoxical character of eschatology. He argued that the antinomy could be solved on a practical, rather than theoretical level. This meant that cooperation with God in bringing about universal salvation had to become the categorical imperative and the telos of all human moral activity. See Berdiaev, *O naznachenii cheloveka* (Moscow: Respublika, 1993), p. 252. Berdiaev’s highly original eschatological ethics deserves a separate discussion that cannot be undertaken here. On Berdiaev, see Esteban Deák, *Apokatastasis: The Problem of Universal Salvation in Twentieth-Century Theology* (Thesis, St Michael’s College, Toronto, 1979), pp. 20–60; Fuad Nucho, *Berdyaev’s Philosophy* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1967).

be termed “ontological universalism” due to its emphasis on God as the source and power of being and its methodological shift from juridical to ontological categories. The distinguishing characteristics of this type of universalism may be summarized as follows: (1) Rational creatures do not endure their resurrection and judgment passively, but cooperate with God synergistically. (2) The last judgment consists in the confrontation between each resurrected individual and his or her eternal image in Christ. (3) The goal of divine punishment is primarily medicinal and purgative, not retributive. (4) The ontological and moral unity of humankind makes the separation between the two parts of humanity impossible. (5) Hence, the separation between good and evil occurs in each human being. (6) All will undergo purgative suffering (“universal purgatory”), and (7) no one will endure such suffering eternally, for this would entail an ontological dualism between good and evil. (8) After a suitable period of purgation all creation, including Satan and the fallen angels, will be restored to union with God.

Having remarked that “the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being,” Solzhenitsyn challenged his readers: “And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?” Florensky’s answer to this challenge was that such destruction was *possible* in the eschatological purgation, provided that the person undergoing such a painful heart surgery was not set in her evil ways. Florensky’s antinomian universalism left room for the genuine possibility of creaturely refusal to participate in the life of God. Bulgakov’s answer was that such destruction was not merely possible, but *necessary*, since “God will be all in all,” and will make himself “infinitely persuasive” to all free rational creatures. In Bulgakov’s ontological univer-

salism there was no room for permanent creaturely resistance to the restoration of all things by the power of God's love.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ For a critique of Bulgakov's universalism, see my article "Universal Salvation in the Eschatology of Sergius Bulgakov," *Journal of Theological Studies* 57.1 (2006), pp. 110–132.