

Variable Readings in Russian Philosophy № 2

**Sergius Bulgakov:  
Apocatastasis and Transfiguration**

comprising his essay "On the Question of the  
Apocatastasis of the Fallen Spirits"

with a memoir by Sister Joanna Reitlinger

**translated, edited, and with an  
introduction by  
Boris Jakim**

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Sergius Bulgakov: Apocatastasis and Transfiguration  
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Cover: Dante's *Vita nuova* by V. A. Favorsky  
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## Translator's Introduction

Father Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944) is coming to be seen as one of the preeminent theologians of the twentieth century, and as perhaps the greatest dogmatic theologian of the Eastern Church in the modern period. A scholar of Bulgakov's work recently wrote that "Bulgakov's dogmatic theology... says yes to church tradition, yes also to the world; yes to theology, yes also to the humanities; yes to God, yes also to humankind."<sup>1</sup>

Bulgakov's life is breathless in its peripeteias and almost defies summary in a few pages. The son of a Russian Orthodox priest, he became a radical Marxist economist. He saw the logical error of the Marxist doctrine, and made a paradigmatic journey from Marxism to idealism.<sup>2</sup> Along with numerous articles of considerable philosophical and socio-cultural interest, he produced two major philosophical works prior to the Russian Revolution, *Filosofiiia khoziaistva* (Philosophy of Economy) (1912) and *Svet nevechernii* (The Unfading Light) (1917). Together with Pavel Florensky's *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, these

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Valliere, "Orthodox Dogma and Modern Thought in Bulgakov's Late Works," presented at AAASS, Philadelphia, November 20, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> This journey "from Marxism to idealism" (the title of one of Bulgakov's collections of essays) was typical for some of the philosophers (in addition to Bulgakov, these included S.L. Frank, Pyotr Struve, and Nikolai Berdyaev) who contributed to the celebrated anti-intelligentsia collection *Vekhi* (Landmarks) (1909). "From Marxism to idealism" became the slogan of a particular current of Russian intellectual life in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century.

two works were to establish the philosophical foundations for the sophiological doctrine.

Only after the Revolution put an end to the state domination of the Church (while destroying the old state and nearly destroying the Church), did Bulgakov feel that he could honorably become a priest. In 1922, he was expelled from the Soviet Union with many other non-Communist intellectuals, and the peripeteias now became the peripeteias of exile. His exile (from 1922 until his death in Paris in 1944) was marked by four intertwined strands: (1) a tremendous outpouring of dogmatic and mystical theological works; (2) priestly service; (3) ecumenical activity (probably the most intense of any churchman of his time); and (4) the achievement of what can be called a state of saintliness. This vast activity was accompanied (and perhaps aided in some mysterious way) by a severe deterioration in his health. An idea of his saintliness, as well as of this deterioration in his health, can be gained from Joanna Reitlinger's memoir, presented here.

Bulgakov's dogmatic theological work finds its culmination in the trilogy *On Godmanhood*, comprising *The Lamb of God* (1933), *the Paraclete* (1936), and the *Bride of the Lamb* (posthumous, 1945). These three works constitute the ultimate unfolding of the doctrine of the Divine and creaturely Sophia, and contain revelations and insights that appear to have been disclosed to one who has gone to heaven and come back, as it were. In the *Bride of the Lamb*, Bulgakov comes to resemble St. John himself, the *tainozritel'* (seer of mysteries) of the Apocalypse.

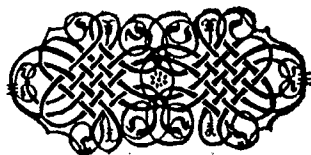
Presented here, for the first time in English translation, is a section from the first addendum to *The*

*Bride of the Lamb*: "On the Question of the Apocatastasis of the Fallen Spirits." A number of Russian thinkers (Fyodorov, Solovyov, et al.) have thought about the abolition of the great calamity of death. Bulgakov takes this desire one step further, and reflects upon the possibility of eliminating evil from the universe. This will be done through the gradual, painful repentance of Lucifer and the other fallen spirits, who will leave the souls of men that they have infected and will rise heavenward to regain the places proper to them according to their angelic nature. John the Baptist, the greatest of those who are human, an angelic man according to his service, will extend a helping hand to the fallen Lucifer to complete his restitution, thus completing the circuit of the co-humanity of the angels. The highest of the angelic thrones, the angelic-human one, will thus belong not to one but to two. The apocatastasis, or restitution, will thus be complete, and evil will be excluded from the world.

Sister Joanna Reitlinger (1898-1988), who was to become a celebrated icon painter, was closely associated with Father Sergius during most of his exile. Her memoir of Father Sergius' death reminds me of the account of the death of a celebrated saint of fiction, Father Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*. But whereas the events surrounding Zosima's death end in disappointment and almost despair for the disciple Alyosha, the events surrounding Father Sergius' death culminate in great joy and a near-heavenly state for the disciple Joanna.

### Translator's Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Nikita Struve, editor-in-chief of *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizheniia* (Messenger of the Russian Christian Movement), for permission to publish my translation of excerpts from Joanna Reitlinger's memoirs of Father Sergius Bulgakov. Sister Joanna's memoirs appeared in *Vestnik Russkogo Khristianskogo Dvizheniia* No. 159 (1990), pp. 51-79.



### On the Question of the Apocatastasis of the Fallen Spirits

(In Connection with the Doctrine of St.  
Gregory of Nyssa)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I have eliminated some of Bulgakov's footnotes. Most of these refer to other works by Bulgakov which are not available in translation.

There is an ontological postulate that posits the final overcoming, even if a prolonged and multistage one, of satanism, an overcoming that will be due to the fact that satanism has a creaturely character. The spiritual world does not have its own nature. It exists by partaking of the divine nature. But since the spiritual world is a created world, it has the principle of creatureliness. Angelic "fleshlessness" (which is also synonymous with worldlessness) is nonetheless united with a certain creaturely *psychicality*. The spirituality of the angels proceeds from God and to that extent is a noncreaturely principle. But this principle serves as the foundation of the creaturely limited, individual being of the angels. Man consists of three principles: a spirit that proceeds from God, and the soul and the body, which are created "out of nothing." Angels consist of two principles: a spirit that proceeds from God and a soul that is created "out of nothing." And this soul is worldless, the form or shell for the personal angelic spirit, in which angelic phenomena take place. (Similar to this shell is man's soul, which, as the shell of the spirit, belongs to him even after death, is inseparable from him.) Angels livingly know their creatureliness through this creaturely form, though differently from men. The fleshlessness of the angels gives them the consciousness of a greater spirituality than that of men. However, this fleshlessness deprives them of the consciousness of ontological originality connected with the possession of their own world, an originality that is characteristic of man (Cf. Heb. 2:5-8). From this relative simplicity of the angelic being flows the immortality of the angels together with their freedom from bodily needs, particularly in connection with food, although they are not free of the

need for spiritual food, "angelic bread" (Ps. 78:24-25; Wisd. Sol. 16:20), in spiritual communion. Through this is given that special spiritual lightness that is characteristic of an angelic being compared with the thick corporeality of human flesh. Fleshlessness gives a special, nonhuman feeling of freedom from the flesh, and the being of the soul that is liberated from the body is experienced in a wholly other way than that of the "enfleshed" human soul. (When it is separated from the body after death, the state of the human soul approaches, in a certain sense, the fleshlessness of angels. But this state also significantly differs from angelic fleshlessness by a feeling of defectiveness, which comes from a morbid rupture — unnatural for man — with the body in death.) In the state of harmony and obedience to God, the shell of the soul is perfectly transparent for the angelic spirit for participation in the divine being. In this sense, the holy angels are creaturely gods ("God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods" [Ps. 82:1]), but in a different sense than men. Of course, in the fullness of Godmanhood, men are gods in a fuller sense (though differently from angels). Creaturely psychicality gives to angelic souls the feeling of their reality, that is, of their creatureliness, which is why the consciousness of creatureliness is the source of a special joy of being, which is poured out in the praise of different forms of creaturely being, beginning precisely with the angelic form (Ps. 148:2-12; Dan. 3:55-88 LXX).

But things are completely different in the world of fallen spirits, with Lucifer at the head. Lucifer lost his spiritual equilibrium; he could not bear the extreme height (the height of the "anointed cherub," the "son of morning") to which he was raised by the Creator (Is. 14:

9-15; Ezek. 28:12-15). He was seduced by this height and, being first "in the congregation of the gods," he desired to become "like the most High," whereas he actually remained in his creatureliness, together with the seduced angels who followed him. (Revelation is silent about the form of this fall.) Two paths of temptation were opened for them. The first led to the unnatural implanting of fallen angels in man's fleshly life (beginning with the antediluvian intercourse of the "sons of God" with the daughters of men, however one interpret this event that is described in Gen. 6:1-4). The fallen spirits became "demons" and entered human life by direct compulsion (Luke 13:16) or by temptation. Cast down out of heaven (we learn about this in Revelation 12:7-11, from the mysterious narrative of the "war in heaven" between Michael and his Angels and the "dragon and his angels," which ended with the casting down of these angels upon the earth), they became the "principalities ... powers ... the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph. 6:12). The Gospel also knows them as demons. The second, and main, temptation for Satan and his hosts was their self-deification with the rebellion against God.

But the demons, together with the prince of this world, will be expelled from the world, both from the earth and from the domain of the "darkness of this world," and they will find themselves in their own emptiness and in the prison of their subjectivity. What can be the life and fate of the fallen spirits in the state of this expulsion? The knowledge of his creatureliness is hateful to Lucifer, and he desires to extinguish it in himself by his pretension to becoming equal to God or even higher than God. The insanity of this pretension is

obviously not reconciled with his consciousness of creaturely *psychicality*, which clearly tells him: you are not God, for you are created, and you must therefore worship your Creator. This fills with the fury of impotent pride and anger the "prince of this world," who has been expelled from his kingdom and deprived of his illusory throne. But, at the same time, this very same consciousness introduces an intolerable, lacerating *contradiction* into the very depths of satanical being. This consciousness implants in Lucifer an insuperable alarm and battle with himself and necessitates that he keep assuring himself — contrary to self-evidence — about what cannot be assured. The living-out of this contradiction is the sole and exhaustive content of the life of the prince of this world in his expulsion from this world. 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 lay down his arms in impotence? Is his strength for this hopeless and infinite battle with self-evidence inexhaustible, so that he can fill the ages of ages with himself? Or is such a supposition impossible, because Satan is in fact a creature and only a creature, which limits his strength and capabilities? In this situation he can be saved precisely by this very same creatureliness of his, which is an involuntary reality for him, involuntary because it exceeds the measure of his creaturely freedom. He can grow powerless in this unequal battle. More precisely, he cannot fail to grow powerless in it, to capitulate before reality, having recognized his creator to be not himself but God. And this means that he must fall down and worship Him.

That will be an ontological compulsion on the part of reality, the force of fact.

But this force of fact contains the mystery of being of everything that exists, a mystery that Satan hides from itself, although he knows it in his depths. This mystery consists in the fact that everything that exists exists by virtue of divine love, is love: "And there is nothing in nature that is not full of love." Satan, once the supreme archangel, an anointed cherub, also exists only by virtue of divine love. To be sure, he can never lose this knowledge once it has become known even if he wanted to lose it, to forget, to trample and annihilate it in his hatred, into which envy of unalterable reality is transformed. But once it is known, a love must be loved with an answering love. This love that is known turns out to be a kind of fate for Satan too, who, like all creation, is created by God's love, has a divine theme in the foundation of his being, and in this sense is sophianic, even if he is sophiamachic. He himself knows this sophianicity of his, which indeed is participation in divine love. And herein lies the meaning of the revelation about demons conveyed by the seer of mysteries St. Isaac of Nineveh: the torments of hell are torments of love, of the love of Satan for his Creator. And this love is jealous and envious, unalterably focused on its object. It is this love that in the Old Testament jealously surveys all the works of God's love for creation. God asks Satan, "Whence comest thou?" and Satan answers: "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Job 1:7). And he asks permission of the Creator to tempt a righteous man who is faithful and unselfish in his love for God. And the reason for his asking permission is not only his satanical malice; at



least, this is not said directly in the Book of Job. And it would be difficult to understand in this sense God's permission to tempt Job, a permission that is given to Satan when, bearing the image he had originally received from God, he is still admitted to God's throne together with the other sons of God.

Satan is given permission to test love, to verify the good. This verification is needed not only for Job but also for the tempter himself, in order to extinguish the excruciating doubt that is in him. But love that tests (for this is still love, though thoroughly poisoned by doubt) ascends from the protoimage to the Protoimage, from the temptation of Job to the temptation of the Son of God, first in the desert, and then in Gethsemane and on Golgotha. In the narrative of the temptation in the desert there are two participants: the tempter and the Tempted One, who rejects the tempter ("get thee behind me, Satan" [Luke 4:8]) and overcomes the temptation. But, here too, the temptation refers not only to the Tempted One, Who exposes its impotence, but primarily to the tempter himself, as a continuation of his temptation of Job. To understand what is happening here with Satan, one must take this not only *in malam partem*, with regard to Satan's falsehood and anger, but also *in bonam partem*, as a temptation for Satan himself. Satan, in tempting, was testing not only the person of the Tempted One, who is He Himself, but also the power of His work: "if thou be the Son of God, then..." do this and that. And this temptation contained all the fullness accessible to Satan ("and when the devil had ended all the temptation" [Luke 4:13]). Insofar as it referred to the tempter himself, the whole temptation was essentially about love, namely, about God's love for the world,

which is expressed in the fact that God gave His Only Begotten Son for its salvation, and about the love of the Son of God for the Father, and His faithfulness in this love. This temptation could not have failed to be a great shock for the tempter himself, who not only did not obtain the grounding he desired on his own path but also experienced a shameful failure in that. But even this could not influence him in such a way as to return him to the path of repentance, the path back to God. On the contrary, Satan became even more embittered, as is sufficiently demonstrated by the further Gospel account, together with the corroborating testimonies of other New Testament writings, especially Revelation.

Satan did not abandon but only postponed the plan of Christ's temptation and his own self-verification: "And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season [ἄχρι καιροῦ]" (Luke 4:13). This "season" came with Christ's agony unto death in Gethsemane and on Golgotha, when the words of Satan's temptation were repeated almost verbatim by those he had inspired: by the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, and the Pharisees, as well as by mere passersby and soldiers (Matt. 27:39-43; Mark 15:29-33; Luke 23:35-37). But even this final temptation did not achieve its goal, for it turned out to be incapable of shaking the Son's devotion to His Father, the Son's obedience to His Father's will, or of shaking the love of the God-man for the world, of the God-man who gave His life for the salvation of many. But it was only a new temptation for the tempter himself, who, by the death of the Son of God, is strengthened even more in his pretension to become the prince of this world. It would appear that the resurrection and the ascension of Christ

would have been capable of annulling this pretension if not for the blindness that resulted from the power that Satan achieved in the world after the departure from it of the true King of Glory. And only in His second coming does the true expulsion from the world of Satan and his hosts take place, which is also the final and decisive temptation for the tempter himself. To be sure, this expulsion can be experienced by Satan not as an isolated event but as the last in a series of successive events which, in their combination, place Satan, the illusory prince of the world by theft, before the true King of creation, who redeemed creation by virtue of self-renouncing love. In this character of his, as a pretender, Satan stands constantly before Christ and involuntarily seeks self-verification in Him, knowledge of his own image. The hate and the envy of impotent competition become more and more the scourge and torment of love, in agreement with the insight of St. Isaac of Nineveh. And the scourge will do its work until the fullness of this torment is reached.

Here one must discuss something that is not directly spoken of in the Gospel, but rather is tacitly implied, and even directly borne witness to in Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation. This book speaks of a great sign, the appearance of the Woman clothed in the sun. In this sign it is natural to see the Church in the personal appearance of the Ever Virgin. Opposite Her stands a great red dragon that seeks to swallow Her birth. This is Satan. One cannot fail to see in this standing opposite of the dragon Satan's express concentrated desire to attack the Woman. The church literature repeatedly bears witness to a particular defeat of Satan by the Woman, which in turn confirms this exclusive concentration of

the tempter's attention. And, truly, if with his prophetic, though maliciously envious eye, he sees the new birth from the Virgin and attempts to become the tempter for Him (and, in turn, is himself tempted to this extent), then is it possible that his genuinely frightening, though self-inflated, attention would not have been attracted by the image of the *New Eve*, who was so different from the first Eve, who in Eden was seduced by his temptation because of her naive untestedness and female powerlessness? Should not this appearance of the New Eve have been alarming, alluring, and frightening for him, and, in general, tempting in its own way with reference to his plans, as is the appearance of the New Adam? Are not the two temptations united into a single temptation and even inseparable for the tempter? Satan succeeded in corrupting Eve's female nature by infecting her eyes and flesh with lust, and that was his general victory over man, because in Eve Adam was also defeated. And Satan once again sees before him a female being, the New Eve, who in her purity and holiness is inaccessible to temptation, and in Her is fulfilled God's determination concerning the Seed of the Woman, which is called to smite the head of the serpent. The very existence of this Woman could not fail to become an alarming temptation for the tempter himself. The serpent's green eyes maliciously and constantly observed the New Eve, who could not be infected with the lust of the flesh. The appearance, in all her sophianicity, of the Woman clothed in the sun simultaneously attracted him as a memory of the lost paradise and frightened and repulsed him in all her inaccessibility and incompatibility with the darkness of the satanical depths. The events of the life of the Mother of God in which she bore Her

cross uninterruptedly also involved the participation of the tempter or at least the presence of his dark shadow, although he did not directly make his appearance here, as he does in the temptation in the desert. In tempting, he is tempted, asking himself what he sees in this appearance of the New Eve.

In all its content, the cross of the Mother of God includes the temptation directed against Her, beginning with the Birth of Christ, which takes place not only in heavenly glory but also in earthly poverty and persecution: the massacre of the innocents by Herod and the flight into Egypt; Simeon's prophecy about the sword; losing the Child in the journey and, after three days, finding him in the temple. "And His mother said unto Him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing? And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me?" (Luke 2:48-49). To be sure, this was a new test and a new temptation for Godmotherhood. And, further, there begins His service, which, visibly and invisibly, uttered and unuttered, involves new tests and temptations for the Mother of God. Only in exceptional cases does this service have an outward manifestation. Such is the narrative of Matt. 12:47-50, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-31. This narrative describes how the Mother of Jesus and His brothers came to call Him to return home, but they "could not come at him for the press. And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee." But he did not go out to them, but answered them in the third person, as it were: "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it" (Luke 8:19-21). And in this way He renounced, as it were,

kinship of the flesh in favor of spiritual kinship (although, to be sure, by no means did He thus diminish the former). But this was only the beginning of the tests and temptation of the Mother of God in Her bearing of the cross, which was common with that of Christ. And the sword pierced her heart most deeply in the days of His passion, at the last standing at the cross, the death on the cross, and the burial. All of these events inwardly and outwardly expose the impotence of Satan's temptation. He is defeated in relation to both Christ and the Mother of God, who, like Her Son, leaves his kingdom through Her ascension and resurrection. And in this manner the "many-sorrowed defeat of the demons" was accomplished in the life of the Theotokos.

Here, we approach that revolution in Lucifer which is utterly inaccessible to human experience and can only be postulated by theological speculation: The stubbornness of resistance is resolved in humility; love that had been enchained by hate is liberated through knowledge of the truth: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). The truth is the way and the life in love for the Creator and His creation. But in this spiritual illumination and liberation there begins an utterly new epoch in the life of Satan, as well as in the life of the world that is connected with him. Hitherto he has abided in the state of being cast out of the world, in the outer darkness and its torment. "The devil ... was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in

the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14-15).

This torment from the "second" death enters into life as its only content, so that this dying fills all of it. This torment is also equivalent to the expulsion from the world. Strictly speaking, this is not even hell, insofar as hell is still a state of life and always exists only in some combination, quantitative and qualitative, with heaven. That which can be called the return of Satan to life is necessarily combined with the beginning of his repentance. Together with liberation from the fetters of envious hatred and the first melting of the ice of unlove, the real torments of hell begin for Satan and his angels only with the repentance for all the sins of the world, not only for those whose constant inspirer Satan was, but also for that most terrible deed which, contrary to Satan's will and knowledge, served the salvation of the world. This was the giving of Christ to death through the betrayal of Judas, into whom "Satan entered" (John 13:27). This was a deed of Satan. This deicide was the focus of the sins of the whole world and of all men, both voluntary and involuntary, and in all these sins, although they are committed by men, it is Satan's infection that acts. Satan is the inspirer of all human evil and is responsible for the sins of the whole world, which the Only Sinless One, the Redeemer, took upon Himself. For this reason the immeasurable weight of this sin begins to burden the repentant Satan proportionately to the awakening in him of new life as a kind of redemption for the tempter himself. And this humanly unfathomable torment of the repentance of fleshless spirits fills "ages of ages," an immeasurable time for mankind. Of course, this is not, so to speak, a chronologically uniform time,

but rather a combination of qualitatively different times of varying intensity or filling, which are measured by a qualitative quantity that is proper only to the spiritual world and is unknown to man. However, these "ages of ages" are nonetheless time and only time, although a time whose content is the touching of eternity, eternal life, precisely in the form of "eternal torments." But this time is nonetheless limited in duration, has its own fullness, and ends together with the torments of the repentant Satan, who in the course of these "ages" returns to that for which he was created. The Creator called him to being to be the chief archangel, Lucifer.

But it is clear that neither salvation with the forgiveness of the satanically inspired sins of the whole world nor (*a fortiori*) restitution, apocatastasis, can be achieved by a unilateral act, by creaturely power alone, just as this was impossible with regard to man too, who, having need of God's redemptive help, received it through the Incarnation in the death of the Son of God on the cross. Therefore, there inevitably arises a question that was so insistently asked by both (and essentially the only) theologians of the apocatastasis, Origen and St. Gregory of Nyssa, and was answered by them in the affirmative: Does the universal power of the redemptive sacrifice brought "for all" extend also to demons? Or is it necessary to recognize that this power is limited, that it is manifested only in relation to the earthly human world? But it is clear that it is impossible to admit any limitation on the power of the redemptive sacrifice. Scripture bears direct and certain witness to this: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth [καταχθονίων (i.e., angels, men, and demons)]; and

that *every tongue* should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11). And "God [will] be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). This directly leads to the general question of the significance of the Incarnation for the angelic world. Although the Incarnation does not refer *directly* to the world of fleshless beings, it does, indirectly, have a determining significance for this world too, because of the connection of this world with the human world, because of the cohumanity of the angelic world. Scripture, primarily the Gospel, informs us of the entire measure of the participation of the angels in the events of the Incarnation, especially during the end of the world, and in general in that struggle (which ends only in the Parousia) for the "lost sheep" in which the holy angels participate so actively. Connected with this is the participation of the holy angels in the Glory in which the Son of God comes,<sup>1</sup> in the life of the future age as well. But is this realization of angelic cohumanity, which is a consequence of human salvation through the Incarnation, only a reflected consequence of this salvation or does it also have a foundation in the proper angelic — though fleshless but nonetheless creaturely — nature? This question must be answered in the affirmative, insofar as angels have a creaturely psychic life. This is the potency of their life, more or less fully realized, with regard to

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<sup>1</sup> "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his glory, and in the Father's [i.e., in the Holy Spirit], and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). The Holy Spirit is very clearly indicated here as the hypostatic Glory of the Father and the Son that is communicated to the glorified creation in the person of the holy angels.

man and his humanity. In Christ, through the Incarnation, this potency achieves its fullness, which is disclosed both in the co-angelhood of men and in the cohumanity of the angels. Through this the angelic world becomes a participant in the glorification of the God-man in the Parousia, in which He comes into the world not alone but accompanied by all the holy angels (see Matt. 25:31). Thus, the holy angels have their share of participation in the salvific power of the redemptive sacrifice. (This is liturgically borne witness to by the presence of the holy angels in the bringing of the eucharistic sacrifice and their spiritual co-communion with us: "Heavenly powers are now invisibly serving with us").

The power of the redemptive sacrifice in relation to the fallen angelic world is realized, first of all, in the restoration of this world through the regeneration of the creaturely, or psychic, nature of the fallen angels. There is an analogy here with the salvific action of the redemptive sacrifice upon man, though with an inevitable difference. For man, the restoration refers to his *entire* creaturely, psychic-corporeal makeup, whereas for the fleshless spirits it refers only to psychic nature, since corporeality is absent in them. But the action of the redemptive sacrifice cannot be limited here to the restoration of the fallen spirits to their original state through the liberation from the darkness of sin. From the original state that was proper to the fallen spirits before their fall, they are separated by the entire past life of the world with its sin, insofar as the tempter and his hosts are responsible for this sin. But not only is the world darkened by the black deeds of the tempter, it is also the place of the Incarnation, through which it has become

other than it was at the creation. The world has become the Kingdom of Christ, and there is now no other principle of being in it. Therefore, the fullness of the apocatastasis presupposes not only the annulment of the cosmic minus that was introduced by Satan but also the participation of all of creation in this new being. Together with the annulment of this cosmic downfall that was caused by Satan, his ascent to his protoimage is not only a passive reception of forgiveness but also an active ascension, a movement toward Christ of one who had in him the whole power of antichrist. This movement, about which we can know nothing except this general theological postulate, requires for its possible realization a new time that is designated for that purpose. The following "ages of ages" must therefore be dedicated to this active overcoming of satanism in Satan himself. But it is necessary to remember that this overcoming will be accomplished not by the fallen spirits in isolation but together with the whole world, which would then be free from the coercive dominance of the "prince of this world." Of great import is the fact that all the holy angels, with Michael and his hosts at the head, who had once cast Satan down from heaven, will now, again not sparing their souls even unto death, drag him once again to the heaven of heavens, to the former place of his heavenly glory. Scripture is silent about this; it limits its revelation to the life of this age. But this dragging of Satan back to heaven necessarily follows from the general prophecies of universal deification and apocatastasis: "God will be all in all." And, of course, the salvation and glorification of Satan are necessarily included in this all. But here the following question arises.

The place of Lucifer in heaven was taken by the angelic man John, the Forerunner of the Lord, who, together with the Most Pure Mother of God, stands closest of all (in the icon "Deisis") to the Lord of Glory, as higher than the angels and the greatest of those born of woman. But is this a matter of ambition, in which one's rival is pushed out? Or is a new possibility of self-renouncing, self-annihilating, self-decreasing (see John 3:30) love being prepared here? Does not John, an angelic man according to his service but still a man according to his nature, manifest the power of love to the one who has an angelic nature that is called to actualize the maximal measure of cohumanity. Is it not therefore natural if, in this meeting, it turns out that the highest of the angelic thrones, namely, the angelic-human one, belongs not to one but to two, and that the higher and holier of the two extends his hand to the fallen but restored one? It should be remembered that this help can be given and realized only by virtue of the reception and assimilation of Christ's redemptive sacrifice not only by the entire angelic world with Michael and his hosts at the head, who at one time conducted a war in heaven and cast Lucifer down from it, but also by Lucifer himself. This new event in heaven will take place in the presence of the angelic man. We have no idea how this will happen, but it is certain that it will happen. Moreover, this help cannot fail to be extended from the church in its entirety, not only the heavenly but also the earthly church, from those glorified saints who have the gift of the "pitying or loving heart," the gift of the flaring up of universal love to which St. Isaac of Nineveh bears witness, and in this case St. Isaac is the voice of all the saints. Finally, in the heavens and even above the

heavens, this help will be given by the Most Pure and Most Blessed Mother of God, more honored than all the holy angels, the One whose loving and pitying heart is the seat of the Holy Spirit, of hypostatic love itself. The power of the Pentecost that was communicated to the entire world, the tongues of fire that set all of creation afire, will also set afire the souls of the fallen spirits, dead but in the process of being resurrected, and their salvation will be accomplished. All this will constitute newer and newer ages of ages, which are unknowable and inaccessible for us. But we do know God's love for creation and this love's promise to the effect that "God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all. For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:32, 36).

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Let us sum up. The eternity of torments, when it is understood in the sense of their infinity combined with the eternal perdition both of Satan and the other fallen spirits and of the men who are cast out and condemned to hell, contradicts God's wisdom and goodness. Here (as St. Gregory of Nyssa and, before him, Origen showed with particular force and persuasiveness), to evil is attributed a depth equal to that of good, and to hell is attributed a depth equal to that of heaven. But evil is only an ontological minus, which does not exist in and by itself but is extinguished when it is separated from being. And the adherents of the doctrine of the eternity of evil do not give themselves an account of what they are asserting. They fall into manicheism and admit, alongside

God's being, the independent being of evil. Evil does not have depth. Evil is exhaustible and exhausts itself; and at a certain stage of the ripeness of being, evil inevitably becomes completely impotent. It becomes totally exhausted and disenchanted in itself. No steady state in the spiritual world, in "eternal life," exists, and the infinite success of evil, its progress in eternity, as defined by the defenders of the eternal unrepentedness and eternal torments of those cast out and condemned, is an ontological absurdity and truly a satanical blasphemy against God's creation. Moreover, even if we take the penitentiary point of view and seek a justification for eternal torments, we get an obvious incommensurability between the crime, which, however great it may be, is limited in time, and the punishment, which extends into eternity. And it is difficult to see the good in such an incommensurability. Even in earthly criminal law, capital punishment is unacceptable, since it destroys not the crime but the criminal. In the same way, the spiritual death that is constituted by the eternal torments presupposes the annihilation of the sinner's life, an annihilation that leaves only a subject suffering in emptiness, without any life-content. Eternal life in the bliss of communion with God can be conceived as rewarding merely temporary merits, since the Lord is "generous and merciful" and repays the temporary with the eternal, the "small" with the "great" (Matt. 25:21, 23),<sup>1</sup> but can one draw the opposite conclusion that, in

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<sup>1</sup> True, this same parable of the talents does not limit itself to saying that "from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Matt. 25:29). It even says: "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 25:30). However, is it right to interpret

torments, the small is repaid with the great and the temporary with the eternal.

In connection with this dynamic conception of eternal life, which is opposite to the static conception, one must, in general, eliminate the conception of eternity and eternal life as immobility and unchangeability. Rather, one should conceive eternity and eternal life as movement and therefore as change, which is characteristic of creaturely life in general. Once again, we must say that not one but two eternities exist: divine and creaturely. In its absoluteness, the divine eternity is unchanging and, in this sense, immobile; this immobility is identical with eternal life (in contrast to creaturely eternity, for which immobility would signify precisely the absence of life). On the other hand, creaturely eternity (*aeviternitas*), which realizes deification in itself through the participation in divine life, is a *process*, in which fullness is realized by the ascent from measure to measure. In this sense, creaturely being is always characterized by temporality, or *history*; this is the case not only in the present aeon, which ends with the Parousia and the resurrection of the dead, but also beyond this boundary, in those ages of ages to which Revelation bears witness in a few brief words. Therefore, "eternity," as applied to creaturely being, in no wise signifies the negation of temporality with creaturely changeability but presupposes in itself different ages or stages, the "ages of ages," and is a qualitative determination, precisely in relation to divine eternity.

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this passage about corrective punishment as applying to eternal life?

However, duration and, in this sense, the temporality and changeability of creaturely being have a *beginning* which issues from God: "All things were made by Him" (John 1:3). "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things" (Rom. 1:36). This beginning is not only the *first* time of being but is, in general, the primary time that supratemporally determines the state of being. It is a touch of God's hand, an issuing forth from Divine eternity, a Divine creative act, a spark of God in creaturely being. It gives an ontological foundation to creaturely being, which it never loses. Creation always preserves an ontological memory of this. Creation bears this memory in itself and knows it like a kind of holy *anamnesis* and also as a pledge of salvation by virtue of divine predestination, as a divine promise. It is essential to understand this promise as accompanying man not only in this life but also in the life to come. In the "last judgment," this ontological foundation of individual being will be manifested in all the modes of its temporal actualization. This anamnesis is salvific and regenerative. It cannot completely fade in creation, for it is found at a depth of being inaccessible to empirical changeability. It is this being itself in its ontological foundation. Essential for the understanding of the "salvation" of Satan is the fact that he too possesses this anamnesis in all its indestructibility. He *remembers* — ontologically — his state *before* his fall, when he was Lucifer, the supreme cherub, and this memory burns him. This memory demonically enrages him in his demonic possessedness. This memory is the main source of his demonhood, a frenzied struggle with his own nature, the desire to reject and forget his own nature, to replace it with... but with what? With emptiness. And, strange to say, this



anamnesis makes of him both tempter and... tempted. He cannot remain an indifferent, calmly contemptuous contemplator of the appearance of Christ and the Mother of God in the world. He loves even the holy angels and saintly men with hate, for hate is the language of love... for a time, until this hate manifests its true nature in the invincibility and indestructibility of love for what is higher than it. This anamnesis is the hand of the Creator's help, which can never be taken away, even from rebellious creation.

How correct is it to call this final culmination of salvation the apocatastasis, i.e., the restitution, with regard to both the fallen spirits and the cast-out men? Such a characterization is clearly inaccurate or even completely wrong. Such a characterization would be appropriate if nothing had happened in the history of the world. But in this history there occurred, first of all, the deification of creation through Godmanhood, i.e., in the Incarnation and the Pentecost. There passed the whole history of the world and mankind both in its entirety and in the fate of each individual person. Therefore, if one can speak of apocatastasis, this can be done only in the sense of ontological anamnesis, a beginning, not a culmination. In the world, nothing is lost and nothing is annihilated except evil, which is defeated and exposed in its nonbeing by God's power. But the history of the world, which is also the history of the Church, is the building of the Kingdom of God, the City of God. And this building can be called an apocatastasis only in the sense of universal salvation, whose seed is already implanted in the creation of all that exists.

## The Final Days of Father Sergius Bulgakov

A Memoir by Sister Joanna Reitlinger

## *Memento Mori*



Father Sergius left Russia when he was fifty-one. A Constantinople doctor found that he had sclerosis. The *concrete* thought of his possible imminent death was henceforth Father Sergius's constant companion, though, physically, this was, of course, only the beginning of his illness. He finally died of a stroke, "with his boots on," as they say, in church, during the liturgy. I remember many a liturgy that he performed as if it were his last; in fact, he summoned me to attend many liturgies as if "they might be his last." *Memento mori* is familiar to all of us, and it is an invariable part of the asceticism of spiritual life. But, in his case, it was as if this *memento mori* had been sent in some way, and Father Sergius accepted and cherished it. Perhaps, this *memento mori* gave a particular acuteness to his peering into God's mysteries, to his inquiring theology. In particular, it gave an acuteness to his conscience, which he would painstakingly examine. After any little quarrel, such as all of us have, he would say: "May the sun not set on our anger." In the evening, Father Sergius would always seek a full reconciliation: "This night you may die," said his inner voice. The *memento mori* would also give a special rhythm to his whole life. He never put anything off; he always lived the *present* moment to the full, as befits a true Christian.

## Illness

The doctor's diagnosis fell onto a soil of extreme fatigue following the arduous conditions of hunger in

Yalta, of arrests, and life in prison before exile. The combination of these things aged him more than the illness itself. That is how he arrived in Prague... Close contact with young people, whose spiritual director he soon became, restored his youthfulness.

A new life began for him, and this surprised him, since not long before this, in the Crimea, it appeared to him that his life was over. Twenty years of turbulent, seething, creative life! But the night that he had always awaited finally came — he had a stroke on the 6th of June, 1944.

But before then there were a great many illnesses and experiences of dying, which were profound revelations.

Every spring his daughter would take him to the doctor, a specialist in sclerosis, who measured his pressure and advised him on how to spend his summer — as to whether he should just rest in the country or go to the spa in Royat. This varied, but even after the spa there was always a “*Nachkur*” in the country, where I had to set him up and take care of him.

His treatment was limited to these annual visits to the doctor... Father Sergius did not like to “fuss” over his health, and had not even a trace of hypochondria, though he obediently carried out all the doctor’s instructions. He lightly mocked the hypochondria of others.

In 1937, he felt some discomfort in his breathing and his throat. The doctor whom he usually saw in the spring decided that it was the “aorta” and sent him to Royat to drink water from the spring. This was his last trip to Royat.

During his stay at the spa, Father Sergius did nearly no work, since the regimen was very fatiguing.

But he did read a lot, getting ready to write. During vacations he never went for a day without working. During his “*Nachkur*” as well he wrote a great deal. He could not imagine, and was organically incapable of, spending his time any other way. On a typical day, Father Sergius wrote from early morning to lunch; after lunch he read; and the second half of the day, after he was thoroughly tired, he took a walk. If certain factors made this schedule vary, the changes were discussed in detail. In the morning, before writing and after coffee, he took another walk, a short, solitary one, during which he thought over what he was going to write. Almost everywhere we lived, he took this walk daily in the same place, and this place would then, for me and for him, be illuminated by the thoughts and works produced in it. This was somehow particularly “significant” in the mountains, where he wrote *The Comforter*.<sup>1</sup>

The place of his walks was a valley meadow surrounded by mountains.

He called this place “*Paraklis*.”

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But then another illness struck.

The last summer in Royat brought nearly no relief. Father Sergius kept reading his lectures, but the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Comforter* (or Paraclete, referring to the Holy Spirit) is Volume Two of Bulgakov’s great theological trilogy *On Godmanhood*, comprising *The Lamb of God* (1933), *The Comforter* (1936), and *The Bride of the Lamb* (published posthumously in 1945). “*Paraklis*” (a few lines down in the text) is the place of the Comforter (Παράκλητος in Greek).--Trans.

strain kept increasing, and he kept feeling "discomfort" in his throat. Finally (only in February), his daughter decided to take him to a doctor, a throat specialist. This doctor diagnosed cancer, and immediately scheduled an operation, since the cancer had been growing for nearly a year. Father Sergius accepted the news as an "it is finished" (Cf. John 19:30). He prepared for death, wrote letters to everyone to whom he could not bid farewell personally, or to those dear ones for whom he wished to leave words of consolation or guidance after his death. He asked me to hide these letters, and to give them out when he died. After the operation I asked him what I should do with them. He asked me to preserve them, except a few that had lost their power. (At that time, he was particularly troubled by the fate of Evgeny Lampert, Zhenya, and he wrote all the letters that would be needed in case Lampert decided to be ordained to the priesthood.)

But God gave him five more years of life! Five more years of exploit, toil, love, patience, and suffering... Yes, it was continuous suffering. What healthy persons can do easily and without labor was toil, a true feat, for him.

By an improbable exertion of will, which astonished and brought delight even to the doctor who operated on him, Father Sergius "learned" not only to speak without vocal cords but even to perform the liturgy and to read lectures! Only God knew what exertions this cost him!

At first, he was coddled like a very sick patient. The number of receptions and confessions was curtailed, but very soon all these precautions were forgotten, or they were simply powerless in the face of the reality of

life. And the number of receptions and confessions became not less than the "pre-war" number.

Many of those dear to him who were apart from Father Sergius at that time assume that he must have been especially irritable then. But it was just the opposite: never was he so meek. And during those years he often repeated that one of the greatest Christian virtues is patience.

But in every circumstance God sends man an appropriate consolation: Because of the loss of his voice and the virtual impossibility of his being able to participate in the great Sunday liturgy, Father Sergius was allowed to perform daily early liturgies, about which he had dreamed all his life. Previously, we had to fight for his being allowed to perform such liturgies. But now these liturgies became "natural," for those who had previously hindered Father Sergius now felt too great a pity for him to continue obstructing him.<sup>1</sup>

Father Sergius' illness coincided with the gravest period of the war and the German occupation. Father Sergius did not want to flee anywhere from the horrors of war even when the opportunity presented itself, and one had the feeling that he never sympathized with such flight, but wished to await his fate where he was.

Partly because of the constant threat of death, there was a greater desire for communion among almost all of us. Father Sergius greatly sympathized with this

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<sup>1</sup> Possibly on account of his sophiological doctrine (which was nontraditional and far from universally accepted), Bulgakov experienced what can be viewed as a certain degree of "persecution" from the Russian Orthodox hierarchy in the emigration. One manifestation of this "persecution" was the limitation of his liturgical activity.--Trans.

desire, and encouraged frequent communion. At the liturgy, his spiritual children sometimes took communion every Sunday.

After the early liturgy, despite his fatigue, he often invited everyone to his quarters to tea.

But, finally, what he had been awaiting for more than twenty years arrived.

### The Appearance of the "Unfading Light"<sup>1</sup>

It is extremely difficult to describe the extraordinary events we four who took care of Father Sergius witnessed during his illness, and the inner experience that we received during the "forty days"<sup>2</sup> of his illness. But to us what we saw — this gift, undeserved like all of God's gifts — shines for us in all the difficult moments of our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> There are many references in the Eastern Christian literature to the non-physical "uncreated" light that shines from the faces of saints. Many of the mystical experiences described by Symeon the New Theologian involve such light; Gregory Palamas elaborated a theology of divine energies associated with this light; there is a famous documented instance of this light emanating from St. Seraphim of Sarov. Pavel Florensky has a chapter on this light in his seminal theological work *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*. The original Christian source of such descriptions is the light of Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Matthew 17). One of Bulgakov's most celebrated theological works is entitled *The Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations* (Moscow, 1917) [*Svet nevechernii: Sozertsaniya i umozreniya*]. — Trans.

<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, a reference to the "forty days and forty nights" Christ fasted in the wilderness (see Matthew 4). — Trans.

How can we be dejected, how can we lack faith after what has been shown to us? And it is necessary to bear witness to this to the glory of God.

The stroke occurred on the night from the 5th to the 6th of June, Monday to Tuesday, after the feast day of the Spirit. On the eve of this feast day, as always on this day which was the anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood, Father Sergius performed the liturgy in an especially inspired manner. His closest spiritual children, all those who could make it, were present at this liturgy and took Communion.

It is amazing that, although Father Sergius did not have a specific premonition of his imminent end (to be sure, he expected the end to come at any time), many of his spiritual children later noticed how particularly significant was this final confession, as if it were a "farewell" confession in which Father Sergius left us his testament and synthesized the main thing that he wished to say to each of us... All this was imperceptible, and it was full of trepidation — a trepidation that was a constant feature of Father Sergius' whole tremulous life, to which all self-assurance was so foreign despite the definitiveness and magnitude of this life.

After the liturgy, Father Sergius invited everyone to tea in his quarters. Several tables were placed in his study, and traditional refreshment was set out. He wished to do this very well, since there was always something holy in this, a continuation of the "common task," of the liturgy, in ordinary life, in the everyday human community. But preparing the refreshments often took too much of his strength, time, and attention. This practical concern about the refreshments was at the expense of prayer and sometimes exhausted him. In such

cases, Father Sergius found consolation in the thought that one should not separate practical work from prayer, that one should do all things as if repaying God. He even used to say that one could be an "angel of the kitchen."

Father Sergius was animated and joyful when he received congratulations. As always, he shared his thoughts, and to some extent his reminiscences, with his friends. In the evening he came to my quarters to say goodnight. Could I have known that this was to be our final conversation! He was upset by his son's difficulties, which always caused him pain. Virtually his last words were: "I no longer know or understand what is best for him. And I surrender him wholly to the Mother of God!"

At six in the morning his son Seryozha had to go to work, and I went down to make him coffee. I met him in the anteroom; he was in tears. He was coming out of his father's study, and in response to my question, he waved in the direction of the study. I entered — Father Sergius was lying unconscious across the bed. We thought he was dead. I ran to get Mother Blandina, who was making final preparations to train home after a two-day stay with us for the holidays. We laid Father Sergius in a better position; he opened his eyes and looked with some reproach at the little bell that stood on his night table for just such an occasion! Seryozha then remembered that he had heard a bell at three in the morning, but did not know what it signified, and so did not respond. Meantime Father Cyprian, who was sleeping in the room next to Father Sergius's study, had taken a very strong sleeping potion and slept like the dead. We summoned a nurse at once, and called Dr. Vladimir M. Zernov, who had been treating Father

Sergius this entire last year of his life. Father Sergius lay without opening his eyes, but he did show signs of life.

The doctor said there was no immediate danger. After his departure, we did not leave Father Sergius' bedside, as if waiting for him to "come back to himself." The doctor assured us that neither his consciousness nor his speech center was affected by the stroke. But because Father Sergius was extremely weak, he could not make the special efforts required by his manner of speaking — his vocal cords had been removed with the tumor, and he could only speak with the aid of a tube inserted in his windpipe. Nor could he manifest his consciousness in some external way. The first four days his consciousness noticeably diminished. Therefore, we did not leave his side, of course. The first day of the illness we summoned Mother Theodosia, and from that day until his death the four of us — Mother Blandina, Mother Theodosia, E.N. Osorgina (who was in charge of carrying out the doctor's medical instructions), and I — were almost constantly by his side.

Because virtually no medical care was needed these first days, we could wholly devote ourselves to contemplating and experiencing the solemnity and significance of what was happening. Yes. We were present at the sacrament of Father Sergius' passage into the other life.

He lay on his back, almost never opening his eyes. But his face expressed an intense inner life, and this expression kept changing.

It is difficult to convey what we experienced this first week. The intense life that was going on in him was mysteriously conveyed to us. We were literally transported together with him to planes of being that had

been unknown to us. And this was not the personal experience of one or another of us, but an objective spiritual fact, which we shared with one another in practically identical words. The life that was being revealed to Father Sergius was so real for us that we almost saw it. If someone had asked us then whether we believe in the other life, the other world, or the immortality of the soul, we would have answered that we almost "know" them. These realities were of the same magnitude as the reality of the visible world, and perhaps one should rather have asked whether we believe in the visible world.

We did not understand the manner in which this was conveyed to us. Because of his extreme weakness, Father Sergius did not say or write anything these days. The doctor told us that this was not an "unconscious state." Father Sergius understood simple questions, could express "yes" or "no" by movements of his head, eyebrows, and eyelids, and attempted to whisper with his lips. But because of his weakness, he could not strongly manifest this consciousness, whose level was diminished, once again by his weakness.<sup>1</sup>

Father Sergius was dying.

Father Sergius was living out the last days of life...

One desired — especially these first days — to sit near him... To pray...

To pray...

To be with him in this living out.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the first words that he whispered with his lips were: "What a drama!" When Mother Blandina, to whom these words were whispered, asked him if he had meant to say "What a drama!" he nodded "Yes!"

*To participate in this living out.*

This living out seemed a excruciating "trial."

Realities...

What realities were these?

How little all these terms say — "immortality of the soul," "the other world." Do these terms hold any truth? What was it that was being revealed to us? What did Father Sergius see? Was he talking with God?

To sit near him, to pray, to be with him seemed the only thing that was possible and necessary, and it filled us to such an extent that we could not think about anything else.

When people came to ask about Father Sergius' "health," we gave them the "medical information." But at the same time we remained in other planes of being...

We virtually did not sleep or eat. We did not feel hunger, so we did not need to overcome it. These first days we did not apportion the vigils. Rather, afraid to "miss something," we tended to keep vigil all together.

It is difficult to describe in words the experience we acquired and the atmosphere that surrounded Father Sergius. But this experience seemed to be the harmonious completion of everything that Father Sergius had taught us in his life, that he had expressed in his books. It seemed that, without this new experience, everything would have been incomplete and insufficiently real for us. I had the personal sensation that, having known Father Sergius for twenty-five years, this week I grew to know him for yet another twenty-five years. I wrote all this down during Father Sergius' illness two weeks after the stroke. He was still lying there, still with us. But what had happened the first week already passed, went away.

But this week was filled with such riches, undeserved, unmerited. Sometimes it seemed to me that this was the happiest time of my life. Why was this so? Probably because we were touching the things that the Lord had prepared for those who love Him. We were touching the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, before which all the varieties of sweetness of this world fade... And when people came to ask about Father Sergius and we gave them the medical information about his health, we wanted to convey something to them, to share our fullness — but our lips were sealed shut, as if we could not talk about any of this “before the time came.” The only thing we wanted to do was “to pace the room from corner to corner,” like St. Seraphim, when the lay sister Elena Vasilievna died in obedience to him (and, apparently, then too the heavens really opened!), and to keep repeating, like St. Seraphim, “they don’t understand anything, they don’t understand anything!”<sup>1</sup>

This “Unfading Light” reached its highest point on Saturday, the fifth day of Father Sergius’ illness.

On the eve of this day, Father Sergius grew noticeably weaker. His consciousness was fading. He lay without opening his eyes, and he had stopped swallowing. It seemed that the Angel of death was already standing by his bed...

I don’t remember if we slept that night. We wanted to be with him during his entire “trial,” to

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<sup>1</sup> St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759-1832) is the greatest modern Russian saint. In the incident alluded to here, St. Seraphim convinced Elena Vasilievna Manturova to agree to die in place of her brother, Mikhail Vasilievich Manturov, whom Seraphim needed to administer the building of Seraphim’s heart’s desire: a convent in the monastic hermitage of Sarov. — Trans.

accompany him, to live out with him the life he was living out...

From early morning on Saturday, I sat by his bed and was struck by how his face constantly kept changing expression, as if some mysterious conversation was being carried on. The expression of his face reflected an intense inner life.

Muna, Father Sergius’ daughter, came that morning, and I drew her attention to how the expression of his face kept changing. After twelve o’clock, all four of us stood around Father Sergius. His daughter left, and no one else came.

Not only did his face keep changing, but it was becoming more luminous and joyous. The expressions of agonizing concentration that would previously occur from time to time were now completely replaced by a childlike expression. I did not at once notice a new phenomenon on his face: an amazing illuminatedness. But when I turned to one of the others standing around him in order to share some impression of mine, one of the others suddenly said: “Look, look!”

We were witnesses to an amazing spectacle: Father Sergius’ face had become completely illuminated. It was a single mass of real light.

One would not have been able to say what the features of his face were like at this time: his face was a mass of light. But, at the same time, this light did not erase or obliterate the features of his face.

This phenomenon was so extraordinary and joyous that we nearly cried from inner happiness. This lasted for about two hours, as Mother Theodosia, who looked at her watch, later noted. That surprised us, for if



someone had told us that the experience had lasted but a single instant, we would have agreed with that too.

The light on Father Sergius' face apparently remained. For us, compared with what had been, this was not so noticeable. But there were sensitive people and close to him who, when they came to see him, said: "Father Sergius is giving forth light."

The girl who said this attended a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on the day (or eve) of Father Sergius' death, and she had a remarkable revelation about him in connection with the music. (This was Nadya Apukhtina. Her testimony, in a separate envelope, is in Mother Blandina's possession.)

### The Temptation

It was probably not by chance that the next day was a day of terrible temptations. It was as if all the powers of hell rose against the previous eve. It was as if these were the demons beneath the mount of Transfiguration. It is difficult to convey what these temptations consisted in. The pretext for them was, of course, difficulties in the relations between some of us. Even though, at that moment, these temptations could not poison us ourselves in the face of what had been experienced, even though they were overcome in us, yet, like demons, they leapt upon those who were nearby.

### light and Light

The stirring contemplation of mountains illuminated in the rays of the setting sun... It appears that, of all the phenomena of nature, this one provoked the greatest joy in Father Sergius. It was as if (and it was so in fact) in this light he sought the unfading Light.

And so, "it is finished." The elements of flesh and spirit, which had been separated by man's sin and limitedness, by his blindness, merged in the final tremulous shining of the Light on Father Sergius's face. And not as a reflection (for the weather was cloudy and rainy) but *from within*, spirit and flesh shined out together.

### Our Life Around Father Sergius during His Illness

The difficult relations among some of us played a role, of course, even later on, as the forty days of Father Sergius's illness progressed. These difficult relations were the material that had to be consumed in the fire of the Kingdom of Heaven. And they were consumed. It sometimes even seemed that Father Sergius was "waiting" to depart until they were consumed. Until, like him, we attain "perfect love"... Not because our smallness had such significance but because this small experience of ours reflected the great thing that was revealed to him... (Alas! Can it be that, in our further life, after Father Sergius' final abandonment of us, we, again and again, will fail to rise above our everyday situation and will defile this "Light" with our passions?)

Strange was our life around Father Sergius during the forty days. It could not be understood from outside; it could only be understood by us among ourselves. The excruciating question, "Where is Father Sergius?", the excruciating impossibility of talking or listening to him (an impossibility that sometimes, on account of its tragic contradiction, seemed more agonizing than the separation that death causes), would cede its place to a lightness and near joyfulness produced by forces from an unknown source. External time and external life seemed to have stopped. We simply "were" in this time. In the external form of life, we did not admit any nihilism. On the contrary, all was significant, even especially significant. We observed this external propriety with particular satisfaction. We had our meals normally, and, in the same way that I would "treat" Father Sergius, it was a pleasure for me to "treat" my sisters. All attentions and expressions of love and care were "in honor" of Father Sergius. Sometimes we celebrated the feast days. On the Birthday of John the Baptist, we had a common meal in the dining room; we opened the door to Father Sergius' study in order to see him. These days there was between us a peace and joy that, most likely, is prescribed for people only in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The 9th of July was the feast day of the Tikhvin Mother of God. Mother Blandina took up the icon of the Tikhvin Mother of God that was standing on the table near Father Sergius. "Father Sergius, today is the feast day of the Tikhvin Mother of God. Here's the icon!" Father Sergius crossed himself, kissed the icon, took it in his right hand, and, with it, blessed all four of us who were around his bed.

## Signs of Consciousness during the Illness

Father Sergius often tried to communicate with us through writing. But because his hand was very weak, it was difficult to make out the letters of what he had written, and often one thing was written on top of another. However, based on what we were able to decipher, we could see that his consciousness had not deserted him. When we were discussing the question of his communion, he heard us and wrote perfectly clearly: "Are you discussing my communion?" On Monday (after final unction), he wrote, "Does El. Iv. have any dried crust?"<sup>1</sup> He asked for medicine and water, but also wrote a great many things that we, alas, could not decipher. He would then wave his hand in despair and stop writing. (He lay only on his back and wrote with his arm extended, not seeing what he wrote.) On Sunday, 18 June, we received news of Father Dmitrii Klepinin. Mother Blandina went up to Father Sergius and said: "Father Sergius, we've received news of Father Dmitrii Klepinin." Without opening his eyes, Father Sergius raised his eyebrows in joyous amazement. "He is alive and is in the hospital. How joyful!" Father Sergius sighed deeply and firmly crossed himself. Such manifestations of consciousness were dear to us.

Someone had brought a large bouquet of cornflowers. Father Sergius loved them very much, compared them to eyes, called them by an affectionate diminutive, "cornies." But now he had clearly passed

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<sup>1</sup> El. Iv. is Elena Ivanovna, Bulgakov's wife. — Trans.

beyond this love. (He had written in his letters that personal love must often be overcome and transfigured.). Mother Blandina went up to him: "Father Sergius! Cornies!" He looked at them very seriously, and, glancing at the table, he whispered: "Put them there."

Our prayer was for healing, for the life of the healed Father Sergius. The thought that life could return to him without his being able to continue his work frightened us. But the excruciating desire to still have him near us was so strong that it appeared we were ready to accept his healing under any conditions, whatever.

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." (Isaiah 55: 8)

## The Burial

Father Sergius breathed his last around one o'clock in the afternoon. We were all around his bed.

We asked permission to wash his body. We were not permitted — that is priestly work, a sacred rite. But we had washed his dear body sufficiently during the illness. We treated him; we ministered to him. Everything was always clean, well arranged. We washed and rubbed his tender white skin...

His body was exhausted, emaciated to the extreme, as if it had consumed itself. The work of anointing his body had ended. His body was now nearly a relic. The bed was so comfortable — a special surgical one had been rented in a special store. Everything had been arranged with love and care; nothing had been left out. But he had suffered so much! Every two days he was fed artificially and received injections. He

experienced an excruciating pain in his temple, which he would repeatedly grab hold of with his fingers. And along with this — this excruciating spiritual pain of the dying man who was living out his life, these "trials." And in this suffering he did not stop thanking us for our cares and love. He would press our hands in turn and even often kissed them. It was clear that he knew perfectly well who was by his bed, whose hand he had taken, whose hand he was pressing and kissing, although his eyes were not open all the time, and sometimes very rarely. The death agony began during the vespers on the eve of the feast day of the Apostles Peter and Paul and ended on the feast day of the Twelve Apostles. We clearly understood that this was the death agony, but no one wanted to believe us. We insisted on telephoning the doctor, who could not come that day and instead instructed us to administer artificial feeding! After vespers, the prayer for the dying was read. A day later, his breathing became very heavy; it became heavier and heavier.

Finally, he breathed his last. Elena Ivanovna, his chronically ill wife,<sup>1</sup> had herself lay sick in her room during the entire period of his illness and came only to look at him sometimes. She was with us now; we had called her. We moved his bed in front of the icons. We covered him, clothed him in the vestments that he had brought from Russia. At his feet we put the white altar cloth with the fiery red cross that we had sewn for him in Prague.

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<sup>1</sup> She died half a year after Father Sergius, on their wedding anniversary. She died quietly in my arms.

The front part of the altar cloth, adorned with the fiery cross, hung over the edge of the bed, which resembled an altar. All around him on the bed lay gladioli of just as fiery a color, and they formed a marvelous harmony with the sewn cross. An exception was made for us after two days, and his face was disclosed to us. Although Father Cyprian, who offered to do this for us, had said that "light was coming from him," we, who had seen that Light, did not see this light, and the face appeared to me to lack resemblance in some way to Father Sergius; it appeared to be "lived out."

All three days that Father's Sergius' body lay in the study, first on the bed and then in the coffin, the Gospel was being read day and night by priests who had come from town, and by his disciples, admirers, and colleagues.

A great many priests took part in the funeral service. Everything had the character of an enormous feast day. All of us took communion. Father Sergius' presence during the liturgy was amazingly real, especially during the Cherubic Hymn. During the prayer for the dead and the reading of the touching canon of the priest's burial, in which there is an astonishing depiction of the conversation of the departing priest with his spiritual children, it seemed that this conversation was taking place in fact. The excitement that was palpable in the church was not merely an emotional expression of sorrow produced by the loss of a loved person. It was rather a whole life of relations between the departing person (since at that moment he had not yet fully departed, and perhaps never will fully depart) and his spiritual children, with his friends. It was a whole life of

destinies entrusted to him or shared in his priestly love, in his love as a friend.

After the funeral service, the coffin was carried (in accordance with the ecclesiastical rules) around the church before being carried to the doors and taken to the cemetery. This procession of the cross, so reminiscent of the procession with the shroud of Christ on Good Friday, produced an astonishing excitement in us.

London. 1945-6

