Analele Universității din București. Filosofie
Vol. LXXIII – Nr. 1, 2024, p. 119-138
ISSN 0068-3175; e-ISSN 2537-4044
DOI: 10.62229/aubpslxxiii/1_24/9

Manuel SUMARES[1]

BULGAKOV AND *THE JESUS PRAYER*

Abstract. The issue surrounding the Name Controversy on Mount Athos in early 20th century provoked a long and systematic response from Father Sergius Bulgakov in defense of the hesychastic prayer in the Name of Jesus. Two remarkable aspects of the response deserve attention. The first is the self-conscious identification of his defense with that of St Gregory Palamas' in the 14th century, also involving the prayer life of the hesychasts and the Jesus Prayer. The essay argues for the Bulgakov's working within the framework of Palamite doctrine, wishing to "further" it. The second has to do with this furtherance via a creative reworking modern German philosophy within the perspective of the dogma of consubstantiality in order to establish the ontological character of the Name and especially the one invoking Jesus.

Keywords: The Jesus Prayer, Bulgakov, Palamas, name, antinomies

A distance of six centuries separate the respective defences of the holy hesychasts by St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) and Father Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944). Both were called out of their usual preoccupations – Gregory Palamas the monastic desirous of solitude, Bulgakov the Russian Orthodox "Intelligent" with a vision for a Christian nation – to argue for the legitimacy of the prayer of the heart invoking the Name of Jesus. The parallel between their respective responses would not go unnoticed by those who look toward hesychasm as typifying Orthodox Christianity and see the controversies around it as involving a crucial feature of how it understands the Christian faith. It is all the more striking for their involvement with occurrences

[1] Honorary Professor, Faculty of Philosophy, Catholic University of Portugal (Braga); Orthodox priest. Email: <frsumares@gmail.com>.

that took place on Mount Athos, given the privileged status that it generally has in the minds of the Orthodox faithful. In that sense, they exemplify issues that go beyond the mere incidences of the moment.

At the outset of his own explication of the Jesus Prayer's meaning, St Sophrony of Essex alludes briefly to the commotion that had rather recently transpired before his arrival to the Holy Mountain in 1925. He recognises in passing that they raise some fundamental questions about prayers of invocation:

> "But what does God's Name mean? In order to pray in His Name is it necessary to understand its significance, its attributes, its nature? […] Not long before [my arrival], stormy disputes had erupted concerning the Nature of the Name of God, similar to the controversy in the fourteenth century respecting the Nature of the Light that the three disciples beheld on the high mountain of Tabor." (Sophrony 1977, 100)

Sophrony completes his consideration by suggesting that the controversy represents a reflection of "a natural disposition" to distinguish between quest for the ontological belonging ("the prophet and the poet") from that of externalised, or instrumental, rationality ("the scientist and the technocrat"). The divergent tendencies, qualified as "natural," express themselves in specific "secular" binary positionings, *e.g.*, "nominalists and realists," "rationalists and idealists."

Sophrony's recollection of the heated controversy over the nature of God's Name is meant only to set the scene for his own exposition, which is primarily biblical and firmly within the monastic tradition shaped by the Fathers. While he would insist on the ontological status of the Jesus Prayer, *i.e.*, the real inner-connection between the Name and the Named, he does not follow Bulgakov, his former teacher at the Saint Sergius Institute in Paris, in thinking that an extended theoretical effort to give foundational justification for its practice is called for. At this more abstract level, one might see the *cause celebre* as a way of testing the principles of Bulgakov's philosophical theology that began to take shape in his pre-exilic writings. Along with the conceptual labour to provide theoretical support for popular devotional practices, *e.g.*, relics, icons, as well as the Name of Jesus, that typify the prayer life of Orthodox Christians, his early self-conscious identification with the Palamite struggle to safeguard the ontological consistency of the Orthodox faith is

frankly relevant. Sophrony recognised the comparison, but Bulgakov took it to heart: he will follow Palamas in order to further him for the sake of Orthodoxy. But what does "further" actually mean in this context and how is it that the question of God's Name, or more precisely, "onomadoxy," is germane to his own Christian Sophiology?

Starting from an endpoint of Bulgakov's thinking in order to appreciate the scope of the concerns already expressed in the earlier work, this passage from his arguably crowning work, *The Bride of the Lamb* (posthumously published in 1945), is especially noteworthy:

> "The sophiological interpretation and application of Palamism are yet to come in the future. By accepting Palamism, the Church has definitely entered onto the path of recognizing the sophiological dogma. But the theological realization of this recognition still requires a long path of intellectual labor. Essential here is the connection with onomadoxy, which has recognized the divine reality and power of the divine-human name of Jesus and, in general, the power of the name of God in the world. It is not by chance that onomadoxy is linked with Palamism. However, these particular applications of sophiology do not yet go to the root of the sophiological problem." (Bulgakov 2002, 19)

The above passage is clearly programmatic: for Bulgakov, the Church's acceptance of Palamism effectively means that, whether or not she is aware of it, she has already entered into the realm of "sophiological dogma," *i.e.*, the interpenetration of the divine and the creaturely. He prophetically sees that, although it will take time, it will become the task for future Orthodox dogmatic theologians to explore relationship between the power that inheres in the Name of Jesus, of the Godman, and the power of Name of God as it pertains to the created order, the world. Onomadoxy, the doctrine of right-naming, as it appeared in the time of Gregory Palamas, has not been explicated sufficiently well. Both the names of Jesus and of God are complicit in the power attributed to each – the first to His consubstantial incarnate nature, capable to be addressed in the heart; the second to the One Who Is. However, much Bulgakov deems this to be for future times to think through, this essay hopes to suggest nevertheless that much about their distinguishing, but ultimately convergent features are already significantly delineated in the philosophical theology of his early work.

A basic tenet in the alignment of Bulgakov's doctrine of Divine Sophia with Palamas' conceptual scheme resides in the latter's intentionally ambivalent understanding of God's Divinity around the Essence (*Ousia*) – energy distinction. This will suit Bulgakov's Christian Sophiology in a way that it will come to be framed as implied in the theological antinomy that he postulates. This can be succinctly outlined thus:

(a) God as super-essential Divinity, related only to Himself as tri-hypostatic;

(b) God as divine energies (*e.g.*, Divine Sophia, Uncreated Light), relates both *ad intra* to God's unknowable Essence and *ad extra,* to the creation in its "multiform" expressions;

(c) hence, God is at once, antinomically, absolute and relative.

Given this, one can anticipate that the onomadoxy that Bulgakov intends to bring to the fore in the furtherance of Palamite doctrine will involve the situating of the Uncreated Light thematic alongside that of the sophianic Name of Jesus, both within the sphere of divine energies, both accentuating the reach of deifying grace into the heart of human being and, through Him, all of creation. In his work on the Holy Spirit, *The Comforter,* Bulgakov underscores the resemblance between the Name of Jesus and the calling down of the Holy Spirit and how both enter normally into the Palamite concerns about deification and the Uncreated Light.

> "Here, the power of the divine-human Name Jesus and the power of the invocation of the Holy Spirit are equivalent. These prayers represent a spiritual work which is a deification *in actu*, in which the person praying, overcoming the spiritual distance between him and God, becomes a god by grace and communes with divine life. This idea is the chief theme of the Palamite disputes about the significance of 'the light of Tabor'." (Bulgakov 2004, Kindle Edition loc. 5853)

By the time of Bulgakov's composition of *The Philosophy of the Name* between 1918 and 1922, the Name controversy had already come in 1913 to a highly disputed resolution. This took the form of an ecclesiastical condemnation and, with the involvement of the Russian government, led to the forced removal and repatriation of the so-called Name-Venerators, a substantial group of Russian Athonite monks, to their homeland in 1913. These were accused of confounding the name "Jesus" itself with God. For example, the prayer could become understood as

"Jesus Christ's name is itself our divine Saviour Jesus Christ". Such a formulation was contested as possibly leading to Christological heresy, confounding the unnameable reality of God into a name conceived by human beings: one could suspect a pantheistic tendency in it, or even the idea that the mere repetition of the Name would be sufficient for salvation, thereby diminishing the importance of sacraments. In spite of these objections, the widespread popular acceptance of the Name's mystical power, inside and outside of the monasteries, remained vigorous. The dispute provoked significant agitation in Russian society and defied Church authority. The punishment meted out to the Name-venerating monks to quell the discussion seemed, to many, unduly harsh. Nevertheless, reasoned arguments in defence of the idea that the Name of Jesus is someway divine persisted among the Christian Intelligentsia. Thus, the contested verdict came eventually up for reassessment. This would take place at the All-Russian Church Council (planned for 1917-18), in which Bulgakov would have been a participant. However, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 put an end to that possibility. Even so, with the encouragement of Pavel Florensky, an extended philosophical response came from Bulgakov.

In *Philosophy of the Name* considered as a whole, references to the intervening factions in the debate are relatively few, but those that exist leave no doubt about what the contentiousness surrounding the controversy meant for Bulgakov and for Orthodox theology. For example, he alludes directly to "the great and terrible question that is making the rounds in Orthodox theology with overwhelming force; that of the Name of God, and Its sacred mystery" (292). For him the stakes are high and he sees his participation in this issue as resonating with two decisive dogmatic instances constitutive of Orthodox tradition: the restoration of the icons in an Ecumenical Council and the acceptance Palamite doctrine as normative for Orthodox Christianity by the Constantinopolitan Synod of 1341.

> "The question about the Names of God and the meaning of the veneration, in connection with other questions, was already examined once, covertly, at the seventh ecumenical council, where it received the indirect resolution of the universal church. The problem of icons, at least those with the depiction of God, is in many features analogous with the question under discussion." (Bulgakov 2020, Kindle Edition, 296)

> "If the Godhead were our caprice and illusion, then the name would be powerless. But in the Name of God, the Very God names Himself in us and through us; in it the thunder sounds and lightening of Sinai flashes for us; the energy of God is present that (in accordance with the conclusion of the Constantinopolitan council apropos the Palamite disputes) is indivisible from the Godhead, although it is not identifiable with it. Our sinful indifference, distraction, and blindness prevent us from being fully aware of the whole magnitude of the Name of God; when we pronounce it, we seemingly partake of the power of God, Name-fighting is unconscious, not fully thought through Antropotheism or godlessness." (309)

Some of the thematic features of the above passages will need revisiting later on below. For the present they serve to appreciate Bulgakov's inclination to see the theme of the Name as related to the dogmatic resolutions concerning the restoration of the icons and Gregory Palamas' culminating articulation of the Essence – energy distinction. Curiously, they actually correspond to the first two Sundays of Great Lent, *i.e.*, The Triumph of Orthodoxy and Saint Gregory Palamas Sunday, often remembered as the second triumph. What is fundamentally being celebrated in both is the reaffirmation of the Incarnation under the sign of consubstantiality, the material world's capacity to receive God, in such a way that its natures are inseparable but yet unconfused. What the iconoclasts are to the icon-venerators and the Barlaamite critics of hesychasm are to the Palamites, the Name-fighters (onomaclasts) are to the Name-venerators. The loss of the sense of the incarnational realism is likely to produce in the threatening parties an "unconscious, not fully thought through Antropotheism or godlessness," even as they profess Orthodoxy. Such would be the consequence of willed ignorance, or simply obtuseness, rendering one practically unavailable to the out-pouring of divine energy in the form of God's Name, inseparable ("indivisible"), yet unconfused ("not identifiable") with it. At issue is the participation in the transformative power that the Divine Name *qua* divine energy unceasingly offers. And, correlatively, God seeks to be known in His Name such that He is effectively and rightly invokable by human being, thus creating the conditions of divine-human communion.

For Palamas, and eventually for Bulgakov as well, the issue is not limited only to the legitimacy of hesychasm but also but of Christian Orthodoxy itself and the primacy of the Incarnation as the consubstantial

reality and point of engagement with the living God in prayer and in the sacramental life of the Church. But for Bulgakov, in particular, consubstantiality is not only thematically central but, even more dramatically, a heuristic formula that opens the mind to a large spectrum of applicability: it is "truly a dogmatic miracle, surpassing the natural powers and possibilities of the epoch [of the Chalcedonian Council]". Moreover, "The Chalcedonian dogma is not only a doctrinal norm according to which the conciliar consciousness of the Church must measure itself. It was also given to human thought as a limit problem of the theological and philosophical understanding" (Bulgakov 2008, Kindle loc. 917). In other words, it is the inspired resolution – indeed a "dogmatic miracle," a "crystal" through which the Church understands herself and creation – that ontologically resolves *in actu* the antinomy presented to the human mind about Christ's dual nature. Significantly, he further defines his conception of the antinomic approach that he favours, along with the consubstantiality that underlies the process and seemingly begging to be made explicit, in this way:

> "An antinomy attests to the equivalence of contradictory propositions, as well as to their inseparability, unity and identity." (Bulgakov 2012, Kindle Edition loc. 445)

Anticipating Bulgakov's own thinking and decisively influencing it, Pavel Florensky already underscored that, when confronted religious experience and language, like that of the Divine Liturgy's "ceaselessly exuberant wit of antithetic juxtapositions and antinomic affirmations," the antinomies ought not be conceived in terms of either/ or but rather yes *and* no together (Florensky 1997, 117). In the light of the real impact that religious experiences can transmit, antinomies demonstrate the "tragic" frustration inherent in purely philosophical investigations to comprehend them. Yet, even under these circumstances, they can nevertheless be embraced as comprising an "*ascesis* of rationality," an exercise of reasoning, inspired by these experiences and in which faith is not a mere supplement: faith is rather a striving to transcend the self-imposed limits of what human thought on its own is capable of conceiving. Such is a rationality in a new key, spurred on by apparent contradictions, gathering into its life's diversity. It is this that Florensky identifies, *grosso modo*, with "the task of an orthodox, namely a universal

rationality, collecting all the fragments into a fullness" (119). Yet, within the generality of this "task," a more specific one appears which further accentuates the antinomic and consubstantial character of this rationality that lays claim to orthodoxy, namely, that of dogmatics, to the extent that it brings together inseparably and non-confusedly two valid spiritual exigences: the intellectual demand to clarify and establish concepts about the content of the experience that is semantically stable and, thereby, identifiable; and the trusting faith in the same content to produce noetic transformation of the believer, including its ensouled body.

Taken up by Bulgakov and consistently deployed throughout his work as a way of framing whatever thematic he is dealing with, the methodology of thinking through antinomies constitutes an epistemological spearhead to initiate the explication of the Christian experience that is ultimately understood as consubstantial. In relation specifically to the practice of the Jesus Prayer and his treatment of it, two apparently incompatible (also "antinomic" in their way) elements enter into play. On the one hand, Kant and his German idealist legacy, though already challenged by Soloviev and Dostoevsky, prime movers of the religiously motivated philosophers of the Russian Silver Age at the turn of the 20th century, made antinomic thinking a standard for serious philosophical investigation.

> "Kant's most outstanding service in theoretical philosophy was the ascertainment of the antinomies of the intellect." (Bulgakov 2012a, 103)

On the other, within the wide scope of the Christian sophiology that he sought to advance, Bulgakov did indeed see his work as an expression of a creative fidelity in regard to Orthodox tradition. In other words, in Bulgakov, duly provoked by Florensky, Palamism meets the demands of modernity for more precise conceptual articulation of the primacy of the experiential that Orthodox Christianity notably values. As Alexander Schmemann once noted,

> "[…] the Orthodox man begins with the 'end', with the experience, the breakthrough, the very reality of God, the Kingdom, the Life – and only afterwards does he clarify it, but in relation to the experience he has had. The Western man rationally arrives at and evokes the 'end' from a series of premises. The Orthodox often expresses that "end" quite poorly in theology." (Schmemann 2000, 110)

One might see that Bulgakov's efforts consist in formulating the "end" of a long process of clarifying an experience "mythopoetically" expressed in prayer and ritual in a better way. Bulgakov deemed that right-thinking about God's Name has, as it were, a "narrow gate" status in the Christian life.

In *Unfading Light*, Bulgakov lays out preliminary philosophical conditions for what faith enables one to envision and, eventually, to confirm as an experience ontologically antecedent to Kantian efforts situate them in accordance with transcendental categories. There Bulgakov advances the idea of a Fourth Critique to complete and eventually overturn Kant's famous three *Critiques of Pure Reason*, *Practical Reason*, and *Judgment*. This Fourth Critique takes as axiomatic that religious consciousness is an ontological given for human being; it makes itself intelligible through the symbolic form of myth, or religion, seeking to represent the inclusion of transcendent reality in the immanence of human life. Under these circumstances, philosophising as the exercise of simple, unaided reason, is, in truth, a *post factum* activity. With this in mind, Bulgakov proposes the following:

> "One can say (by applying Kant's terminology) that *myth is a synthetic religious judgment a priori* from which *a posteriori* judgments can be deduced analytically." (Bulgakov 2012b, 64)

Both for the interests for what it reveals about the sort of the philosophical theology that he proposes and how its elements come into play in the question of the Name, Bulgakov's formula may be parsed in the following way:

a. **myth [**a narrative that linguistically structures Orthodox Christianity in the form of an intrigue, *muthos*] is **a synthetic religious judgment** [an articulated discursive formulation about the truthfulness vis-à-vis an experience of the transcendent in the immanence of one's life] ***a priori*** [in accordance the inherent categorical conditions that identify Orthodoxy as such, *i.e.*, (i) catholicity, (ii) conciliarity, (iii) ecumenicity, and (iv) ecclesiality];
b. **from which *a posteriori* judgments** [on the basis of which further dogmatic considerations about the truthfulness of the experience] **can be deduced analytically** [made the object of further explication as to the nature of its contents and the appropriateness of the original formulations of the dogmas in relation to the Orthodox narrative, the story that it tells].

A strictly analytic investigation of the nature of religious consciousness puts between parentheses how it functions in time and space, and then proceeds by a progressive explication of what true religion necessarily has inherently. Among the categories that may be postulated as transcendental, Bulgakov sets catholicity as primary, the other three appear to be measured in relation to it in the wake of synthetic judgments. Having situated the necessary *a priori* conditions, *a posteriori* judgments advance by affirming the measure of their actuality in the myth that they always presuppose as anchored in experience as a result of divine action: the transcendent, taking the initiative, while preserving itself as such, permeates the immanent with its grace.

Significantly, this fundamental antinomy of religious consciousness translates *in concreto* ritually and mythopoetically in the sacramental life of the ecclesial body, whereby the presence of the transcendent in the immanent is celebrated. This primacy of *lex orandi* (the rule of prayer), indeed the structuring of its mythopoesis, in relation to *lex credendi* (the rule of belief), underscores that the ascendant movement of thought has its initiation the practice of common worship – as the word, "liturgy," suggests, to wit, the shared, public work on behalf of the people. What then emerges from the poetics of devotional practices, aspiring to respond to the peculiar persuasiveness, implied in the religious experience, by setting dogmatic boundaries in order to conceptualise and affirm the givens of the revelation represented in the myth. The passage beyond negative theology, *i.e.*, the persistent negation of all definitions, of every "Yes," concerning the knowledge of God, Bulgakov affirms the factors that give life to the mythopoetics as a positive instance of revelation and knowledge: "religious self-consciousness cannot live, breathe, or be nourished by this emptiness alone – divine communion, divine experience, divine being constitute its vital foundation" (109). At the end of the day, under the sign of furtherance of what has been delivered in Holy Tradition, Bulgakov's intellectual labour is, for all intent and purposes, a sustained praxis of synthetic judgments *a posteriori* and his treatment of the Jesus Prayer is an example of it. "All religious dogmas seek new incarnations in philosophical creativity" (95). The dogma of the Name, rooted in ritual and devotional practices, follows suit.

> "The Name of Jesus is the foundation stone for a Christian philosophy of the name." (331)

The experiential domain of prayer, associated with the Name, draws spontaneously on the poetics that symbol and myth provide. However, taking as usual his cue from Kant about what serious philosophy must look like, a transcendental *a priori* moment must also appear in dealing with the Name as preliminary to engagement with its more organic ontological content.

> "The Name of God must be considered in its general sense, *i.e.*, as part of a general theory of names, as signs; then it must be dealt with where it is exceptional, *i.e.*, in its singularity on account of its theophoric nature." (292)

Still, just as in the case of religious consciousness, Bulgakov's intent is to subvert and transform, eventually arguing that Kant chose to ignore the power of language and the peculiar movement of the grammatical elements at work in it: it is precisely these that ground the system of formal and abstract categories that Kant deemed to be invariable and universal. The "concrete" epistemology that Bulgakov proposes dislocates the source of judgments in cognitive acts from the transcendental forms of knowing to acts of naming and their relation to forming of sentences around the copula *is:* epistemology depends on a grammar which is constitutive of its ontology.

> "It is a functional dependence, teleological, in which the unity of the task allows for variety in the ways and means, as well as difference in the perfection of their resolution. Here both the spirit of a language and the genus of a people can manifest themselves." (192)

The "language" and "genus of a people" that concerns us is that which is conceived around the person of Jesus, but, to begin with, the most general quality of name as "word," already with its own incarnational features, in view of the Name's maximal definition, *i.e.*, God's proper Name.

Bulgakov's treatise is very rich in detail and insights, a fascinating tour de force, which, read together with *The Philosophy of Economy* (1912), *Unfading Light* (1918) and *The Tragedy of Philosophy (*written in 1920-21, published in 1927), constitutes a programme for a Christian philosophy inspired in the Chalcedonian dogma. They also have in common the task of working through and beyond Kant's epistemological schemata

that, for however much uneasiness it creates for its pushing away the knowledge of the noumenal from the domain of philosophical legitimacy, remain – for Bulgakov – an unavoidable legacy. His need to deal with it in these works is akin to the need to deal with the "unconscious" element in the minds of the Name-fighters that surreptitiously lead them to "Anthrotheism and godlessness". This consists of a wandering into a nominalist psychologism and away from the hypostatic reality of the Incarnation. In working through the particular response given in *Philosophy of the Name* with that of "Jesus" in view, the attempt will be made to bring to the fore the key steps on the path toward the clarity that Bulgakov wished to give to the theme:

a. A general theory of names

(i) "Thoughts without words do not exist anymore than words without thoughts." (50)

With the same kind of abruptness that Wittgenstein initiated his *Tractatus Logico- philosophicus* ("The world is the totality of facts, not of things"), Bulgakov declares from outset that words are not sounds but, in the sphere of human cognition, are immediately given in complicity with thought. As such it constitutes an ontological axiom with broad ramifications that characterise both the phenomenal and noumenal quality of word that are innately conjugable. This can already be appreciated in the "bi-unity" that the very notion of logos possesses, *logos*-as-thought and *logos*-as-word. The incarnational pattern is established as a primary fact simultaneously containing two worlds without division and without confusion.

> "A word is inexplicable; it exists in its miraculous primordial state. […] As an idea does not exist without incarnation, so too sounds are not words without an idea." (53)

Taken as articulable between themselves, words-ideas are grounding instances of language. They are also incarnational energies in search of a sonic body, *i.e.*, language, its *ergon.* It is these prototypical words-ideas that sustain historically determined languages and, crucially, "speak" in human subjects before they themselves make use of them in their

particular idiom: "[…] *we do not learn* the inner language that lies beneath the idiom and at its base, words as ideas that are incarnated in sound or as symbols; rather they *arise* in us and moreover they do so in us all equally in the measure of our humanness" (80). This arising from within us of the inner language is also communicative and speaks to our humanity, or, one might say, "Divine-humanity," in consonance with Bulgakov's utmost conviction. This inchoate calling, enticing us to further self-understanding in relation to it, is subject to conscious remembrance and invocation associated with prayer. Prayer is a creative act of response and engagement with this communicative primordial *Logos.*

(ii) "[…] logos is not only a word, a thought, but also a connection of things." (93)

The bi-unity of *logos* is not only communicative but also connective. An aspect of its connectivity resides in the virtue it possesses to correlate grammatical parts of speech that stand in relation to one another with the wider order of the cosmos. The grammar of thought and speech is not a domain unto itself; it has the further mission to name judiciously what *is.* It is literally an ontological act, "the *logos* of the real," implied in speech acts that implies the presence of a subject, an "I" who is doing the naming but is not included in the named, *i.e.*, who is ontologically prior to it. The pronoun "I" acts in an essential way, *i.e.*, as *ousia*, as source of energy that the name possesses. Ontologically prior to the name, the pronoun is "the symbol of *ousia* [of noumenality], of the inexpressible depth of super-being, of proto-hypostaticity." (107)

The connective power of the logos, uniting transcendence with immanence, is sustained by an inner-life that personal pronoun tacitly evokes in the act of naming. Associated with a personal pronoun, the name as substantive noun of a sentence becomes liable to a wide range of predicates underscored by the copula *is*, the adhesive force of its realism. In accordance with the role that the Holy Spirit has in the economic life of the Holy Trinity, it works in an unseen way as a verbal energy related to its works, its *ergon*, providing for it a proper name or meaning. The heart of naming, the copula performs the task of predication, disclosing meaning, such that the process of naming incorporates in itself an act of judgment and of implied remembrance:

> "[…] we perform anamnesis, by naming things, so that in the final analysis, naming to which the speech-word is reduced, is nothing but remembering." (139)

In naming, as in prayer, there is a harkening back to a substantial bond, overcoming forgetfulness for the sake of achieving wider and deeper ontological connectivity.

b. The theophoric nature of naming

(i) "Cognition, from the elementary to the most complex, contains a triune act: that of the muffled voice of being, the sounding of a word, in the act of cognition the union of this stimulus and this word – in naming." (203)

Concrete epistemology seeks to resolve the problem of thought in function to the content that forms around the word that expresses it, *i.e.*, in the way it gathers in and releases the potential for further naming. Cognition operates in that manner essentially because it is triune:

> "Each elementary act of cognition refers to the great and sacred mystery of the creation of human being in the image of trihypostaticity." (202)

At its most basic, naming enjoins inchoate being (muffled, itself unnameable) to its manifestation and brings both together into meaning. At its highest in regard to articulation, the Prologue of Saint John's Gospel configures the movement of the word in terms of descent and ascent as if, "cut with a diamond chisel and miraculous in their measureless depth and conciseness" (208): in the beginning, the word was at once toward God and God; all things came through the word and those things consequently are what they are because of the word. A space thus is given to the recreated world logos to assume expansively its creative potential, while it is concomitantly being drawn upwards to the Divine Logos, for "apart from whom nothing arose from that which arose." (Jn 1:3)

Conceived in the image of the trihypostatic God, human being thereby is commissioned to act in a godlike the manner as bearer of world logos. The naming by God in the creation of the cosmos becomes the task of humankind in naming the living creatures brought to him for that purpose. With the Fall, the task of naming, presumably for those

called to do so (such as Saint John the Baptist), consists in making room, "for the incarnated hypostatic Divine Logos, by which was laid the foundation for the divinization of the whole creation in human being" (211). Inspired words of faith, adopting poetic language, take hold of the human subject; invitatory in character and rooted primal symbology, they are supremely revelatory. For instance, "the Bible is an eternal potential of divine inspiration, like a window into another world from which the rays and sounds of the Kingdom of God burst through" (252). Herein lies the centrality of devotions that incorporate into them the language of Holy Scripture.

> "A word is or rather can be a condenser of power, cosmic or gracious; the sacred formulas of sacraments are such condensers of power." (254)

(ii) "[…] a name is a force, a seed, an energy. It forms and determines its bearer from within." (263)

Because naming is also judging, an element of propriety enters into the attribution of a name. One might see this as implying an evaluation of rightness, an idea for the bearer himself, even allowing that it might prove too difficult to fulfil. If one must speak an inner-form, it is best to accentuate its entelechy, its inner force, directed towards its full realization.

> "Names arise not by chance and not arbitrarily; they are not contrived without any internal regularity; they exist in the human being […] and are only discovered in naming. Therefore, the naming of a name gets meaning and completeness, the problem of onomastics stand before us in all its breadth." (270)

A name once given incarnates the idea that it communicates to the flesh, as widely shown in the Bible and includes that of Jesus, named from above, as well as His renaming of some of His disciples in accordance with their new identity. In relation to realization, the Incarnation and its saving purposes resonate with the divine image and likeness of human being. He is the exemplary manifestation of Divine-humanity to which humankind is called; He is the Incarnation of Divine Logos and the Name that enlightens human being, the "world logos," and the latter's creaturely mode of naming and incarnating. But what of the Names of God?

(iii) "The naming of God takes place in and through human beings; it is their act, the awakening of their theophoric and theophanic potentials, the realisation in them of the enclosed image of God, of their primordial theanthropism." (295)

Following Pseudo-Dionysius' treatise on the subject, names attributed to God are energies, communicating themselves in human being who names them in accordance with character of the divine revelations. The latter name these energies that are anchored predicates that become subjects, *i.e.*, they acquire a certain sustainability in their own right. The names are recognised as referable to the power of God and, in that sense, they are verbal icons of the unnameable God in His Essence, in His "I". The symbolic character of word, even as it applies to God, likewise functions as a bridge between what is experienced and the depths of the utterly transcendent Name. That Name was revealed in two distinct ways, one to Moses (Yahweh: I, WHO AM) and the other to the Virgin Mary (Jesus): they constitute two images of the Name of the Godhead not made by human hands (315). Both are important, but the one communicated in the Annunciation is eminently, even apocalyptically, so both for what it reveals and for what it inaugurates.

> "The Annunciation: the calling of the name Jesus was performed by an angel sent by God, by God Himself. The Name of Jesus preceded His conception and birth from the Virgin. (327). It was not born but is in God pre-eternally, appearing in the fullness of time in the earthly incarnation in His Name: around this core of the person there arise a crystallization, a consolidation, and coverings." (328)

This is indeed a new revelation about what can be said about God: more than attributing to the Names of God the status of revelatory divine energies, the Name of Jesus is the Proper Name of God that is simultaneously a human name. In the Incarnate Word, the Lord (Yahweh, I AM), who eternally abides in the Godhead's fullness, is likeness of the fullness of humanity.

(iv) "All names meet or proceed substantially and dynamically from the Name of Jesus, for we cannot imagine anything inherent in the human being and lying outside of Christ except in the dark region of sin, of non-being, of satanic evil." (333)

Herein lies the scope of the scope of the Name of Jesus and thereby that of the Jesus Prayer. All of humanity created in the image and likeness of the Creator God are also to be contemplated in the Unfading Light of the Divine Logos, Christ Jesus. In that sense, the Name of Jesus is ontologically ascribable to all human beings: "If the Lord in whom everyone finds themselves in all-individuality, then the Name of Jesus is the *all-name*, the Name of all names." (333). What matters ultimately is not the sound (phoneme) of a name nor its form (*morphene*), but the mystical energy (*semene*) that inheres in all individual names and implies a call to true humanity to be realised in the Church under the creative power of Jesus' Name. Disclosing the foundational reality of Divine-humanity, the Name of Jesus is the name of all names.

(v) "Thus, in our understanding and in our interpretation, the formula 'the Name of God is God' signifies only that that the Name of God is divine and enters into the sphere of the Godhead, His energies." (349)

In the wake of God's revealing His Name to Moses, the invocation of the Name limited itself to the liturgical setting of Temple worship. This dramatically changes with the invocation of Jesus' Name, for henceforth the temple is primarily the believing human heart. There He may be called upon "at any time and at any hour" and be effectively joined at the heart in consubstantial communion.

> "Every believer has the priesthood of this temple imprinted with this Name. … It became close and accessible and is not separated by the ontological chasm that exists between the Creator and the creature. Across the chasm a bridge is erected, the divine and human heart were already united indivisibly and without confusion." (339)

Therefore, the Name-venerators can find dogmatic legitimacy for their practice of the Jesus Prayer: in the invocation of His Name, endowed with divine energy, they participate in the Lord's Divine-humanity, the real presence that is known to them by experience.

The realism of the Name is finally crucial for common worship, for it contributes in preventing the service from degenerating into an event that is merely representational. Divine worship is not only the service to God but also God's service in which we have Christ the High Priest

himself, and the priests consecrated in His Name show the power of His presence in the church's sacraments and accomplishes them by the power of the Name of God. (348) So, as energy, the Name of God is in that sense "God." But in the dynamics of consubstantiality, the copula *is* is not equational, but irreversible and communicative of divine qualities – just as Essence differs from its energies but is ever communicating itself in them. It is the judgement involved in the naming that constitutes at once the gage its irreversibility and the distinctive ontological character of the Name as revelatory and open-ended promise of communion.

Concluding remarks

In broad terms, the arguments for realism over against nominalism in Orthodox prayer life would be readily agreed upon. Slippage into "psychologism" about prayer and the sacraments would be judged as a drift into intellectualist constructivism, an attachment to an idea rather than an effective synergy of human and divine wills. Also, broadly speaking, the Orthodox would feel quite literally at home with a resolution along the lines of the Palamite articulation of the Essence (Unnameable Pronoun "I"/ Subject) – energies (nameable predicates around the "I") distinction. Thus, to that extent, the defence of the Name-venerators in *Philosophy of the Name* confirms the practice as dogmatically sound – a fact that does not preclude the authentic possibility of being positively moved by a deeper understanding of the Jesus Prayer's content that the work brings to the surface. Taken together with references to the Jesus Prayer and importance of onomadoxy in the edification of the Christian Sophiology, under the sign consubstantiality that he was developing, the details of the treatise's systematized exposition effectively reveals the dogmatic awareness of the Name of Jesus as foundational, a "cornerstone," to our knowledge of God's Name.

Undergirding the invocation of Jesus by Name, consubstantiality is not only understood as engaging explicitly with the power of Divine-humanity in order to deepen one's potential for personhood, as part of deifying process that God intends for human being made in His image. It is to be reckoned as conjuring up a psycho-somatic dimension already

found in the pact that binds immediately thought and word. This is re-dimensioned as one enlarges the perspective by which the root-action of naming sets in movement a gathering in and expanding of horizons. An action that always already precedes human action per se, they already abide in it.

One may be tempted to enlist Bulgakov's *Philosophy of the Name* as part of the Linguistic Turn that, expansively interpreted, involved the major figures of twentieth century Western philosophy. *Grosso modo*, it is about the precedence of language (myth, symbol, metaphor, and the like) as determinant in shaping thought. It is surely the primacy of the Word/ Name that governs this work of Bulgakov's. But the philosophy that Bulgakov allows as non-tragic is religious philosophy that has its ground in the experience of God through prayer, invoking Him in His transcendence, naming Him in the mode of His revelation.

In terms of content, the Name of Jesus, the human name that is also a proper name of God, is the invokable Divine energy that is exceptional among Divine Names in revelatory and deifying power, complete sense of which can only be the anticipation of the All-Unity in His Name. In regard to the nature of thought, the grammatical approach, conceived according to the inter-relationality of Divine Persons, encourages a catholic yearning for communion. As Bulgakov argues consistently, the tri-hypostaticity of divine substance has its analogue with what constitutes human life as noetic and communicative. As to language as a fundamental *Lebensform* of humankind, it already announces humankind's affinity to the metaphysical and mystical principles that anticipate eschatological promise contained in the Word of God. In *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, Bulgakov expresses this simply and very well indeed:

> "[…] our whole life, and therefore our whole thinking too, is a continuous self-realising proposition, a proposition which consists of a subject, a predicate, and a cupola." (Bulgakov 2020, 10)

Likewise, the human naming of God's revelation in Christ Jesus can also be continuous and self-realising with the royal priesthood of the faithful as its ultimate realisation in the eschaton. Such is the promise and the hope.

References

Bulgakov, Sergius (2002). *The Bride of the Lamb,* trans. by Boris Jakim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Bulgakov, Sergius (2008). *The Lamb of God,* trans. by Boris Jakim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Bulgakov, Sergius (2012a). *Icons and Name of God,* trans. by Boris Jakim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Bulgakov, Sergius (2012b). *Unfading Light: Contemplations and Speculations,* trans. by Thomas Allan Smith. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Bulgakov, Sergius (2020). *The Tragedy of Philosophy,* trans. by Stephen Churchyard. Brooklyn: Angelico Press.
Bulgakov, Sergius (2022). *Philosophy of the Name,* trans. by Thomas Allan Smith. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Florensky, Pavel (1992). *Pilar and Ground of Truth: An Essay on Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters,* trans. by Richard F. Gustafson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Schmemann, Alexander (2020). *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann 1973-1983*, trans. by Juliana Schmemann. Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press.
Sophrony, Archimandrite (1997). *His Life is Mine,* trans. by Rosemary Edmonds. Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press.

All links were verified by the editors and found to be functioning before the publication of this text in 2024.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS
The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

FUNDING
The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.