The Ecclesiology of Divine Humanity and Church Unity: Solov’ev, Berdyaev and Bulgakov

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This article considers Church unity through the prism of bogochelovechestvo, the Russian term for divine humanity, particularly in the work of Vladimir Solov’ev (1853-1900), Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) and Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944). It studies the different ways these thinkers engaged with ecclesiology and ecumenism and how the divine and human dimensions of the Church provided them with the framework for this. The article concludes by considering the importance of bogochelovechestvo both in terms of Catholic ecclesiology (esp. Lumen Gentium 8), and more broadly in terms of its orientation to deification and its implications for the contemporary mission of the Church.

In a recent synodal document from the Russian Orthodox Church on the social conception of the Church, we read the following in the opening section on ‘Basic theological positions’:

The Church is a divine-human organism. Being the body of Christ, she unites in herself two natures – divine and human – with their characteristic activity and freedom. The Church is linked to the world by its human, creaturely nature. However, it interacts with it not as a particularly human organism but in all its mysterious fullness. Precisely the divine-human nature of the Church makes possible the graced transfiguration and purification of the world, being perfected in history.

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in the creative cooperation, ‘synergy’, of the members and Head of the ecclesial body. [...] The Church, being the body of the God-man Christ, is divine-human. But if Christ is the perfect God-man, then the Church still is not perfect divine humanity, for on earth she battles with sin, and her humanity, although interiorly also united with the Divinity, is far from expressing Him in everything and corresponding to Him.¹

The language used here to describe the Church is largely unfamiliar to Catholic ecclesiology. Yet in Lumen Gentium, while one does not find the term ‘divine-human’, there is a recognition of the same theme presented in paragraph 8, which concludes Chapter 1 of the document, ‘The Mystery of the Church’:

Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His Holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body.²

This text, perhaps somewhat neglected, certainly opens a door to engagement with the terminology used in the Russian Orthodox definition. Interestingly, the sources of this Orthodox description of the Church derive from the work of Vladimir Solov’ev, who introduced the concept of bogochelovechestvo (divine humanity) into Russian religious thought in his famous Lectures on Divine Humanity delivered to a packed St Petersburg audience in 1878 and published in revised form in 1881. He is, ironically, often viewed with suspicion by the Orthodox because of his Catholic sensibilities. Indeed, he is perhaps best known by Catholics as a pioneer of Catholic-Orthodox unity, as the author of the work Russia and the Universal Church which, apart from anything else, is an excellent source of proof-texts from the patristic east for the

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primacy of the Petrine ministry. It is however the concept of divine humanity, *bogochelovechestvo*, which lies at the very heart of Solov’ev’s thought. Although he died somewhat isolated, in 1900, his influence was immense, and this concept of divine humanity was seminal for many Russian thinkers who followed him. In this article I shall examine the theme as expressed in the work of Solov’ev, Nikolai Berdyaev and Sergius Bulgakov, and specifically with regard to its significance in the work for Church unity.

The key to understanding Solov’ev’s *Lectures on Divine Humanity* is the final part of it, *Lectures 11 and 12*, which Solov’ev revised considerably prior to publication in 1881. Here Solov’ev’s examination of the nature of the relationship between the human and divine in world history culminates in the Incarnation and in a description of the person of Christ which is central to his theological perspective: ‘[F]or the harmonization of the two natures in the Divine-human person to be a free spiritual act, human will has to take part in it – a will that is distinct from the divine will and that, through the rejection of any possible contradiction with the divine will, freely submits to the latter and brings human nature into complete inner harmony with Divinity’.

This Christological position is, as Solov’ev points out, a perfect profession of Orthodoxy, and, in its emphasis on the two wills in Christ is one of many strong echoes of the influence of Maximus the Confessor in his overall theological vision. After establishing this Christological foundation, Solov’ev immediately outlines his basic ecclesiological position, writing that, ‘[h]umankind, as reunited with its divine principle through the mediation of Jesus Christ, is the Church’ which, as an organic body, is ‘growing and developing little by little’ such that at the end of time the Church ‘will encompass all humankind and all

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4 Solov’ev writes in a footnote here: ‘This definition follows from our conception of the “spiritual man”, or the second Adam. It is identical with the dogmatic definitions of the ecumenical councils of the fifth to the seventh centuries, which were developed against the Nestorian, Monophysite, and Monothelite heresies, each of which represented a direct contradiction of one of the three essential logical conditions of the true idea of Christ’. For a full exposition of the influence of St Maximus on Solov’ev, see J. Pilch, ‘Breathing the Spirit with Both Lungs’: Deification in the Work of Vladimir Solov’ev (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), esp. 75-111.
nature in one universal divine-human organism'.\textsuperscript{5} What the Incarnation establishes, for Solov'ev, is a new ontological order of being, divine humanity or humanity called to deification which he equates directly with the Church.

In *The Spiritual Foundations of Life* (1882-84) Solov'ev emphasizes the ecclesial dimension of the Church much more fully than in *Lectures*, offering, in particular, an important account of the sacraments. Through the Church, especially through the sacraments, we receive the divine life and necessarily become mediators of that grace to other human beings and also to all of creation. It is primarily this ‘graced’ humanity, having received new birth in the Church, which Solov'ev understands as divine humanity. Since it is made up of people, the visible Church on earth is for him a ‘divine-human organism’ – the concept at the very heart of his ecclesiology. In formulating this definition Solov'ev is of course again drawing out the ecclesial implications of the Christological formulas of the Ecumenical Councils. ‘The Church’, he writes, ‘founded by the God-man Christ, also has a divine-human composition. But the difference is that Christ is the perfect God-man, and the Church is still not perfect divine humanity but only in the process of becoming perfect’.\textsuperscript{6} This distinction between perfect and imperfect humanity is crucial and one which Bulgakov will later re-work in Sophiological terms. Solov'ev, though he is justly seen as the founder of Russian sophiology, does not in fact attempt to formulate a formal sophiological position after writing *Lectures* and develops his ecclesiology in traditional Christological terms.

It is necessary, Solov'ev argues, to recognize correctly what the divine and human elements are in the Church. Then one can

by every means to strive for the elimination (in oneself and others) of this discrepancy so that all that is human in the Church, as far as possible, becomes conformed to the Divine – so that the Divine name is all the more hallowed in people, so that God’s kingdom spreads more and more widely and so that the will of God is perfected on earth as it is in heaven.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{5} Solovyov, *Lectures*, 164.
\textsuperscript{6} Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, t. III maech (Brussels: Zhizni’s Bogom, 1966-70), 385-86.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 387.
Effectively, the full manifestation of the will of God, the Kingdom of God, will happen, according to Solov’ev, when all that is human in the Church has become like the divine, when the Church becomes perfect divine humanity. The whole thrust of Solov’ev’s thought here centres on the Visible Church becoming the Invisible Church by virtue of the divine essence incarnate in it, in its way of apostolic succession, creedal and conciliar faith, and sacramental life. As Stanislaus Tyszkiewicz has stated, ‘it is Vladimir Solov’ev who is the first among Russian Orthodox thinkers to examine explicitly and ex professo the question of the divine humanity of Christianity’.

While Solov’ev was writing *Spiritual Foundations* in 1882-84, a shift occurred in his ecclesial sensibilities. He turned away from the Slavophile position he had espoused at the end of *Lectures* and came to recognize the Pope as the centre of unity. After a series of articles on the east-west schism published in 1883 with increasing reluctance by Ivan Aksakov, the editor of ‘Rus’, Solov’ev addressed the task of the union of the Churches more directly in a project to which he devoted most of his efforts and written work of the 1880s. The works *A History and Future of Theocracy* (1885) which he was forced to publish abroad in Zagreb and *La Russie et L’Église Universelle* (Paris, 1889) are the main literary fruits of this endeavour. The core of Solov’ev’s actual practical vision for reunion are not expressed explicitly here, but can be found in a lengthy two-part essay ‘The Jews and the Christian Question’, first published in *Pravoslavnoe obozrenie* [The Orthodox Review], nos. 8 & 9 (1884). In this he concludes that Russia and Poland, in particular, have the duty to ‘reinstate Christian unity freely and consciously’ for in them ‘the Christian East and West stand face-to-face with all the untruth of their enmity, with all the necessity of their reconciliation’, a perspective no less true today than it was then.

This work contains a mixture of an extremely inspiring vision of a united and transfigured humanity, ‘enchurched’ in the expression of the twentieth-century Russian émigré

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9 *The Great Controversy and Christian Politics* was not published in Solov’ev’s lifetime; there is as yet no English translation. See Vladimir Solov’ev, *Tri razgovora; Velikii spor i khristianskaia politika* (Moscow: AST, 2007).
theologians, while also belonging manifestly to the nineteenth-century in terms of Solov’ev practical suggestions.

Often, it is thought that following the disappointment of not seeing his theocratic project for Church unity meet with success, Solov’ev no longer concerned himself with ecclesial matters, only returning to them in his final apocalyptic fictional work on the antichrist. This, of course, is to overlook Solov’ev’s reception of communion and recitation of the Tridentine creed at a Mass celebrated by Fr Nikolai Tolstoi in February 1896 and also his ongoing communication with Princess Elizabeth Volkonsky regarding church union. In fact, Solov’ev’s thought was still very much conditioned by divine humanity, which is evident in his magnum opus, The Justification of the Good. In the short middle part of this work, entitled ‘The Good is from God’, Solov’ev re-expresses the basic position of Lectures: ‘The purpose of the world-process is the revelation of the Kingdom of God or of the perfect moral order realised by a new humanity which spiritually grows out of the God-man’.

While this work doesn’t appear to focus on Christian unity it actually offers a valuable new approach because it explicitly disengages from trying to formally solve the problem of disunity. Solov’ev’s pointed footnote is not insignificant in this context: ‘The least attention on the part of the reader will convince him that I have not given any ground for serious critics to reproach me with the absurd identification of the Kingdom of God with historical Christianity or the visible Church (which one?). I reject such identification both implicitly and explicitly; nor do I recognize every scoundrel who has been baptized as a “spiritual” man or “a son of God”’. In focusing on morality and the moral task of humanity Solov’ev offers an approach to Church unity which will result from holiness rather than structure and organization. For Solov’ev does not separate the moral life of humanity from the Church; indeed the Church is ‘the fundamental form of the moral organisation of humanity’.

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12 Ibid., 169. The identification of the Kingdom of God with historical Christianity is a feature of St Augustine’s thought criticised by Evgenii Trubetskoi in his 1892 work on St Augustine and Latin theocracy of the fifth-century.
13 Ibid., 373.
foreword to a new English edition of the book, ‘[j]ust as Solovyov’s investigations of the human constants at the ground of moral consciousness necessarily culminate in Christology, so his considerations of the practical particulars of ethical existence necessarily culminate in ecclesiology’.\textsuperscript{14} Solov’ev emphasises that ethics ultimately leads to divine humanity, the new ontological order effected by the Incarnation. In this way he offers a permanent avenue for ecumenical endeavour, at once obvious, yet always easily forgotten: the work of personal and social holiness – social deification one might call it – always builds up the body of Christ. As such, it moves the visible Church one step closer to the invisible and eternal heavenly Church it is called to become.

In the final part of the book, ‘The Moral Organisation of Humanity as a Whole’, Solov’ev returns to the theme of \textit{Lectures} with regard to the Church as being in the process of becoming perfect divine humanity: ‘There is no division but there is difference between the invisible and the visible Church, since the first is the hidden moving power of the second, and the second the growing realisation of the first. The two are one in essence but different in condition’.\textsuperscript{15} Solov’ev emphasises the divine essence of the visible Church through which actual unity may be obtained:

Perfect unity and holiness are in God; sin and division are in worldly humanity; union and consecration are in the Church which harmonises and reconciles the divided and sinful world with God. But in order to unite and consecrate, the Church must itself be \textit{one and holy}, \textit{[that is, it must have its foundation in God, independently of the divided and sinful men who are \textit{in need of} union and consecration, and therefore cannot obtain it of themselves.]} \textit{The Church, then, is in its essence the unity and holiness of the Godhead, not, however, of the Godhead as such, but as \textit{abiding and acting in the world. It is the Godhead in its other, the true substance of divine humanity.\textsuperscript{16}}} 

While the twofold nature of Church as divine humanity is re-expressed here, Solov’ev now approaches the question of Church-state relations differently. Instead of advocating a direct alliance between Church and state and a formal ‘kingly’ role for temporal power in establishing or enforcing Church unity, Solov’ev now suggests the state freely accepts

\textsuperscript{14} The \textit{Justification}, xlix.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 372-373.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 372.
its role in facilitating the sanctifying work of the Church: ‘From the Christian point of view the state is only a part of the organisation of the collective man – a part conditioned by another higher part, the Church, which consecrates the state in its work of serving indirectly in its own worldly sphere and by its own means the unconditional purpose which the Church directly puts before it – to prepare humanity and the whole earth for the Kingdom of God’.” Following this, and concluding the whole work, Solov’ev reflects further on the relationship between Church and state, arguing, still in Chalcedonian terms, for a separation between them so that the state may freely serve the Church. This is clearly a very different understanding of Church and state relations approved of by secular liberals in the west. Ultimately it is a re-expression of his ‘free theocracy’ project first expounded in Lectures and much developed in the 1880s.

The theme of divine humanity was further explored by subsequent Russian thinkers in the twentieth century after Solov’ev’s death. Of Solov’ev’s disciples, Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) stands out as the preeminent representative of Russian philosophical and theological thought in the west; his work was immensely popular across the world during his lifetime and in the years preceding Vatican II. Today he is much less read in the west and, where there is interest in the ‘Russian school’, other figures such as Bulgakov and Florensky probably hold a greater contemporary appeal. Nonetheless Berdyaev, together with Solov’ev and Ivan Ilyn, was suggested as recommended reading for Russian politicians a few years ago. The preeminent contemporary translator of Russian religious thought, Boris Jakim, considers that Berdyaev ‘saw that the meaning of his own activity was to reveal to the western world the distinctive elements of Russian philosophy, such as its existential nature, its eschatologism, its religious anarchism, and its obsession with the idea of “Divine humanity”’. Indeed, having relinquished Marxism for Christianity in his early thirties, Berdyaev immediately expresses his faith within the paradigm of divine

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17 Ibid., 391-392.
humanity. At the end of the preface to his 1907 work, *The New Religious Consciousness and Society*, he writes that:

‘[i]n both the old church which has preserved holiness, and in worldly culture and society, invisibly accumulating a new holiness, there must come a conversion of cosmic character, a transition to the Divine-human way... This conversion will noot be a renewal of the old, not a Lutheran Reformation, but something immeasurably greater: the changeover from a natural-human ... to a divine-human order. The essence of evil is the deification of the natural, human element, apart from God: the essence of good is making human nature divine, in union with God’.²⁰

Although Berdyaev’s work was primarily philosophical, he nonetheless made an extraordinary contribution to the work for Christian unity. His friend Philippe Sabant considered that ‘Berdyaev has done more than anyone else in our day, to give back to Christians the true dimensions of the Church’ while F. H. Heinemann called him ‘a link between East and West, between Christians of different denominations, between Christians and non-Christsans, ... between philosophy and theology, between the visible and the invisible’.²¹ At the same time, he disengaged from explicitly ecclesiastical conversation, his friend and biographer Donald Lowrie noted that ‘[i]t was typical of Berdyaev that he never discussed religious-philosophic ideas, even those concerning the role of the church, with churchmen. It was not in his character to talk theology with theologians, and although Bulgakov shared Berdyaev’s sense of the central importance of the God-manhood idea, the two men apparently never consulted each other on the question’.²² Yet few figures in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s were able to generate ecumenical encounters as he did and he was regularly requested as a lecturer and public speaker. When Berdyaev settled in Clamart in the outskirts of Paris, thanks to a generous gift from an Anglican benefactor, he established religious informal gatherings in which many Catholic thinkers were present.²³


²² Lowrie, 249.

Furthermore, Berdyaev’s own marriage was an ecumenical event, his wife Lydia living much of their married life as a Third Order Dominican. Her conversion was facilitated by discussion groups Berdyaev had hosted in Russia through which she met Fr Abrikosov, whose intense spirituality and asceticism impressed both husband and wife.  

Berdyaev writes explicitly of the divine-human theme in one of his final works, actually published posthumously, which, written in wartime and dedicated to Lydia, he considered one of the most demanding he had ever written. Here he emphasizes that, ‘[t]he theme of God-humanity is the fundamental theme of Christianity’ and notes that ‘[t]he very dogma of the divine humanity of Jesus Christ expressed the mystery of God-manhood, of the union of the two natures without confusion or identity’. He refers to his first book The Meaning of Creativity, in which he ‘said that to correspond with the Christological dogma there should be a new anthropology, a Christology of man’, adding the challenging observation that ‘[t]here is still no real Christian anthropology. Among patristic writers St Gregory of Nyssa came nearest to it. He was the greatest philosopher among the doctors of the Church and he endeavoured to raise the dignity of man’.  

Part of Berdyaev’s legacy and contemporary value is his own contribution to Christian anthropology. He highlights the immense importance of human freedom and also the essential truth that true humanism can only be a Christian humanism, thus addressing two of the greatest absurdities and commonplaces of the contemporary west, namely the ideas that to be a Christian means to limit one’s freedom and that to be a humanist necessarily entails a rejection of faith. Thus, Berdyaev writes that ‘[t]here is a true and a false criticism of humanism (humanitarianism). Its fundamental falsity lies in the idea of the self-sufficiency of man, of the self-deification of man, that is to say in the denial of God-manhood’; rather, ‘[t]he highest humanity is embedded in Christianity for it relies upon God-manhood and Christian


24 For a history of this extraordinary Catholic community see Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart, OP, To Courageously Know and Follow After Truth (Summit, New Jersey: DNS Publications, 2013).

personalism, upon the recognition of all human personality as the highest value’.  

For Berdyaev, then, the implications of divine humanity are not so much ecclesial as personal and ethical. The Incarnation ushers in a new anthropology, and with this must come a new ethics. ‘In the language of traditional terminology’, Berdyaev writes, ‘God-manhood corresponds to the union of grace and freedom. From this there also arises a new ethic, one which stands in opposition to the old racial ethic [...] The ethics of the human, the ethics of personalism, must be constructed upon an attitude which regards man, personality, as the highest value, it must be founded upon the unrepeatably individual and not on the impersonal common’. Berdyaev could hardly have written his book at a more challenging moment in history, and the urgency of this endeavour was not lost on him. Yet with war and terrorism in many ways omnipresent in the world today, abortion claiming more unborn lives than ever, the givenness of humanity’s created nature being constantly challenged by gender ideology, and enslavement to technology causing increasingly levels of ill health, his words resonate powerfully today: ‘The hour is at hand when it becomes more and more clear that it is only in and through Christianity that the image of man can be preserved, for the elements of the world are destroying it’.

In his work Freedom and the Spirit, Berdyaev has an important chapter on ‘Mysticism and the Way of the Spirit’ in which his basic positions regarding Catholicism and Orthodoxy are expressed. Berdyaev reveals an extraordinary breadth of knowledge and offers, as ever, lots of stimulating reflections and points to quibble with. Once again, influential Catholic works are acknowledged, such as Poulain’s The Graces of Interior Prayer and Auguste Saudreau’s The Mystical State and ‘the very interesting work by the Thomist Garrigou-Lagrange, Christian Perfection and Contemplation according to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross’. In his support of Meister Eckhart Berdyaev draws on contemporary Catholic scholarship: ‘The Dominican Denifle has shown that Eckhart was an orthodox Catholic to a much greater extent

26 Ibid., 115-116.
27 Ibid., 127. Berdyaev notes that he attempted to construct such an ethic in his book The Destiny of Man.
29 Ibid., 251 and 243.
than had hitherto been suspected and that in his recently discovered theological treatises he was completely Thomist’. The key to Berdyaev’s view on mysticism is not that east is better than west but rather that ‘[m]ysticism is the way of deification both for man and the world. On this point the mystics of all ages and creeds are at one’. Indeed, Berdyaev notes that ‘[m]ysticism also by its very nature overrides the barriers which divide Christians [...] however unpleasant it may appear to the fanatical supporters of confessional mysticism.’

In addition to this, what else does Berdyaev have to say about the Church and the question of unity? He devotes the final chapter of Freedom and the Spirit to the topic ‘The Church and the World’ and his views on this matter remain pertinent – and they cannot but have been inspirational for the ecumenical movement in the 1940s and 50s when ‘everyone’ was reading Berdyaev. Berdyaev opens his chapter challengingly: ‘Is the Church an ontological reality? The catechisms give us no information on this point. The ontology of the Church is still scarcely revealed. It is a task which belongs to the future.’ Berdyaev’s immediate answer is that ‘the true reality of the Church, its being, is inward and mystical, and is something beyond buildings, clergy, rites, councils, etc.’ and it is notable that he references a Catholic theologian here in support: ‘Peter Lippert, S. J., has treated this question in an excellent manner in Das Wesen des Katholischen Menschen’.

An ecclesiology of divine humanity is one in which the deifying implications of the Incarnation are foregrounded. Without sliding into pantheism, this means that nothing exists beyond the reach of God’s sanctifying grace. Berdyaev explains it thus:

In reality the natural as an independent sphere of being does not exist; for it is only a state of sin and of separation from God. The true being of man and of the world is rooted in God. That is how Orthodoxy regarded the matter and in this it was nearer the truth than Catholicism, which was intensely dynamic but did not imply the transfiguration of nature and its deification. Catholicism does not seem to expect the

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30 Ibid., 246.
31 Ibid., 243.
32 Ibid., 244.
33 Ibid., 328.
34 Ibid., 329.
Christianization of the cosmos and the human race, and this is why it always possesses a more juridical character than Orthodoxy.  
Significantly he adds in a footnote that ‘[t]here are quite clearly in Catholicism not only mystics but even theologians possessed of a quite different spirit, especially in German Catholic theological circles. In Moehler, Scheeben, and, among contemporary writers, in Guardini, a more organic and mystical conception of the Church may be found’.  
The central point of Berdyaev’s position about unity is this: ‘In the task of the reunion of the Christian world, the most important factor is the work of deepening the mystical life of Christendom so that the positivism and materialism of the churches may be transcended’.  
Personal conversion, suggests Berdyaev, in a way that recalls Solov’ev’s words to Princess Elizabeth Volkonsky, does not help the task of union: ‘It is only by remaining in one’s confession, and by deepening and broadening it, that one can work towards universalism or supra-confessionalism’. The way of Christian unity is primarily an interior one:  
[B]he difficult problem of the unity of the Christian world must be approached not from an external point of view, but from within. The churches will never be united by treaties signed by their respective governments or by mutual conventions and concordats. In order to achieve a real union of the churches it may even perhaps be necessary to avoid having union as our objective. [...] Only the Holy Spirit can unite the Churches; reunion can only be the result of grace and cannot be secured by purely human efforts.

Berdyaev places an important emphasis on a personalist approach to the work of reunion, encouraging ‘an attitude animated by love which permits of mutual recognition of other confessions as also living in the same spiritual world’. This ‘inner way of spiritual union’ will in turn help ‘to change the mutual relationships between Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants rather than those of their churches’. Berdyaev concludes with an explicit statement of a position also expressed by Bulgakov which pre-empt aspects of Vatican II’s teaching on salvation:

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35 Ibid., 350.
36 Ibid., 350.
37 Ibid., 357.
38 Ibid., 355.
39 Ibid., 355.
40 Ibid., 356.
The limits of the universal Church do not coincide with those of the visible historic churches; the soul of the Church is one, and to it there belong, not only the members of the different churches, but even those who are outside the visible Church altogether. There is a great spiritual brotherhood composed of Christians to which not only the Churches of the East and West belong, but also all those whose wills are directed towards God and the divine, all in fact who aspire to some form of spiritual elevation.41

The work of Sergius Bulgakov, in contrast to that of Berdyaev, is both more theological and formally addresses ecclesiology. Indeed, Bulgakov’s most mature work, the divine-humanity trilogy, is widely regarded, at least by western theologians, as one of the most significant theological endeavours of the twentieth-century. Introducing the first volume on Christology, The Lamb of God, Boris Jakim writes that: ‘The present volume is one of the greatest twentieth-century works of Christology and, in my opinion, represents that century’s crowning achievement in the theology of Divine Humanity’.42 The final volume, published posthumously in 1948, The Bride of the Lamb, is a work of both ecclesiology and eschatology, and may be said to be Bulgakov’s magnum opus.

Prior to this divine-humanity trilogy, Bulgakov had written separate books on both Sophia and the Orthodox Church, as well as participated in a number of ecumenical ventures. Bulgakov undoubtedly owes a significant debt to Solov’ev, and he acknowledges ‘Solovyov as having been my philosophical “guide to Christ” at the time of a change in my own world outlook, when I was moving “From Marxism to Idealism” and, indeed, even further, to the Church’.43 Of all the Russian thinkers he developed Solov’ev’s teaching. Bulgakov most explicitly explains divine humanity in sophiological terms. Indeed, for him, ‘[t]he central point from which sophiology proceeds is that of the relation between God and the world, or, what is practically the same thing, between God and humanity. In other words we are faced with the question of the meaning and significance of Divine Humanity – not only in so far as it

41 Ibid., 356-57.
concerns the God-human, the incarnate Logos, but precisely insofar as it applies to the theandric union between God and the whole of the creaturely world, through humanity and in humanity’.  

It is interesting, however, that in his work *The Orthodox Church*, Bulgakov places much less emphasis on both Sophia and divine humanity than he does in the trilogy. Only in the opening chapter, entitled ‘The Church’, is the basic theme expressed: ‘The Incarnation is not only an idea or a doctrine; it is above all an event which happened once in time but which possesses all the power of eternity, and this perpetual incarnation, a perfect, indissoluble union, yet without confusion, of the two natures – divine and human – makes the Church’. Just as Solov’ev shows, this Chalcedonian understanding of the Church embodies the exchange formula of patristic thought and the theology of deification: ‘The Church is the work of the Incarnation of Christ, it is the Incarnation itself. God takes unto Himself human nature, and human nature assumes divinity: it is the deification of human nature, result of the union of the two natures in Christ’. Bulgakov also emphasises that the Church extends across time including not just the living, but also the dead and those yet to be born. Furthermore, he includes within the reach of the Church the angels and all of creation, thus establishing an ecclesiology of cosmic proportions.

Later in this early work, *The Orthodox Church*, Bulgakov considers key aspects of the Orthodox Church, notably the concepts of sobornost which is ‘the soul of Orthodoxy’ in which ‘according to the perfect definition of Khomiakov: “in this one word there is contained a whole confession of faith”’. Bulgakov’s approach to Church unity emerges from his understanding of this concept, which plays a larger part in his thought than in that of Solov’ev. For,

[i]n “sobornost” understood as “catholicity” each member of the Church, equally within the assembly of the members, lives in union with the entire Church, with the Church invisible, which is itself an uninterrupted union with the Church visible and forms its foundation. Then the idea of catholicity, in this sense, is turned inward and not outward. And each member of the Church is “Catholic” inasmuch as he

44 Ibid., 14.
46 Ibid., 2.
47 Ibid., 60.
Bulgakov places strong emphasis on this interiority as the foundation of ecclesiastical unity: ‘This quality, the unity of the life of the Church as the body of Christ, is manifested by a certain identity of life (unity of ecclesiastical experience) among its members, a oneness not depending on this external unity and even, in a certain sense, preceding it. [...] This internal unity is the foundation of the external unity’. While acknowledging that this ‘must be connected with the empirical world, with the Church visible’, Bulgakov doesn’t suggest that union with the Pope, surely the representative par excellence of the empirical Church, might be appropriate. Rather the ecclesiology of the Catholic Church is presented as the direct opposite of the essence of Orthodoxy: ‘The unity of the Church can manifest itself in two ways, in unity of life and faith, and in unity of organization, and these two sorts of unity must be in harmonious agreement. Now the idea of internal unity may gain predominance, now that of external unity. Accordingly, there are two types of Church unity, the Eastern Orthodox type and the Roman Catholic’.

Bulgakov’s ecclesiology is coloured by this rather Slavophile stereotype of the Catholic Church and he does not engage with western Catholic theology in the way that Berdiaev did, showing little awareness, for example, of the work of Emile Mersch, whose books about the Church as the mystical body of Christ would surely have resonated strongly with him. Nonetheless, Bulgakov’s ecclesiology contains within it an implicit model for contemporary ecumenism, namely the deep conviction that the Church transcends exterior limits and is for all peoples. This universal mission of the Church, his emphasis on the ontological reality of the Church, is summed up with his words: ‘[t]he whole world is coming to be the Church’. The destiny of mankind, individually and collectively, is intrinsically ecclesial: ‘The

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48 Ibid., 62.
49 Ibid., 89.
50 Ibid., 60.
51 Ibid., 89.
52 Bulgakov, Orthodox Church, 146.
Church, since it is Divine humanity in history and develops through history, is inseparable from the life of humankind in time’.\textsuperscript{53} For Bulgakov genuine unity, oneness is ‘substantial, ontological’, and ‘[i]t corresponds to the unity of divine life, which is one – not by the unity of emptiness, but by the unity of fullness, of the wholeness of all in all’.\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, Bulgakov stresses that ‘[o]ne should not diminish the ontological significance of this unity by transforming it into merely a figure, a simile: like a body or similar to a body. On the contrary, the apostle speaks precisely about one body (Eph. 4:4–6), in direct relation with the unity of God’.\textsuperscript{55} What emerges forcefully in Bulgakov, who like Berdyaev and Solov’ev also strongly challenges any limitation of the Church to visible boundaries, is, as Aidan Nichols has observed, ‘an extraordinarily high doctrine of the Church’.\textsuperscript{56} Crucial to the ecclesiology of divine humanity is the unity of Christ and his Church, the divine presence of Christ in His Church in history, which challenges the somewhat timid words ‘by no weak analogy’ with which \textit{Lumen Gentium} describes this relationship.

As noted in the introduction, the concept of the Church as a divine-human organism is largely unfamiliar in Catholic ecclesiology. Perhaps the major contemporary ‘handbook’ of Catholic ecclesiology is that by the Dominican Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole, which appeared in English in 2014.\textsuperscript{57} For all its thoroughness, this comprehensive work does not touch upon this idea (with the possible exception of a page about Matthias Scheeben) and the whole area of Eastern Catholic ecclesiology does not feature at all, while Paul Evdokimov and Sergius Bulgakov are mentioned in passing with regard to Orthodox ecclesiology. Yet since the Council many of the problems the Church has experienced are a reflection of a severance of ecclesiology from Christology and can be understood best in these terms. Thus when Cardinal Ratzinger, whose primary teaching areas had been in

\begin{thebibliography}
\bibitem{53} Ibid., 140.
\bibitem{54} Sergius Bulgakov, \textit{The Bride of the Lamb}, trans. by Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 258.
\bibitem{55} Ibid., 258.
\bibitem{56} Aidan Nichols, O.P., \textit{Wisdom from Above: A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov} (Leominster: Gracewing, 2005), 197–211.
\end{thebibliography}
ecclesiology and eschatology, was interviewed some twenty years after the close of the Council, he reflected on the over-emphasis or simple misinterpretation of the term ‘People of God’ as a description of the Church, which had been highlighted in the document *Lumen Gentium*:

‘Thus, without a view of the mystery of the Church that is also supernatural and not only sociological, Christology itself loses its reference to the divine in favour of a purely human structure, and ultimately it amounts to a purely human project: the Gospel becomes the Jesus-project, the social-liberation project or other merely historical, immanent projects that can still seem religious in appearance, but which are atheistic in substance’.58

Ratzinger’s emphasis on the connection between ecclesiology and Christology goes to the core of the origins of the concept of *bogochelovechestvo* which, as all three of the thinkers surveyed in this article make clear, has its origins in patristic Christology. Ratzinger similarly highlights that sound Christology provides the true basis for ecclesiology: ‘In reality, there is no truly New Testament, Catholic concept of Church without a direct and vital relation not only with sociology but first of all with Christology. The Church does not exhaust herself in the ‘collective’ of the believers: being the ‘Body of Christ’ she is much more than the simple sum of her members’.59

A recent 2011 work by a Polish theologian, Andrzej A. Napiorkowski, *The Divine-Human Communion: An Outline of Catholic Integral Ecclesiology*, notably uses the divine-human terminology favoured by the Russians. In the brief section of this work entitled ‘The Church: A divine-human reality’, he writes that the Church

‘is at the same time a mystery of faith and an empirical reality... Both aspects of the Church should be kept apart and not confused with each other. On the other hand, they should not be separated. Despite the Church having been established “from above”, it is realised in the world and in history as a place of people’s free decisions. These dimensions (spiritual and visible) constitute the complex reality of the Church, which is merged from a divine and human element (una realitas


59 Ibid., 47.
complexa, complectens divina et humana, media salutis et fructis salutis).  

Evidently, here, Napiorkowski’s thought is moving close to the ‘school’ of divine humanity, but the Christological connections are not developed any further nor is the Russian contribution recognized in this context. The theme is taken further in regard to the sacramental nature of the Church, however: ‘The point of departure for approaching the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation is its theandric nature (Greek Θεός – God, ανήρ – man). In ecclesiology theandrism is understood as the divine-human structure of the Church’. Deepening this point, he then cites Lumen Gentium 8: ‘In the conciliar Constitution of the Church we read: “As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body (cf. Eph. 4, 16)”’.  

If there are elements of contemporary Catholic ecclesiology which are beginning to describe the Church in divine-human terms, how much richer these approaches may be if they were to draw upon the foundations laid by the modern Russian ecclesiological reflection. The ecclesiology of divine humanity is, therefore, ripe to be integrated into contemporary Catholic theology. This gift from modern Russian religious thought can deepen the insights of Lumen Gentium and heal some of the polarities which have emerged since the council in which a ‘Chalcedonian’ balance has been lost. Here a pathway lies open which can enable the Catholic Church to overcome some of the internal tensions experienced since the Council, and at the same time to recapture some of the ecclesiological openness to the traditions of the Christian east which was such a prominent part of Catholic scholarship in the decades preceding the Council. Moreover, since the ecclesiology of divine humanity ultimately postulates the divinization of humanity, it integrates within itself a spirituality which is both the fruit of true Christology and answers to the highest possible aspirations of humanity.

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61 Ibid., 229. Again, Napiorkowski cites from LG8. See also 233-35.