CHAPTER 7

# Eastern Orthodox Thought

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The images most closely associated with Eastern Orthodox Christianity as well as its history do not immediately suggest either a tradition of social–political criticism and analysis or radical stances toward social justice. If anything, certain aspects of the Orthodox tradition, such as the former unity of church and state and the transcendent orientation of the Orthodox liturgy, among other things, seem to suggest at best an obsession with stability and order. At the worst, the Orthodox past might appear to contain a hyper-conservative bias. This can sometimes manifest itself as a negative vision of society and culture, of things material and human; in Max Weber's terms, an "other-worldly" or ascetic stance.

However, things are seldom what they seem, and such is very much the case for the social and political vision of the Orthodox Church and its thinkers in the modern era. The same holds true, surprisingly, for the earlier periods in which the church appears to have been either an extension of the Byzantine or Russian imperial court or the popular cult of an ethnic group. Even in the patristic era of the fourth to the ninth centuries one finds the striking personalities and radical social justice perspectives of John Chrysostom and Basil the Great, two of the greatest of the Greek fathers. With them we find perhaps the first overriding theme of the social and political thought of the Eastern church. Along with the transcendently beautiful character of liturgy in the Orthodox East, its social and political vision is a most *particular*, *concrete*, and *realist* one, namely an authentic concern for the material realities of this world, of flesh and blood human beings and their life. In the fiery homilies of John Chrysostom as patriarch of the greatest city of the Christian East, the gap between the affluence of Constantinople's elites and the poverty of many of its citizens is provocatively underscored. The rich who neglect their suffering brothers and sisters will experience the pain of the rich man Dives in hell, the one who failed to show mercy to the poor man Lazarus. In perhaps his most riveting words, John Chrysostom

also observes that, having received in holy communion the body and blood of Christ from an altar of gold (that of the Hagia Sophia, the "Great Church" of Constantinople), one then must celebrate the "sacrament of the brother and sister," seeing Christ and serving him on the altar always before us, that of the neighbor (Chrysostom 1856, 1994; Evdokimov 2001: 82–7).

Here we find a second feature of social and political thought in the church of the East: the *consistent attention to the human individual, a radical personalism*. One thinks of the Dostoevskian character who loves humanity but cannot stand the wretch in front of him. While profoundly sensitive to the communal and social nature of human life, the vision of the Eastern church cannot mistake an abstraction for the concrete person.

Basil goes as far and further: the ornaments, extra clothes, and shoes sitting in our closets are what we have taken, robbed from the poor. The Basiliade, an institutional complex of social services for widows, orphans, the chronically ill, the dying, and the poor was the result of Basil's preaching and pastoral activity as Bishop of Caesarea in the Asia Minor province of Cappadocia. The greatest teachers of the Eastern church pay close attention to the institutions and processes of society. There is an authentic *structural and material awareness and concern* in their thinking: a third characteristic of their vision.

In these Eastern fathers – who are, of course, teachers of the universal church – we also find the fourth salient feature of the social and political teaching of the Eastern church, namely its *constant eschatological reference*. When asked what was the social position and program of the Orthodox Church, the eccentric yet brilliant Russian philosopher Nicolas Fyodorov replied: "The Holy Trinity" (Nicholl 1997: 67–118). All too often we take "eschatology" to mean just the end, the "last things." For the Eastern church it bears the more ancient Gospel meaning of the kingdom of God being present among us. Thus, Fyodorov meant that the Trinity's communion of love is powerful and present, here and now. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit's communion of love is the image for each person and for the world. Justice in this world must always be measured against that of God and his kingdom. And here too we find the fifth dominant character, implied by the previous four, that our life in history and society, in our families, in learning and science, government and business, must be constantly *transformed* in light of the Gospel.

The thinking – and, moreover, the lives – of the three contemporary Orthodox thinkers we will profile here as examples of the social and political thought of the modern Eastern church resonate with the earlier fathers and express the same qualities just described. Here lies the root of the loyalty to the "truth" of socialistic reform and organization, the significance of social, political and economic changes for flesh and blood individuals, that is the hallmark of the political economist and sociologist-become-theologian Fr. Sergius Bulgakov (1877–1944). Yet from here also stemmed his profound rejection of the inhumanity and impersonalism of ideological Marxism. Dominating his vision is the Incarnation and its implications for human life: a vision of the actions of God who has entered time, space and human flesh, always breathing new life, creating new possibilities for the transformation of the world and the human heart.



We will also find a similar vision in the life and work of the lay theologian Paul Evdokimov (1901–70). After graduate studies in theology and philosophy and raising a family, he spent over a decade in the service of the suffering and outcast of society. He served as administrator of ecumenically funded hostels for the marginalized. In his writing, he underscored the radical, "absurd" love of God for humanity, God's "kenotic" or self-emptying compassion – a central theme in Russian theology and spirituality over the centuries.

Finally, I will highlight the discovery by Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891–1945) of the indivisibility of love of God and of the neighbor, her emphasis on the radicalism of Christ's second commandment of love and its rule or principle for life: love is not diminished by giving to others, it is enhanced. Mother Maria's bishop said that her monastic life would be located in the world, in the desert of the human heart, and she put her radical vision into practice in Paris, where she served in several hostels for feeding and sheltering the poor and suffering.

My selection of these three figures by no means indicates that no others in the Eastern church were interested in the social and political realities of human life. For example, training as a canonist, a historian, and a scriptural and liturgical scholar gave Fr. Nicolas Afanasiev (1963, 1975, 1992; Nichols 1989) a unique perspective on the church's relationship to politics and society. Most frequently he was a perceptive critic of the church's tendencies toward authoritarianism and cooptation by the state. Metropolitan John Zizioulas (1985) has contributed discerning ideas to our understanding of the relationship between the individual and the community, to the theology of personhood within the world, society and the church. Likewise, Frs. Stanley Harakas (1999) and John Breck (1999) have pursued many of the ethical questions of our time, from abortion and capital punishment to cloning and euthanasia and other controversial issues in bioethics. Vigen Guroian (1994, 2001) has also raised the questions of how the Incarnation leaves its imprint on all we do, from our use of the environment, the natural world around us, to the treatment of the chronically ill and the dying. The late Frs. Alexander Schmemann (1973, 1979, 2000) and John Meyendorff (1978, 1987a, 1987b) also provided general perspectives on the encounter of the church and each Christian with the complexities of life in modern society. Yet the focus here on the three mentioned – Sergius Bulgakov, Paul Evdokimov, and Maria Skobtsova – is no disservice to these others, for in fact all are connected both directly and indirectly, and these three offer perhaps the most radical and insightful approaches in the Eastern church tradition to the challenge of life in our age.

## Sergius Bulgakov

The son of a priest and a seminarian, like many other intellectuals of his generation Sergius Bulgakov left the church and Christianity to follow the Marxist

vision of the transformation of society and the individual. Trained in sociology and political economy, he challenged Plekhanov's ideas about the restructuring of Russian society and economy, particularly agriculture, understanding (like Max Weber) the importance of the family, the village, cultural customs and individual motivation. Eventually, with the tragic experience of the Second Duma and the revolution, Bulgakov returned to the faith and the sacramental life of the church, first as an important lay leader in the Great Council of Moscow in 1917–18, which proposed reforms in the Orthodox Church, and later as an ordained priest and theologian. Almost the last twenty years of his life were spent as Dean of the St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris, where he finally arrived after expulsion from Russia in the early 1920s. Under conditions of poverty and duress, due to criticism and then official examination of his writings under the charge of heresy, Bulgakov nevertheless produced a prodigious body of writing. Paul Valliere (2000) and Antoine Arjakovsky (2000) have argued in their recent studies that Bulgakov's central concern in writing of divine wisdom was to clarify the relationship of God to creation and of humankind to the divine. This he sought to examine in the light of modern thought and experience and principally through the consequence of the Incarnation, namely the "humanity of God" (*Bogochelovechestvo*) as earlier Russian thinkers such as Soloviev had framed it.

For Bulgakov it was axiomatic that it was necessary, indeed urgent, not only for the Orthodox Church but for Christianity as a whole to engage in conversation with the modern world, its institutions, consciousness, and inhabitants. All of the rapid developments that had produced modernity were diagnosed by Bulgakov not as evil but as the present situation of God's working with and in creation. Like the Greek fathers of the church more than a millennium before him, Bulgakov recognized the human capacity for destruction and evil but – being a kind of theological optimist, in the best, deepest sense – he saw God as stronger, the ultimate victor in Christ's Incarnation, death and Resurrection. Like, among others, Gregory of Nyssa and Origen before him, Bulgakov considered the final restoration of all creation (*apokatastasis*) as at least the object of prayer and hope; and, while not appropriate for dogmatizing, such restoration was nonetheless more consonant with the boundless compassion and forgiveness of God and the desire for the ultimate (re)union of the divine with creation, when God would be "all in all." Much of his vision is summed up in his last book, *The Bride of the Lamb*, the final volume in his great trilogy.

While Bulgakov did not offer a book-length discussion of the events of his era, such as the Russian Revolution, the destructiveness of state socialism, the Great Depression, the rise of the Nazis, the Second World War, and the Holocaust, he nevertheless did touch upon all of these in his writings (Bulgakov 1999: 229–67, 293–303) and presented what might be called a summary of his social and political thinking in presentations he made while on visits to America in 1934 and England in 1939. These were the sermon he was invited to preach at the chapel of Seabury-Northwestern Seminary, "Social Teaching in Modern Russian Theology," and the paper read by another for him at the Fellowship of SS Alban and Sergius, "The Spirit of Prophecy" (Bulgakov 1999: 269–92). It is not just Eastern church thinking in general but Bulgakov's own creative and radical vision that is offered in these texts.



He notes that in the early church there was no particular concern with the social world and politics other than living peaceably, obeying the law and the rulers, and living according to the Word of God. The sense of the imminent Second Coming of Christ also played a significant role in the early church's perspective. But the adoption of Christianity as the official cult of the Roman Empire under Constantine did not only end persecution: it also introduced all kinds of problems, principally the confusion of imperial political interests with ecclesiastical status in the Empire. Only rarely were bishops and teachers such as John Chrysostom and Basil the Great able, as noted above, to speak against the power of wealth and prestige. The monastic movement did begin to raise a continuous note of protest against the world's penetration of Christian thought and practice; but in the long run, even in its time of flourishing, the monastic movement was marginalized and the radical inversion of cultural values found in the Gospel routinely softened or ignored. Marx and other critics were correct in perceiving the church to be on the side of the wealthy and powerful; the church often supported the state blindly and with destructive consequences for ordinary people. But, rather than the extremes of church–state unity or the opposition of the church to any this-worldly activity, Bulgakov sees a third path, one for him aptly expressed by the figure of Wisdom, from the Book of Proverbs 8: 22–31, who is both the creature of God and his co-worker in the making and sustaining of the world (Bulgakov 1993). The destiny of all creation, particularly of humanity, is to be deified, to be in communion with the Creator, filled with the life of God and radiating the glory of this life. All are to be "prophets," messengers of the Lord, not only in word but in action.

Thus the Pentecost event of the descent of the Holy Spirit is a kind of icon of the mission of the church, not only toward the political realm but also toward the rest of the natural and social world. The church is not an institution of the state or society, but is the body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit, thus the presence and door into the kingdom of heaven here and now, in the world (Bulgakov 1988: 1–99). The "churching" of the world is not merely its being made more religious but its transfiguration, its full "humanization" and "divinization." Bulgakov imagines the completion of what all creation was meant to be, united again in love with the Creator. The church, therefore, is not the moral arm of the state (Bulgakov 1988: 156–175). It should not use any fear-provoking tactics to scare souls into goodness. Neither is the church the punishing arm of God. The church is healing, forgiveness, resurrection, new life. The very purpose of the church is creative, revealing the "humanity of God" and the divine possibilities of humanity, bringing humanity and everything else back into union with the Lord. For this relationship Bulgakov employs imagery of the Book of Revelation: "The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'" (Rev. 22: 17). The church, and through it the world, become the spouse of the Lamb. Time becomes eternity. The antipathy between the city of God and the city of the world is

abolished, not all at once but in a cumulative, compassionate process (Bulgakov 2002: 379–526).

This is not a naïve, "rosy" Christianity. Bulgakov in other essays recognized the peculiar power of the modern state to enslave and destroy human beings. He recognized the specific inhumanity of modern totalitarian regimes, not only that of the Bolsheviks but also those of Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Bulgakov underscored the need in the modern world for the gift and the vocation of biblical prophecy, the fearless, strong proclamation of God's word, and the witness to the kingdom in the midst of the world not just by a few specialists but by all Christians.

## Paul Evdokimov

Paul Evdokimov was in the first class to graduate from St. Sergius Institute and had Bulgakov, the institute's first dean and professor of dogmatic theology, as his teacher. Yet Bulgakov was not the only influence on him. The radical philosopher Nicolas Berdiaev was an acknowledged shaper of his thinking, as were friends and colleagues such as Fr. Lev Gillet, Fr. Nicolas Afanasiev, and Olivier Clément, among others. Evdokimov's life experiences also played a decisive role in forming his social and political thinking as a theologian. He arrived as an immigrant in Paris in 1923 and studied at both the Sorbonne and the St. Sergius Institute, earning his first doctorate at the University of Aix-en-Provence in 1942 and a second at St. Sergius in 1958. During the Second World War he was active in the French Resistance. At the war's conclusion and for more than a decade thereafter, he directed ecumenically sponsored hostels for refugees, foreign students, and other people in need. Evdokimov writes with untypical emotion about how he was more than an administrator, acting also as counselor, lay pastor, and friend to the residents, with their complicated, often damaged existences. When he later taught at St. Sergius and other theological schools, the experience of this service was always present. Consistently, Evdokimov sought to bring the suffering God who loves absurdly, but without coercion, into contact with the person of our time, with his questions, her rage, with the range of modern human experience.

In an essay entitled "Church and Society" (Evdokimov 2001: 61–94), he synthesizes a dialogue that extended through virtually all of his writings, from his early studies of the theology of Gogol and Dostoevsky to his discerning look at the history of spirituality. What is truly new in the New Testament, he argues, is the ultimate destiny of humankind in the "humanity of God," in the consequences of the Incarnation, life, death and Resurrection of Christ. Though they did not call it this, even the earliest of the fathers, like the apostles and New Testament authors before them, envisioned a "social ecclesiology." The church, being the body of the Risen Christ, drew all to itself, raising everything into the kingdom. The divisions so often seen between Mary and Martha, between action



and contemplation, between the sacred and the profane, are illusions. One cannot really love God without loving and serving the brother and sister always present before us. Evdokimov was especially fond of the saying of the desert fathers: "If you want to see God, look at your brother." This does not exclude numerous other possibilities of encountering God in the world, but emphasizes the singular presence of God in the neighbor in need. He even cites Tertullian and Origen on the unique experience of God in the encounter with the neighbor. Repeatedly in his writings, as in his own life, Evdokimov emphasized the truth of the claim in the first letter of John (4: 20), that if we cannot love the brother whom we can see, we cannot love the God who is invisible – or, better, most visible – in the neighbor.

Like Bulgakov, Evdokimov tracks the history of the church's solidarity with the state, with society and culture. While there are indisputable high points in this history, there are great stretches of tragedy and evil resulting from the union. The desert fathers and, after them, the monastics understood the action of Christ to mandate an "ecclesial evangelism" or an "evangelical ecclesiology." The Lord is the one who stands at the door and knocks, waiting to come in to our table, to share the bread of our suffering and of our joy. Evdokimov repeatedly quotes the thirteenth-century Byzantine statesman and theologian Nicolas Cabasilas, describing God as *Philanthropos*, the one whose love for us is without reason, force or measure (*eros manikos*) (Evdokimov 2001: 175–94). Such a God is the core of the Christian attitude toward the state, toward all the institutions of society, in international relations, even with respect to the natural world. It is far from being distinctively Eastern or Orthodox, but is the shared vision of the undivided church of the first millennium. "Beauty will save the world," wrote Dostoevsky, and this was his credo amid the lowest forms of human degradation, springing from his own imprisonment and near-execution by firing squad. Evdokimov, who did his first doctoral dissertation on Dostoevsky, constantly found the evidence of God's presence and love in the beauty surrounding us: that of the natural order, that of the saints as captured in their icons and words, but particularly that of men and women, bearers of the image and likeness of God (Evdokimov 1990). So Evdokimov urged a reclaiming of the radical spirituality of the mothers and fathers of the desert, but in the hidden ordinary, everyday lives of "ecclesial beings" today. "One does not just say prayers, one becomes prayer" (Evdokimov 1998). The appeal is straightforward. If human beings have brought suffering and destruction, then it is also through human action, transformed by the beauty and love of God, that God will accomplish the overturning of this evil. God will be acting through them, as the Bible recounts.

In his own life in the hostels at Bièvres and Sèvres and Massy, and as remembered by those for whom he cared, Paul Evdokimov's vision, like that of the church fathers and the desert fathers and mothers, was always realistic and personal. The distance between the developed and undeveloped nations, he wrote in 1967, could come down to this: an electric toothbrush in the North should not deny a container of milk to a child in the South. He has the patristic quotes at hand too. "Money and all other goods are the common property of all just as

the light and air we breathe." This bit of Christian socialism came from Simeon the New Theologian (949–1022). "Women who embroider biblical scenes on their clothing would do better to live out these stories," wrote John Chrysostom, whose "golden mouth" earned him a death march at the end of his life. Basil the Great argued, "You are a thief if you transform into your possessions what you had received only as a steward." It is hard to miss the radical political yet eschatological perspective in the teachings of these fathers and other saints. Evdokimov concludes his meditation on the social and political perspective of the church by arguing for a tax by which the affluence of wealthy nations would be redistributed to reshape the situation of the third world. In an encyclical about the same time, *Progressio populorum*, Pope Paul VI had also called for the setting up of a global fund established by taxes derived from conspicuous consumption, waste, and the buildup of armaments. Only the recent proposal by numerous humanitarian and religious leaders for the Group of Eight leading nations to stop making interest-bearing loans, write off debts, and make outright grants to the poor countries comes close in radicality.

Evdokimov, a man of both the world and the church, understood that no law could affect the interior change of heart that leads to different action. Conversion cannot come through compulsion. Yet traditions of faith can plant the seeds of such personal and then communal transformation. Thus he called for a kind of summit meeting of the leaders of the world's great traditions: the Pope, the Orthodox patriarchs, heads of the churches of the Reformation, rabbis and imams, the entire "family of Abraham." A smaller version of such a gathering has indeed occurred, in 1986 at Assisi, at Pope John Paul II's invitation. Amid outbursts of violence there is still peaceful protest by many groups at meetings of the World Trade Organization, and even celebrities have called for forgiving of debts and gifts of aid to impoverished countries. Evdokimov recognized that, in the words of Paul Eluard, "Everything was not needed to make a world, just love, and nothing else." But he also saw that such change of heart then required action. Affluent nations sharing their wealth was just a beginning; the world community had to go further to cooperate in a plan for a truly global economy, a world society where resources would be managed by all, used by all. Only this would approach the justice of which the Bible speaks.

## Maria Skobtsova

A similarly radical view of the Gospel's call to transform the world in love is found first and foremost in the life and writings of Mother Maria Skobtsova (Hackel 1981). One of the most colorful and original figures in the Orthodox Church in the modern era, Elisabeth Pilenko, as she was born, was a gifted poet and part of the circle of the Russian poet Alexander Blok. She was involved in the political turmoil of the Russian Revolution, may have been involved in the plot to assassinate Trotsky, and was herself nearly executed by both the Bolsheviks and the White Army. She was married twice, both marriages ending in divorce, and had three children. After flight to the West, she became deeply involved in providing basic humanitarian aid and counsel to impoverished Russian émigrés, both in the Russian Christian Student Movement and in another service organization, Orthodox Action. The death of her youngest daughter in 1931 from meningitis was a turning point, a moment of conversion. She asked to be admitted to monastic life and, despite some reservations on the part of colleagues, her bishop, Metropolitan Evlogy, did receive her vows, tonsure her and clothe her in the habit on the first Sunday of Lent 1932.



Mother Maria's life was incandescent. She was creative in arguing that monastic life in our time needed to find its modern location and form. If indeed such life was a sign of the presence of God's kingdom in society, then monastics should, as their predecessors did, live the life of the Gospel in the world, serving God by their prayer and by loving the children of God. She had in mind the practical service of suffering people by the desert monastics and the location of many early monastic houses in such urban locations as the Studios monastery in Constantinople and the Basiliade in Caesarea. Incessantly in her writings, Mother Maria stressed the indivisibility of the love of God and the love of the neighbor. Her essays, written in the minutes she could steal from her work, are filled with perceptive observations on the stress of the pace of modern life, and the complex consequences of political upheavals such as the Russian Revolution, then the Great Depression, and finally the Second World War. Before her monastic profession, her life was already committed to service. She traveled around France, visiting and counseling émigrés, raising funds for their assistance, seeking better governmental welfare services, and working to secure retraining and rehabilitation for them. After entering monastic life she rented large residential units both within Paris and in the suburbs, to set up, first at Villa de Saxe, then rue de Lourmel and Noisy-le-Grand, hostels for the homeless and suffering, living centers for the sick and aged. She hoped to attract other women to this monastic life of service, but her colleagues were few and temporary. She had a formidable personality which some could not tolerate. There was a kind of undeclared war between her and her first chaplain, Fr. Kiprian Kern, who could not adapt to her way of life, yet she was also blessed with two very discerning chaplains, Frs. Lev Gillet and Dimitri Klepinine.

Echoing Basil the Great, Mother Maria put her reading of the Gospel's social ethic bluntly. "At the Last Judgment I will not be asked whether I satisfactorily practiced asceticism, nor how many prostrations and bows I have made before the altar. I will be asked whether I fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoners in jail. That is all I will be asked." In her reflections on the "second commandment," that of loving the neighbor as oneself, Mother Maria concluded that, just as one was to love God with one's whole mind, heart, and will, the two commandments were really one (Skobtsova 2003: 45–60). In an essay written in 1937 but never published and located again by Fr. Dimitri's daughter Hélène and her son Antoine, "Types of Religious Lives," Mother Maria conducts not only a theological but also a social–psychological examination of

how faith and life are connected, or not, in the social world around her. (Skobtsova 2003: 140–86). She presents ideal types in a probing analysis that is extremely precise in capturing some of the various "styles" of religiosity in the Orthodox Christians she knew. She delineates aesthetic, ritualistic, ascetic, and peculiarly Russian-cultural "types" of religiosity. Of greatest relevance here, though, is her sketch of the simpler, more radical approach one finds in the Gospels and in the lives of many saints. A "peculiar law" seems to be at work, she wrote, quite the opposite of the calculus of everyday life. Rather than being impoverished by every dollar or hour I give away to someone in need, in reality I receive back even more than I give. And what I do not share, what I rather try to hoard, hide, protect, even increase in worth, actually slips away from me, is consumed, as if burned up. The response of so many (in the 1930s) to the people and society around them – to unemployment, homelessness, hunger, the breakup of marriages, families, psyches – namely, to retreat to the movies, the café, was a further tragedy. To want to escape the suffering of others said much about the disappearance of the heart, the loss of community and humanity. One could retreat as well not into jazz or alcohol but into liturgical chant, lives of saints and rituals.

While she painted and embroidered beautiful icons and vestments, Mother Maria nevertheless thought that Christ, entering into the splendor of such worship, would eventually work his way out the church door into the square, the streets outside, where his suffering children were. The Gospel's true force propels Christians out from the eucharistic liturgy and sanctuary into the liturgy of loving and serving the neighbor in everyday life. Mother Maria realized that what she was proposing ran directly counter to ordinary human orientation, counter to our fundamental love of self, then of those closest to us and those most like us. Yet what she read in the Bible about the absolute quality of God's love and his desire that we love in the same manner transcended all these fences of love. The divine form of love will make even the parent see the image of God not only in one's child but also in other children, in other people and their situations. By giving we receive. What we give is not lost but returns many times over, enriching us.

Mother Maria was both loved and reviled in her own Russian community and church. Cutting short her stay at the services to prepare meals, making early morning trips to the meat and produce markets at Les Halles to beg leftovers and day-old items, visiting the cafés to find the lonely and the homeless hanging on to their glasses of cheap wine so as to enjoy the shelter and warmth – her lowering of herself to the level of the unfortunate, in the example of Christ, made her an embarrassment to many of her contemporaries. Reminiscences of her by some notable émigrés contain a mixture of disparaging comments on her nonconformity and passionate nature as well as profound regret at having kept a distance, at looking down on her unusual life of service.

During the Nazi occupation of France, Mother Maria actively assisted many who were targeted by the Gestapo for roundup and the death camps. Fr. Dimitri issued many baptismal certificates to protect Jewish people by incorporation into the community of his parish. Mother Maria fed, hid, and helped other Jewish neighbors to flee. She ministered herself to those held in the Vélodrome d'Hiver during the hot July days of 1942. In the end, she, her remaining son Yuri, and Fr. Dimitri were arrested by the Gestapo and sent on to death camps, where all died. Mother Maria took the place of another woman in a wagon headed to the gas chambers at Ravensbrück, and the camp records note her death on March 31, 1945, Good Friday, just weeks before liberation by the Russian army. She is honored as one of the "righteous among the Gentiles" at Yad Vashem, and many recognize her as a martyr of our time.



Although politically astute and experienced enough in social action to identify the economic and structural causes of dislocation, poverty and war, Mother Maria also understood that the only authentic form of love was that given to an actual person before one. While earlier in life she spoke and worked for reform at all levels of state and society, she eventually formulated what might best be called a personalist social ethic. The Incarnation of God meant, as her confessor Fr. Bulgakov saw it, the "humanity of God." Mother Maria sought to put into action as well as into words the human counterpart of this, namely human care for the other in the manner of God: indulgently, freely, without reservation or demand. Was her work essentially radical philanthropy or charity, with no real political dimension? Quite the contrary, for she was profoundly aware of the reality of the state and its institutions and power. In assisting the suffering, she utilized all the available resources in the French welfare system. During the war, the residents of her hostels were engaged in practical tasks such as preparing clothing for troops and organizing medical supplies; under the occupation the hostel dining rooms fed the neighborhood hungry, using government rations and public funding. She countered the effort to round up the Jews of Paris, and even in the Ravensbrück camp opposed the machinery of death with small but powerful gestures. Her last embroideries were of the Allied invasion of Normandy in the style of the Bayeux tapestry and of the Mother of God holding Jesus not as a child but as the crucified one, the God who makes himself one with all who suffer.

I chose these three remarkable Orthodox Christians of our time solely for the insightful things they wrote about the Christian understanding of social and political life in the modern era. Even more importantly, I present them for the example of their work and existence. Their lives embody the characteristics of the Eastern Orthodox perspective I described earlier. In their lives, each one was politically and socially active. Sergius Bulgakov served in the Second Duma and in the Great Council of Moscow in 1917–18. Mother Maria served as mayor of her hometown of Anapa in the Revolution and was almost executed by both the Bolsheviks and the White Army. Paul Evdokimov participated in the Resistance and then in the providing of service to the suffering, as did Mother Maria. They never denied the need for political change, for government's just and humane treatment of its citizens, and all three recognized the monstrous possibilities of a totalitarian state in our time. Their love for the neighbor and serving of the suffering was, however, direct and personal, not restricted to the dimensions of

theory or plans. Despite the power of evil they saw unleashed around them, both in the Russian Revolution and in World War II, they nevertheless could not lose the vision of transformation that they saw in Christ and the Gospel.

Embedded in the vision of these three extraordinary Orthodox Christians is *freedom*, a concept explicitly discussed by their colleague and fellow Orthodox Christian, the philosopher Nicolas Berdiaev. To encounter the other and the world with the mind of Christ, with the heart of God, also means so respecting the neighbor's freedom that there can be no possibility of threat, coercion, or harassment. On the contrary, all three put into practice, in veneration for the freedom of every person, what they absorbed from their prayer and study: the force of the "humanity of God." Though they were born and raised in an authoritarian Russian state and society, though they knew well the excesses of legalism, ritualism, and control in their church, these three – and, as it turns out, many of their fellow émigrés – came to see that love transcends every law and reveals the perfect freedom of the children of God (Plekon 2002). This freedom they recognized to be the material from which a reformed and renewed society and state had to be crafted. Never rejecting the world, the social arena, culture, the arts and sciences, their theological vision saw the raising of all these aspects of human life into the beauty of the kingdom of God. Theirs was at once a perspective fully human, humane, and divine.

There is no single Orthodox social and political theology, given the diverse character of Orthodox Christianity, extending over so many centuries and localized in so many countries, now including western Europe and North America. The lives and work of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, Paul Evdokimov and Mother Maria Skobtsova nevertheless embody some of the most basic and singular of Eastern Orthodoxy's understandings of the world and life in it. Orthodox Christianity is marked by the vision of the eternal kingdom of heaven and the beauty of God's transcendence. Yet Orthodox Christianity, contrary to assumptions, does not flee the world or condemn it as essentially evil. Rather, intensely aware of God's creation of all things as good and of the entrance of God into creation by the Incarnation of Christ, one should embrace the world as the only place where the drama of salvation occurs. The church, as the outreach of the kingdom of God, seeks to transform the world again into God's good creation. The pitting of the Western Christian passion for social justice and activism against the East's alleged other-worldly passivity is quite false. Many recent examples bear witness to this, the lives of these three and so many others: the efforts of monastics, Patriarch Pavle, the monk Fr. Sava and others to bring peace in the former Yugoslavia; the leadership and intense activism of Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana (2003) and of scores of clergy and lay volunteers in rebuilding Albania; the efforts of the Hosanna Community of lay people, many disciples of Fr. Alexander Men, in introducing social outreach to the young, the homeless, the imprisoned in Moscow and surrounding areas; the recognized effectiveness of the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) in providing disaster relief worldwide. The examples of Orthodox Christians working "for the life of the world" could be multiplied.



There is no form of government blessed in particular by God. Every form can serve if the rule of love is followed, if human dignity and freedom are respected. Politics and culture are indispensable arenas for Christian discipleship, but all work leads to the kingdom. The human person is a microcosm, at once the glory of God's creating, the object of God's redeeming love, the agent of this transforming compassion for the rest of the world. In sum, Orthodox Christianity treasures the encounter of the divine and the human wherever this occurs.

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CHAPTER 8

# Carl Schmitt

Michael Hollerich

The twentieth-century godfather of political theology is the controversial Catholic jurist and sometime Nazi Carl Schmitt. This "Martin Heidegger of political theory" and "German Hobbes of the twentieth century" (Schmitt 1996b: xii; Meier 1998: 100), as he has been called, is usually credited with reintroducing the concept of political theology into modern discourse. This chapter provides an introduction to Schmitt's life and work, an account of his political theology as he understood it, and a review of the critical reception of his work among his fellow Catholics.

Schmitt scholarship is massive, contentious, and unabating (see Mehring 1993; Gebhardt 1995; Seubert 2002). Reference will be made only to sources used in this presentation.

## An "Authentic Case of a Christian Epimetheus"?

Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) was born into a strongly Catholic family in Plettenberg, Westphalia. His modest origins and his religious identity perhaps contributed to his ambition and also to a certain incorrigible insecurity. Trained in legal studies, he rose rapidly from academic obscurity to an appointment at the prestigious Friedrich-Wilhelm University in Berlin in 1933, a position which he lost after World War II because of his complicity with the Third Reich. His advancement was assisted by a prolific outpouring of books and articles on jurisprudence, constitutional and political theory, and broader cultural topics, all written against the backdrop of the Weimar Republic and its fluctuating fortunes. Schmitt's writings reflect his skepticism about the reigning neo-Kantian philosophy of law and about legal positivism, his concern for the viability and legitimacy of Weimar democracy and a fascination with dictatorship, and his