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# The Church in the State: Independent? Resistant? Cooperative? Imperial Legacy, Father Sergii Bulgakov and the Paradigm of Post-Secularism\*

## Abstract

After its „birth” in Jerusalem, the Church immediately found itself in the closest neighbourhood with the state and experienced a very repressive, at times utterly severe treatment in this first period of Christianity. It survived and evolved from an object of social rejection and administrative persecution to a significant political and social actor, finally having become the essential element of the Byzantine state power model known as “symphony”. In Russia, the Church underwent an opposite process: it quickly arose to a state-building institution in Kiever Rus and



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the Great Duchy of Moscow and was then downgraded to a common state department under Peter I. Father Sergii Bulgakov, arguably the most influential Orthodox theologian of the 20th century, elaborated on the appropriate model for state-church relations throughout his whole life, adjusting and, in some crucial moments, radically changing his views due to the inner spiritual evolution and the unstable political situation. Father Sergii's relentless socio-political engagement and firm belief in the transfiguring power of Christianity produced a valuable heritage, which, combined with a critical analysis of the Imperial legacy, may help the Church to find its place in the meandrous post-secular world.

## Keywords

Church and state, Father Sergii Bulgakov, symphony, "enchurching", post-secularism

## 1 Introduction

The Christian Church felt the close breath of the state immediately after its Apostolic "planting and watering" in Jerusalem. In the Roman Empire of the 30's C. E. and further on, Christians were suspected of state disloyalty and therefore became subject to social stigmatization, discrimination and marginalization. Under those circumstances, a complete abstinence from any political engagement was the only behavioural pattern, which made it possible to exercise Christian ministry in the pax Romana and, to an extent, guaranteed physical survival. The Christianization of the Empire, a long historical process which started in the 4th century, led to an ever-growing political activity of Christians, who quickly entered and, after some time, dominated all kinds of state affairs. Since this experience of the early Christian era, the options of Church-state relations constantly remain twofold: The

Church is either a victim and an object of state persecution or a consolidating assistant to the politics.

Having undergone a development from the state-building institution in the Kiever Rus and the Grand Duchy of Moscow to a common state department in the Russian Empire, the Russian Church finally received an opportunity to debate its ideal of the Church-state relations by holding a local council in 1917-1918. Sergii Bulgakov, one of the most influential and renowned philosophers (not yet a theologian) of that time, played a key role in the discussions. His philosophical background sharpened his sensitivity for the phenomenon of the state, accompanied by his constant interest for the political status and social significance of the Church, which quite naturally intensified after he received his priesthood ordination during the 3rd session of the Council in June 1918.

Religion, which had been banned into privacy by dominating secularism of the 20th century, is experiencing a social renaissance in the ongoing post-secular period. To believe and to live the belief once again became a matter of public interest and social relevance: The Church returned into politics and, consequently, had to establish a theoretical framework for its interaction with the state. Analysing its colourful and, at times, painful past, the Church found itself in a critical juncture, as it had not only to present a situational response to a single challenge, but to make a fundamental decision, which would in any way cause considerable consequences for the present and the future. Until now, this mission remains unaccomplished and still requires a solid theoretical ground for the development of comprehensible and realistic conceptual alternatives. A critical review of Imperial legacy as well as the works of Father Sergii, who faced quite similar circumstances of a total paradigmatic breakdown in the revolutionary Russia, may provide a valuable and useful input to the current debates on the Church-state relations.

## 2 The Church in the Roman Empire: A Symphony with an Imperial Soloist

Religion was an integral part of Ancient state understanding.<sup>1</sup> The ruling power was considered a phenomenon with a halo of sanctity, a medium of divine guidance, a gift of Heavens to the humankind. Hence, the holder of this holy instrument rose into the highest realms and became a god himself. Thus, the sacred nature of state power opposed the very possibility to separate state and religion. However, Christians rejected to follow the official polytheism and pagan cult promoted by Roman Caesars. The obedience to worship the Emperors as living gods was especially provoking and unacceptable, whereas the Imperial administration sanctioned the refusal as disloyal and insidious conduct. The relations were therefore reduced to a hostile opposition: The Church became the target of massive state persecution, responding the sanctions by demonizing the state and its rulers as the fulfillment of the Scripture's apocalyptic prophecies. Under these inauspicious conditions, any contacts, let alone a trustful dialogue, were sheer impossible. Thus, the relations between the Christian Church and the Roman Empire began with a strict, irreconcilable antagonism.

It was Constantine I who revolutionized the Church-state relations by legalizing Christianity and restoring Christian property, which has been expropriated during the former persecutions. This quite new perspective of an enduring co-existence between two mighty and influential institutions led to the abandonment of the Early Christian apocalypticism and indifferentism towards earthly needs. The tolerant politics of the state let the faithful believe that the "end of days" might have been delayed, so a sensitivity for the essential concerns and desires of people inhabiting the Empire had to be developed. The Church turned to open confrontation against the still widespread polytheistic paganism by

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<sup>1</sup> G. Florovsky, *Antinomies of Christian History: Empire and Desert, Christianity and Culture*. Collected Works, vol. II (Belmont: Nordland Publishing Company, 1974), p. 70.

stating that Christianity offered no ground for sanctification of human rulers. A slight flash of hope arose that the Empire could be completely christened and a unique process of a universal historical renewal would be set into motion.<sup>2</sup> The borderline, which formerly separated the Christian Church from the pagan state and vice versa, quickly vanished. The society transformed into a single undivided entity with a twofold ruling hierarchy: the state administration and the clergy.<sup>3</sup> Despite the recent and still unforgotten enmity, the new united existence seemed to embody the inner logic of history as the Christianization of the Empire continuously shortened the distance to the final goal of a “society administered by the Emperor and spiritually guided by the Church”.<sup>4</sup> In this “politico-religious unity”,<sup>5</sup> declaring the one omnipotent God the source of all religious and state power was quite consequent – an ambitious idea expressed in the simple formula “one God – one Empire”.<sup>6</sup> The Emperor was considered an icon of Christ the Ruler of Heavens, for he also received a sac-

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> J. Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church. Its Past and Its Role in the World Today*, 4th ed. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1996), p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Idem., *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), p. 213. However, by switching from the ex-ante- to the ex-post perspective, Meyendorff aptly detects the tragedy of this unity as the state would never become intrinsically Christian and therefore would never fulfil the Church’s soteriological vision of assisting it to lead the world to salvation; see also Florovsky, *Antinomies of Christian History*, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Idem., *The Orthodox Church*, p. 17; see also his incisive diagnose on reasons for this unexpected and brisk unification: ““...between a Roman Empire, culturally diverse, but united administratively, and a universal Christian Church, equally tolerant of cultural pluralism but committed to territorial unity, there was a structural affinity which made their alliance even more natural” (J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Division: The Church 450-680 A. D.*, (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1989), p. 21).

<sup>6</sup> J. Rieger, *Christ & Empire. From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 71.

ramental blessing for his reign as well as the Anointed One Himself.<sup>7</sup> According to this view, the Empire represented the incarnated Heavenly Kingdom,<sup>8</sup> ruled by the Emperor as a mystic image of God's Begotten Son.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the Emperor's first and foremost task was to protect and defend Christian faith against inner and outer threats. The long Greco-Roman tradition of interpreting state processes in religious terms also had a sociological background, because the people of the Church and the peoples of the Empire quickly became identical.<sup>10</sup> Still, in this first period of Imperial Christianity, the idea of the united imperial-ecclesiastical power found no juridical expression. The "symphony" was rather a „state of mind“ than a completed political theory with a visible legal output.<sup>11</sup> Therefore the non-juridical, "anatomic" description of state and church powers as the body and the soul of the Empire appeared quite appropriate.<sup>12</sup> It was the beginning of a colourful and exciting story, which should end up in the most intense, almost intimate and even epistemological<sup>13</sup> interconnection between the Empire and the Church.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Runciman, *Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge-London-New York-Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. A. Schmemmann, *The "Orthodox World", Past and Present*, Church, World, Mission. Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Press, 1979), p. 35: The Empire becomes Christ's "politeuma".

<sup>9</sup> P. Kalaitzidis, *Church and State in the Orthodox World: From the Byzantine "Symphonia" and Nationalized Orthodoxy, to the Need of Witnessing the Word of God in a Pluralistic Society*, E. Fogliadini (ed.), Religioni, Libertà, Potere. Atti del convegno internazionale filosofico-teologico sulla libertà religiose (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 2014), p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> C. Hovorun, Is the Byzantine "Symphony" Possible in Our Days? *Journal of State and Church* 2016, vol. 59, no. 2, p. 289 (280-296).

<sup>11</sup> J. Meyendorff, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> C. Hovorun, Is the Byzantine "Symphony" Possible in Our Days? p. 290.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Rieger, *Christian Theology and Empires*, P.-I. Kwok, D. H. Compier, J. Rieger (eds.), *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 1: „Christianity can hardly be understood apart from empire.“

The history of Christian theology reveals that the idea of a Church-state symphony did not appear as an ingenious intellectual flash of a single individual at a certain moment of time, but has rather been thoroughly developed and thus has solid, traditionally founded roots. One of its premises is the patristic thesis of the universal responsibility of every human.<sup>14</sup> According to this view, Christians are obliged, inter alia, to contribute to the relations between the Church and the state as part of their environment in order to make them as harmonic and productive as possible. In addition, the symbiosis of state and Church power was paralleled to the core of Christian Christology, namely the indivisible unification of the Son's divine and human natures in one hypostasis.<sup>15</sup> Transferred into the sphere of Roman hierarchy, this Christological postulate, which has been dogmatized at the 4th Ecumenical Council in 451, empowered the Emperor to summon the whole potential of earthly power, but also held him responsible for every person living in the Oikoumena. Moreover, by transforming Roman and Christian universalisms into a single socio-political program, this creative model was sharpened to fulfill the final mission shared by both ecclesiastical and state power – the salvation of humanity.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the both dimensions of power were no separable, temporally combined self-sufficient entities, but indispensable elements of a whole, bound by

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Basil the Great, *In Time of Famine and Drought*, S. Holman, The hungry are dying: beggars and bishops in Roman Cappadocia (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 185.

<sup>15</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 213-214. Christological dogmas approved at the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon also bore serious challenges to the Imperial power, as they postulated God-likeness of man and therefore implicitly questioned the existence of political and ecclesiastical hierarchy as contrary to the equality of all people; J. Rieger, *Christian Theology and Empires*, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> N. K. Gvosdev, *An Examination of Church-State Relations in the Byzantine and Russian Empires with an Emphasis on Ideology and Models of Interaction* (Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), p. 87.

the utmost intense connection and mutual permeation.<sup>17</sup> Under Emperor Theodosius I, some four decades after Constantine, Orthodoxy was officially proclaimed a soteriological *conditio sine qua non*, charging the Emperor with the mission to spread Orthodoxy over Imperial territory for the sake of its people and rapidly emerging to a decisive factor in the forming of a new social identity.<sup>18</sup>

Under Emperor Justinian I, ecclesiastical canons were granted the rank of state laws,<sup>19</sup> so the symphony concept was transferred into the terminology of Roman jurisprudence. According to the Sixth Novel of the new Imperial Code,<sup>20</sup> priesthood and kingdom were declared interconnected elements of the single Imperial power, which emerge from the same origin, i. e. are God-given, in order to adorn the life of people. This co-existence is teleologically programmed to evolve to a perfect harmony and serve the humankind as a swift and gentle guidance towards salvation.<sup>21</sup> According to this legal definition, the Church and the state formed an “internal cohesion of one single human society”,<sup>22</sup> or, in other words, a “single theopolitical entity”.<sup>23</sup> However, despite all idealistic visions of harmony and agreement, the

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<sup>17</sup> M. Antonov, *The Varieties of Symphonia and the Church-State Relations in Russia*, *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 2020, no. 9, p. 556 (552-570). As the idea of state and Church as two separate, independent powers was incompatible with the Byzantine tradition (J. C. Skedros, „*You Cannot Have a Church without an Empire*“. *Political Orthodoxy in Byzantium*, Aristotle Papanikolaou/George E. Demacopoulos (eds.), Christianity, Democracy and the Shadow of Constantine, New York, 2017, p. 221-222), it might explain why the constitutional principle of separation of powers is still so difficult to implement in states with a majorly Orthodox population.

<sup>18</sup> C. Hovorun, *Is the Byzantine “Symphony” Possible in Our Days?* p. 284; J. C. Skedros, „*You Cannot Have a Church without an Empire*“, p. 222.

<sup>19</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Justinian, the Empire and the Church*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 1968, vol. 22, p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> Translated in: J. Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, p. 209.

<sup>21</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, p. 213.

<sup>22</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Justinian, the Empire and the Church*, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> C. Hovorun, *Is the Byzantine “Symphony” Possible in Our Days?* p. 289.



prescriptions of the Novel attributed the right to control all aspects of the Church's „earthly“ requirements, such as property, legal status of church employees and alike, to the Emperor, whereas the clergy was appointed to take care for the spiritual needs, such as prayer and the sacraments. Reflecting the monarchy of God the Father,<sup>24</sup> the Emperor was able to significantly affect the Church's legal position and claimed exclusive responsibility for its welfare and prosperity.<sup>25</sup> By occupying the highest position in the ruling hierarchy, the Emperor received a unique sacramental status and has been henceforth considered a priest himself.<sup>26</sup> He was not subordinate to any of the Church's hierarchs but willingly, albeit reversibly, restricted his theoretically unlimited freedom in order to assist the Church in its universal mission.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, this juridical model granted the Emperor the right and the duty to control the moral purity of the priests and to sanction eventual misdemeanor.<sup>28</sup> The interdependence and permeation between Church and Empire left no room for a whatsoever secular sphere. Everything considering public and personal life was more or less ecclesiastic.<sup>29</sup> The omnipresent „ecclesiacy“ and the soteriological teleology of Imperial power refute the “invective” of caesaropapism, which is still often used to define the Byzantine political system. This characteristic misinterprets the figure of the Emperor, who has never been declared an infallible arbiter on questions of faith and morality.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>25</sup> John Meyendorff, *Justinian, the empire and the Church*, p. 49.

<sup>26</sup> C. Hovorun, *Is the Byzantine “Symphony” Possible in Our Days?* p. 287; Constantine's self-definition as “the bishop of those outside” (ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ἐκτός) never received a legal manifestation and granted the Emperor no competencies in the ecclesial area.

<sup>27</sup> G. Florovsky, *Antinomies of Christian History*, p. 78.

<sup>28</sup> G. V. Bezhanidze, *The Preamble of the Sixth Novella of Justinian the Great in Russian Codes and Commentaries*, Vestnik PSTGU (Series I: Theology, Philosophy, Religion Studies), 2018, vol. 80, p. 28 (26-36) (in Russian)

<sup>29</sup> G. Florovsky, *Antinomies of Christian History*, p. 79.

<sup>30</sup> J. Meyendorff, *Justinian, the Empire and the Church*, p. 51; see also G. Florovsky, *Antinomies of Christian History*, p. 77: “The charge of caesaropapism towards the Roman Empire is a biased anachronism”.

Rooted in the Catholic-Protestant interconfessional debate, the terminological pair “caesaropapism-papocaesarism” is unable to deliver even a partly correct description of the political situation in the Christian Roman Empire.<sup>31</sup> One should therefore fully restrain from applying these inappropriate *Kampfbegriffe* to the Early Christian age.

Justinian’s legislative achievements defined the framework for further development of the state-Church relations. Once established, the socio-political model of symphony was multiply confirmed and re-designed by following Imperial acts.<sup>32</sup> For instance, the *Epanagoge*, a 9th century law book allegedly composed by Patriarch Photios,<sup>33</sup> transformed the implicit tendency of continuing division between Imperial and ecclesiastic competencies into a more detailed and precise form, while leaving untouched the common, overwhelming goal of universal salvation.<sup>34</sup> The Emperor received (or rather granted himself) the official status of a safeguard and defender of the nation and was obliged to restore the strength of the state through watchful care, to obtain new strength by wisdom, just ways and deeds and to perform beneficial acts. However, the first and foremost obligation of the Emperor is to “enforce and maintain” the observance of the Holy Scriptures, the dogmatic and canonical teaching of the Ecumenical Councils and the Romaic laws (Title II, § 4). On the other side, the Patriarch as the highest hierarch of the Church and – quite notably – the “living and animate image of Christ” (Title III, § 1) is obliged to care for the piety and soberness of people’s life, convert all heretics and unbelievers, uphold the

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<sup>31</sup> C. Hovorun, *Is the Byzantine “Symphony” Possible in Our Days?* p. 293. An alternative, though rather foggy term, „caesaroprocurism“ was proposed by D. J. Geanakoplos, *Church and State in the Byzantine Empire: A Reconsideration of the Problem of Caesaropapism*, *Church History* 34, no. 4, 1965, p. 398 (381-403)

<sup>32</sup> Cf. N. K. Gvosdev, *Church-State Relations*, p. 85 et seq.

<sup>33</sup> J. Scharf, *Photios und die Epanagoge*, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1956, pp. 385-400 (in German).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. B. Geffert, T. G. Stavrou, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The Essential Texts* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 116-118.

unity of the Church, spiritually guide the faithful to salvation and interpret ancient rules and statutes of belief.<sup>35</sup> Although the Epanagogue reveals the first erosional signs in the symphony between the Church and the Empire,<sup>36</sup> the model of the single Imperial power exercised by the Church and the Emperor remained valid – at least theoretically – until the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

### **3 The Caesaropapist Metamorphose of Symphony in the Russian Empire**

After the liberation from the Tatar-Mongol yoke in the 15th century, a new political structure of the Russian state to replace the demolished institutions of the past had to be established. It was therefore quite natural that the Byzantine example of Church-state symphony attracted the attention of Russian dukes who sought for a fitting prototype to rely on. By this time, the unity of ecclesiastical and imperial power was still situated at the core of the Roman political system.<sup>37</sup> The Church and the Empire were considered indispensable for any Christian state, as Anthony, the Patriarch of Constantinople, stated in his 1393 composed a letter to the Great Duke of Moscow Basil I.<sup>38</sup> Due to certain internal and external circumstances, the Slavonic states, including Russia, did not fully implement the Byzantine institutional model, as their rulers did not possess the status of the head of a universal Ortho-

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<sup>35</sup> N. K. Gvosdev, *Church-State Relations*, p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Title III, § 8, where the Emperor and the Patriarch are described as „parts“ of the constitution.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J. Rieger, *Christ & Empire*, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J. C. Skedros, „*You Cannot Have a Church without an Empire*“, pp. 219-220.

dox empire and therefore did not receive any ecclesiastic functions like those of the Byzantine emperors.<sup>39</sup> However, the glorious example of the Christian Empire continuously fascinated Russian Christians. Having undergone a process of certain adjustment and transformation, the pillars of the Roman-Christian state theory were incorporated into Russian political tradition, finally encouraging the Great Duke of Moscow to raise the claim of inheriting the defeated Orthodox Emperor of Constantinople as the leader of the „Third Rome“.<sup>40</sup>

The situation changed significantly after the enthronement of Peter I. Facing a strong opposition to his reform plans from the church's hierarchs, the Emperor's most dedicated supporter, archbishop Feofan Prokopovich, developed a new model to reduce the influence of the priesthood and subordinate the clergy to the state power. His utmost devotion to and inspiration for epochal changes, combined with his striking righteousness, made him the spiritual guide and main driving force of a truly revolutionary „experiment in state-imposed secularization“.<sup>41</sup> The Spiritual Regulation, a document Georges Florovsky defined as the „program for a Russian Reformation“, was designed by Feofan in 1721 and explicitly declared the desire to create a state organ for ecclesiastical affairs, which, in the end, would downgrade the church to a common state ministry.<sup>42</sup> Eliminating the mystical element from the traditional ecclesiology, Feofan considered the Church nothing more than a common organization of religious people, which set the framework for mutual assistance

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<sup>39</sup> D. Kalkandjieva, A Comparative Analysis on Church-State Relations in Eastern Orthodoxy: Concepts, Models, and Principles, *Journal of Church and State* vol. 53 no. 4, p. 592 (587-614).

<sup>40</sup> M. Antonov, Church-State Symphonia: Its Historical Development and Its Applications by the Russian Orthodox Church, *Journal of Law and Religion* 2020, vol. 35, no. 3, p. 484 (474-493).

<sup>41</sup> G. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, Part One (Belmont: Nordland Publishing Company, 1979), p. 114.

<sup>42</sup> *The Spiritual Regulation of Peter the Great* (ed. by Alexander V. Muller, Seattle-London: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 8.

and provided a specific identity.<sup>43</sup> He held it therefore quite legitimate to regulate its activities in a legal act, so the Regulation addressed the Church by a swarm of pernickety prescriptions, including those concerning sacraments and liturgy, which has been always considered the untouchable domain of the Church.<sup>44</sup> Peter I followed the strategy drawn by Feofan and converted his theoretical inputs into a system of total administrative domination by institutionally decapitating the Church and implementing the Holy Synod as a collective, subordinate substitute of the Patriarch under the supervision of the Ober-Procurator, who should control the hierarchs as the “Eye of the Emperor”.<sup>45</sup>

„Truth of the Monarch's Will“ of 1722,<sup>46</sup> Feofan's major treatise with the obvious intention to lay the theoretical ground for and explain the controversial “blow” to the Russian political tradition delivers the finalized justification for Peter's ecclesiastical reforms. It contains numerous references to Justinian's legislation in order to create the illusion of an unbroken Christian-Byzantine legacy. However, bearing in mind his statist and servile preferences, Feofan unsurprisingly presents a quite different model. In opposition to the Byzantine symphony, he defines not salvation, but commonwealth as the state's *raison d'être*, while completely refraining from any definition of the Church's goal. Without any doubt, this was the most crucial paradigmatic change as it definitely abandoned the state's soteriological basement characteristic for the Roman Empire. As explicitly stated by Feofan, the monarch shall be foremost responsible for the welfare of the state and its people and, hence, must not be „distracted“ by any

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<sup>43</sup> G. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, p. 125.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *The Spiritual Regulation*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> On Peter's church reform cf. J. Cracraft, *The Church Reform of Peter the Great*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971); in the general context of Petrine reforms idem., *The Revolution of Peter the Great* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> On Feofan's authorship see idem., Did Feofan Prokopovich Really Write *Pravda voli monarshei*? *Slavic Review*, vol. 40, no. 2 (Summer 1981), pp. 173-193.

soteriological burdens.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, one of the central theses of “Truth” is the monarch’s unrestricted freedom, accomplished by legal immunity against any earthly jurisdiction and the right to violate all existing rules, including Church canons. According to Feofan, the priesthood should not play any significant socio-political role in the state, but focus on its basic liturgical duties. Relying, though implicitly, on Western state theories, Prokopovich demanded absolute obedience to the Emperor as the one and only legitimate sovereign, who, inter alia, possesses the solemn right to control all activities of the Church.<sup>48</sup> No Byzantine Emperor has surely not even dared to dream of such an absolute, unbound and despotic power.

In sum, the model of Church-state relations created by Feofan and implemented by Peter was a clear and supposedly intended contradiction to the Byzantine symphony. The grave discrepancies about political priorities ended up in an antagonism between the Church and the state and, finally, in incorporation of the former into the apparatus of the latter.<sup>49</sup> Although Peter never proclaimed himself the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church (as he was allegedly urged to by some of his advisors), he summoned the supremacy over both state and ecclesiastical spheres, embodying the pinnacle of a new administrative model. Georges Florovsky’s definition of the Petrine political system as „Caesaropapism in the spirit of the Reformation“<sup>50</sup> sharply notes the beginning of an epochal transformation in Russian history, as the Church has been institutionally subordinated to the (formally) Christian Emperor. The Petrine reforms were no symbolic

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<sup>47</sup> A. G. Glinchikova, *The Metamorphose of the Western Idea of Natural Law in the Political Concept of Feofan Prokopovich*, LOKUS, 2016, no. 3, p. 83 (78-92) (in Russian).

<sup>48</sup> G. V. Bezhanidze, A. O. Titova, *The Paradigm of Church-State Relations in the Works of Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich: from the Middle Ages to the Age of Revolution*, Khristianskoe chtenie, 2020, no. 6, p. 42 (25-46) (in Russian).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. M. Antonov, *Church-State Symphonia*, p. 484.

<sup>50</sup> G. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, p. 121.

demonstration of Russia's Westernization, but a pragmatic secularization project, which aimed to guarantee and secure the power of the Emperor. It was the idea of an omnipotent monarch forged by Niccolò Machiavelli and Jean Bodin which convinced Feofan and Peter to restrain from the traditional Church-state union and lower the Church to a mere „department for religious needs”.<sup>51</sup> Subsequent Russian emperors upheld the political model elaborated by their great ancestor, while the history of church-state relations circled from antagonistic feud to tolerant, sometimes benevolent co-existence and, though rather rarely, active co-operation and back again. Still, the Russian Church never accepted the state-imposed Synodal model and officially condemned it at the Local Council of 1917/1918.<sup>52</sup>

#### **4 Father Sergii Bulgakov's "Enchurching" of the State**

“A specter is haunting Europe — the specter of Communism” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote in their Communist Manifesto,<sup>53</sup> describing the omnipresent feeling of stark political and social tensions, which culminated in two World Wars and put the European humanistic values to the hardest test imaginable. Quite similar anticipations bothered almost every person in the Russian Empire who faced the second decade of the 20th century. It was especially perceivable to the representatives of the so-called *Intelligentsia*,<sup>54</sup> a community of well-educated, politically interested visionaries who realized the meaning of the Russian Emperor's abdication in a state with more than a millennium old tradition of absolute monarchy. Sergii Bulgakov was

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 114-116.

<sup>52</sup> D. Kalkandjieva, *Church-State Relation*, p. 593.

<sup>53</sup> K. Marx, F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), p. 55.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. R. Pipes (ed.), *The Russian Intelligentsia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) and especially M. Malia's article in this volume (pp. 1-18); A. Sinyavsky, *The Russian Intelligentsia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

one of those intellectuals, who experienced a phase of utmost commitment and devote adoration for Marxism, followed by a bottom-up revision of his political preferences and conversion to Christianity.<sup>55</sup> The issue of the Church's proper place and position in the world of changing political, social and cultural paradigms immediately became one of the central and urgent concerns of the highly talented and engaged young man. It is therefore no coincidence that, as a prominent Russian scholar, Bulgakov has been requested to file in a report on the church-state relations for the All-Russian Council in 1917, an event which provided Christians (and not only those in Russia) with significant impulses for improving and developing various aspects of ecclesiastical life and regrettably remained virtually without any practical output due to the establishment of the atheist Bolshevik regime. In this document, Bulgakov stated that the Church cannot be abstinent to any kind of human activity because God integrated the entire Earthly realm into His divine being by the Incarnation and Resurrection of His Son. From his point of view, a hermetically isolated existence of the Church and the state is not only undesirable, but ontologically impossible, although their competencies may and do differ.<sup>56</sup> To avoid the poisoning and harmful concurrence or rivalry with the state, the Church must withstand the temptation to engage into common politics and restrain from providing any recommendations on current political issues. Instead, it should focus on consistently following its mission and persistently insisting on safeguarding of Christian values and observing of Christian norms.<sup>57</sup> Bulgakov argued that the Church must "inspirit" all facets of human life and aim not for political, but for noetic and spiritual supremacy.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. R. M. Zwahlen, *Sergii Bulgakov's Reinvention of Theocracy for a Democratic Age*, *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies*, 2020, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 175-194.

<sup>56</sup> S. N. Bulgakov, *Report for the All-Russian Council* (Petrograd: Synodal Council Press, 1918), p. 8 (in Russian); see also idem., *Dva grada*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Mamontov Comradship Press, 1911), p. 309 (in Russian).

<sup>57</sup> S. N. Bulgakov, *Report*, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.



In one of his opera magna, „Unfading Light“, Bulgakov, who received his priest ordination in 1918, presented a theologically grounded vision of power as a supernatural phenomenon, which contradicted the secularization mainstream of contemporary political theories. On the one hand, he proclaimed power an essential element of any human society, but, on the other hand, spotted its source in the sphere of the Divine.<sup>59</sup> From the Christian perspective, Bulgakov claimed, power cannot be interpreted as a result of a whatsoever negotiated social contract, but represents an image of God's almightiness, although baring a grave corrupting and destroying potential – a tragic, but unavoidable consequence in a fallen world.<sup>60</sup> In a somewhat idealistic manner, Bulgakov characterizes power as a „God-given instrument of external resistance against inner evil“. Due to its intrinsic connection to and dependence on God, power is never self-sufficient, but always seeks for justification in the Absolute.<sup>61</sup> Hence, as secularization is interpreted as a process of continuous liberation of society from its obsolete religious “manacles” and elimination of metaphysical arguments from the political discourse, it destroys the spiritual community between the ruler and the ruled, causes social alienation and provokes ruthless and disintegrating struggle for power. Consequently, in the secular society, the image of power as a visible expression of Divine presence fades, shadowed by progressivism and rationalism.<sup>62</sup> Even if the ruler manages to defend his reign and defeat the opposition, his power will be accepted only as a burden of economic concern and will therefore unavoidably remain unstable.<sup>63</sup> There will therefore be no other choice than to re-deify power, albeit without any reference to God according to the new secular paradigm – a fruitless, self-

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<sup>59</sup> S. Bulgakov, *Unfading Light. Contemplations and Speculations*, ed. by Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), pp. 404-405.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 409.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 344, 412-413.

contradicting project inevitably doomed to fail.<sup>64</sup> Before his extradition from the Soviet Russia, Bulgakov favored the rule of a Christian Emperor as an icon of the Divine King and a person who might be able to establish a state order possibly closest to the Christian ideal of Heavenly theocracy.<sup>65</sup>

Quite unsurprisingly, Bulgakov's visions eroded after his forced emigration in 1922.<sup>66</sup> In his later works, Bulgakov, equally rejecting both caesaropapism and papocaesarism,<sup>67</sup> argued against any support for political regimes by the Church. Admitting a monocratic leadership to present the closest image of the Divine rule „in the person of its supreme representative”, he nonetheless refused to attribute „saint power“ to any certain form of Earthly government.<sup>68</sup> Blaming monarchy for having impeded the “development” of Orthodoxy, Bulgakov diagnosed the lack of “equilibrium between the state and the Church” as the source of many historical aberrations and human tragedies, which have significantly damaged or even destroyed Christian states.<sup>69</sup> He especially opposed the widespread belief in a state guided by the Orthodox ruler („the White Tsar“), which he considered a *contradictio in adjecto* due to his understanding of the Church as a union of love and freedom. Indispensable in the state, coercion and violence may not have any place in a community, which understands itself as the “Christ's bride” and therefore possesses all the divine virtues.<sup>70</sup> Bulgakov claimed that the church-state alliance has already been overcome by “historical process” and advocated for a separation between the Church and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 414.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pp. 409, 411-412.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. R. M. Zwahlen, *Sergii Bulgakov's Reinvention of Theocracy*, pp. 188-192.

<sup>67</sup> S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church. Social Teaching in Modern Russian Orthodox Theology* (Maitland: Three Hierarchs Seminary Press, 1935), p. 188.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>70</sup> S. N. Bulgakov, *State and Church*, in: *Works on Sociology and Theology*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), pp. 50-51 (in Russian).

the state as the most appropriate *modus vivendi* for both institutions and an important precondition for the idea of human dignity to be practically realized.<sup>71</sup> Besides, a free Church, independent from and unsupported by the state, would more likely tend to avoid the dangers of clericalism. Bulgakov opted in favor of the political model he labelled „democracy of souls“, i. e. a broad political participation of Christians, which would increase the influence of the Church on state affairs.<sup>72</sup> A complete isolation of churchmen from the politics is as impossible as it would be to imagine a human soul existing without a body.<sup>73</sup> „En-churching“ of the politics, the core of Bulgakov's theopolitical program, should establish the Church as the state's conscience, unceasingly insisting on promoting Christian virtues and upholding the Divine law<sup>74</sup> – an action mode Semyon Frank will later describe as “radiation of love”.<sup>75</sup> Aware of countless historical controversies between the Church hierarchy and the state administration, Bulgakov argued for the right to disobey state orders and even struggle against the state if the politics runs contrary to the Christian teaching.<sup>76</sup> Crowning his project with an optimistic perspective, Bulgakov concluded that the secular fundament of the society will be “dissolved in ecclesiacity.”<sup>77</sup>

## 5 The Church in the Post-Secular World

After decades of numerous attempts to polarize the Church and the state and discredit religion as a relevant socio-political fac-

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<sup>71</sup> S. Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 188.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189-190.

<sup>73</sup> S. N. Bulgakov, *State and Church*, p. 64.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>75</sup> S.L. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness: An Essay in Christian Ethics and Social Philosophy*, trans. by Boris Jakim (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>77</sup> Archpr. S. Bulgakov, *The Soul of Socialism*, Noviy grad, 1937, no. 7, p. 40 (in Russian).

tor, an opposite process has stepped on the scene. As the renowned German philosopher Jürgen Habermas aptly noticed, supporters of secularism, who aimed to replace religious terms and concepts by rational equivalents, had to face the failure of their efforts: religious communities did not disappear or became marginal because of the growing secular pressure, but, on the contrary, remained socially visible and managed to defend and sometimes even increase their political and social influence. For Habermas, the fact that the majorly secular society decided (was forced?) to adjust itself to the existence of believers is the characteristic feature of post-secularism.<sup>78</sup> In other words, the co-existence of religious and secular culture (social pluralism) lies at the core of the post-secular society.<sup>79</sup> This cohabitation, Habermas argues, forces both religious communities and secularized strata into a “complementary learning process”, which sets acceptable rules of mutual respect and sensible dialogue.<sup>80</sup> As the borderline between secular and religious arguments becomes vague, the delineation between the ecclesial and the secular becomes a cooperative social task, which makes it necessary for every partner to accept and apply the perspective of the other one.<sup>81</sup>

Hence, Habermas insists on the – somewhat self-evident – necessity for the secular society to become sensitive to requirements and arguments articulated by its religious “neighbors”. Even if massive paradigmatic transformations, like domination of mar-

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<sup>78</sup> J. Habermas, *Glauben und Wissen*, Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001), p. 10 (in German).

<sup>79</sup> T. M. Schmidt, *Religiöser Diskurs und diskursive Religion in der postsäkularen Gesellschaft*, R. Langthaler, H. Nagl-Docekal (eds.), *Glauben und Wissen. Ein Symposium mit Jürgen Habermas* (Vienna: Oldenbourg Akademie Verlag, 2007), p. 322 (in German).

<sup>80</sup> J. Habermas, *Religion in der Öffentlichkeit*, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2009), p. 146 (in German); see also *Thomas M. Schmidt, Religiöser Diskurs und diskursive Religion*, p. 323.

<sup>81</sup> Idem., *Glauben und Wissen*, p. 13.

ket economy, prerogative of rational choice and profit maximization, are undisputable, the social ties based on interhuman communication and unconditional respect remain irreplaceable. „The lost hope of resurrection leaves a significant emptiness“,<sup>82</sup> Habermas states and argues for the establishment of a universal agreement between believers, non-believers and other-believers.<sup>83</sup> This consensus should include, inter alia, the acceptance of religious terminology and the consideration of religious interests contributed to social debates as well as the definition of tolerance and its limits. Characteristic for many Western societies, aggressive secular environment forces to explain individual religiosity, a situation which many believers perceive as a stigma of „guilt“ for their faith. Such preconditions are obviously quite counterproductive for the envisioned establishment of a post-secular „social contract“; the same is valid for the attempts to distinguish „rational“ and „non-rational“ parts of religion in order to communicate only on the „rational“ ground.<sup>84</sup> Instead, the non-religious part of the society should make peace with the obvious fact that their religious fellow citizens have no alternative but to ground their fundamental convictions on their belief and to express their concerns in religious terms. To make them „translate“ their position into the secular „language“ would mean a violation of their personal integrity.<sup>85</sup> However, the „cold“ Western societies, Habermas states, will not be able to produce any meaningful impulses or counteractions against the secularly dominated frameworks, unless post-metaphysic thinking transforms religious traditions to new energies and normative sub-

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Idem., *Religion in der Öffentlichkeit*, p. 125.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 142, 149.

<sup>85</sup> N. Wolterstorff, *The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues*, R. Audi, N. Wolterstorff (eds.), *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), p. 105.

stance of an enlightened, politically and socially inspired self-understanding.<sup>86</sup> At the same time he appeals to religious members of society and points out that religion will not be accepted as a relevant social reference if it appears merely as a swarm of ancient traditions and behavioral patterns without any impact on the current social and political situation.<sup>87</sup> One of the most urgent missions of religious communities in the post-secular era would therefore be to promote socio-political presence of religion, especially its stabilizing and developing potential in constitutional states.<sup>88</sup>

It seems quite clear that Christianity faces an unknown situation in the post-secular era. Even under regimes of most radical secularism, religion was still acknowledged as a considerable social phenomenon with a decisive meaning for people's lives. It was this very influence of the organized religious community, the Church, which apologists of secularism attacked while seeking to establish a new, "unchurched" and "dereligionized" state order. The project was, at least partly, successful: most basic values, like human dignity, fundamental rights, equality etc., have been dissected of their Christian roots and transformed into somewhat amorphous common principles of the humankind. Therefore, the Church currently finds itself in a situation where a substantial conversational exchange with the secular society cannot be realized due to the lack of an appropriate "lingua franca", i. e. a terminology and "rules of engagement" comprehensible and acceptable by both partners of the dialogue. It is notable that a complementary learning process, as conceptualized by Habermas, presupposes the existence of a mentor who would provide at least a brief introduction into the foreign realm of the counterpart. It is therefore up to the Church not only to "enchurch", but to re-evangelize the society, i. e. to resurrect the forgotten layer

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<sup>86</sup> J. Habermas, *Replik auf Einwände, Reaktionen auf Anregungen*, R. Langthaler, H. Nagl-Docekal (eds.), *Glauben und Wissen. Ein Symposium mit Jürgen Habermas* (Vienna: Oldenbourg Akademie Verlag, 2007), p. 409.

<sup>87</sup> Idem., *Religion in der Öffentlichkeit*, p. 145.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

of Christianity buried deep under the thick secular sheath. By doing this, the Church, of course, refrains from any coercive indoctrination, as it would ruin the very ground for any respectful talk. Following the patristic tradition,<sup>89</sup> it should instead concentrate its efforts on pointing out the omnipresent “*logoi spermatikoi*”, which would directly confront the society with the presence and relevance of the Divine and wake the interest to engage in a dialogue with the Church.

## 6 Conclusion

It would be obviously of no use to adjust the ancient concepts of Church-state relations to modern conditions. Florovsky was absolutely right, when he stated that “the Byzantine politico-ecclesiastical experiment should not be re-enacted.”<sup>90</sup> Under current circumstances, a revival of Christian symphony, as it has been legally defined by Justinian, is sheer unrealistic due to the lack of a Christian empire, a Christian emperor and other necessary prerequisites. Any attempts to refresh the symphony and stick it into the world of modern politics are therefore doomed to fail. As was shown above, the partial success of secularism does not compensate its crucial failure: it missed the main target. The attractiveness and (illusional) simplicity of the secular project did not help to eliminate the Church from the public sphere and to ban religiosity from people’s minds. However, it managed to alienate the believers and the secular society and to destroy the terminological fundament for their dialogue. As Habermas wisely anticipated, secularism laid an enigmatic shadow over religious communities, which now appear as mysterious “outsiders” and irrational followers of long past cults and beliefs. The Church must

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. D. Bradshaw, *The Logoi of Beings in Greek Patristic Thought*, B. Foltz and J. Chryssavgis (eds.), *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 9-22.

<sup>90</sup> G. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology*, p. 98.

therefore not only engage with its environment, but should actively confront it in order to postulate and demonstrate its present relevance. It must not necessarily be a philosophical discourse between Christian apologists and non-Christian (pagan or Hebrew) opposers like those in late Antiquity, which dealt with complicated dogmatic issues and presented sophisticated argumentation explained with highly developed rhetorical skills. It is about the mere existence of the Church, its “why” and “what for” in a world, where decisive existential questions, if raised at all, are used to be answered unidimensionally, i. e. without any reference to God or other divine universes. Father Sergii Bulgakov’s enchurching vision was not fulfilled due to overwhelming secular tendencies in society and politics. In the ongoing post-secular era, it is of vital importance for the Church to make use of the remaining chances by re-evangelizing its secular surrounding and re-introducing Christian content to the contemporary socio-political agenda.



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