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## Rethinking the 'Liturgy after the Liturgy' with Schmemmann, Zizioulas, and Bulgakov



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### Abstract

*Contemporary Orthodox thinking about the role of church in society is fragmented. Is it possible to give an Orthodox theological justification for social action? What kind of actions or arrangements would it recommend? Today, Orthodox political theologies range from United Nations-style liberalism to militarist versions of neo-Byzantine symphonia, to reactionary pockets of apocalyptic sectarianism. Although there is no single approach for how Orthodox Christians should act in society, there is one concept that seems to comprise a promising theological starting point for Orthodox social action: the 'liturgy after the liturgy.' This concept, formulated in the twentieth century, represents an attempt to unite what Christians do outside the walls of the church with what the church does inside, in worship. Modern Orthodox theologians hold that the church is called to manifest the Kingdom of God in its liturgy. Can extra-liturgical Christian social action also manifest the Kingdom of God? The notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' answers in the affirmative. While maintaining that liturgical worship holds a place of primacy as the church's chief act, it frames extra-liturgical action as an important and necessary aspect of the church's mission in the world. But as this article argues, despite its promise, the concept is too imprecise and under-theorised to demarcate the boundaries of appropriate Christian social action, and thus can be used to justify almost any extra-liturgical action, no matter how objectionable, if it is blessed by church authorities. A better way to think through Orthodox Christian engagement in society, this article holds, is to focus on the notion of the Kingdom of God, which the liturgy, and perhaps the 'liturgy after the liturgy,' are supposed to manifest. The Kingdom of God is of major theological concern for modern Orthodox thinkers, three of whom are brought into conversation here: Alexander Schmemmann, John Zizioulas, and Sergius Bulgakov. Each of them locates the liturgy as the primary site of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in history, but they differ on the extent to which extra-liturgical social action can also manifest the Kingdom. The conversation staged between these thinkers sharpens the questions at play in the discussion of the relationship between liturgy and social action in Orthodox theology.*

Keywords: theology, liturgy, social action, Orthodoxy, Alexander Schmemmann, John Zizioulas, Sergius Bulgakov

## Introduction

Contemporary Orthodox theological thinking about the role of the Church in modern society is fragmented. Does Orthodox theology possess a rigorous and authentic basis for social action? What kind of action would such a theology recommend? There is no single, official approach or recommendation for how to answer these questions.<sup>1</sup> Today, Orthodox social theologies draw inspiration from a range of perspectives, from United Nations-style liberalism to militarist versions of neo-Byzantine symphonia, to reactionary apocalyptic sectarianism.<sup>2</sup> However, one popular notion seems to offer a promising starting point for Orthodox social theology: the ‘liturgy after the liturgy.’ This phrase, formulated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, represents an attempt to integrate what Christians do outside the walls of the church with what they do inside, in worship. Modern Orthodox theologians, drawing from the insights of 20<sup>th</sup>-century eucharistic ecclesiology, hold that the Church makes present the Kingdom of God in its liturgy, especially in the eucharist. Can extra-liturgical social action also manifest the Kingdom of God? While retaining the conviction that liturgical worship holds a place of primacy as the Church’s chief act, the notion of ‘liturgy after the liturgy’ tacitly frames extra-liturgical action as an extension of that act, and thus an authentic expression of the Church’s life and mission.

But as I show in this essay, the concept is too imprecise and under-theorised to ground and demarcate the boundaries of appropriate social action, and could be used to justify almost any extra-liturgical action, no matter how objectionable, if it is blessed by church authorities. It also obscures the distinction between liturgical and non-liturgical action. A better starting point for Orthodox Christian social theology, I propose, is to clarify the notion of the Kingdom of God, which the liturgy, and perhaps also the ‘liturgy after the liturgy,’ are supposed to reveal and manifest. The Kingdom of God is a major theological category for modern Orthodox thinkers, three of whom I bring into conversation in this essay: Alexander Schmemmann, John Zizioulas,

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1 The two main official documents on Orthodox social teaching from the 21<sup>st</sup> century are Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate 2000 and Hart and Chryssavgis (ed.) 2020. Neither of these documents rise to the level of detail or theological rigor as, for example, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* in Roman Catholicism. See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004.

2 See Hovorun 2022a, 347–356. On apocalyptic sectarianism among converts to Orthodox Christianity in the United States, see Riccardi-Swartz 2022.

and Sergius Bulgakov. Each designates the liturgy as the primary site of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, but they differ on the extent to which extra-liturgical social action can also make the Kingdom present in history. The conversation I stage between these thinkers sharpens the questions at play in the search for a rigorous and authentic social theology in Orthodox Christianity.

### The 'Liturgy after the Liturgy'

In his 1996 book, *Liturgy after the Liturgy: Mission and Witness from an Orthodox Perspective*, Romanian theologian Ion Bria provides an account of the origins of the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy.' It has roots in Russian Orthodox émigré theology and eucharistic ecclesiology but emerged formally in consultations of Orthodox members of the World Council of Churches in 1974 and 1975.<sup>3</sup> Participants in the consultations wrote that the liturgy both gives the church its unity and identity and contains an injunction to social action. "Prayer and the eucharist," one document reads, "whereby Christians overcome their selfish ways, impel them also to become involved in the social and political life of their respective countries."<sup>4</sup> The participants used the concept of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' as shorthand for the link between liturgy and social action. Here is Bria's account of their reasoning:

The dynamics of the liturgy go beyond the boundaries of the eucharistic assembly to serve the community at large. The eucharistic liturgy is not an escape into an inner realm of prayer, a pious turning away from social realities; rather, it calls and sends the faithful to celebrate "the sacrament of the brother" outside the temple in the public marketplace, where the cries of the poor and marginalized are heard.<sup>5</sup>

The notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' seeks to integrate the Church's worship with all the other things the Church might do. Bria writes that any

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3 Bria 1996, 19. George Fedotov articulates the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' in Федотов 1939, 62–83. Nicholas Afanasiev was a key thinker in the emergence of eucharistic ecclesiology in the 1940s and 1950s. See Afanasiev 2007.

4 Bria 1996, 20.

5 Bria 1996, 20. On the sacrament of the brother as a concept in Orthodox social thought, see Clément, 1980.

attempt to articulate a social teaching that severs the connection between “the Church’s liturgical and diaconal functions,” is bound to be defective.<sup>6</sup> As an extension of the Church’s worship, Christian social action witnesses to the Kingdom of God that is revealed firstly in the liturgy. Bria writes,

Preaching the good news of the *basileia* of God means challenging the unjust and totalitarian structures of society [...] Because the *basileia* is invoked [in the liturgy], Christian witness as struggle and confrontation must never be allowed to disappear from the horizon of the liturgy.<sup>7</sup>

For Bria, the Church must critically examine how it “is or is not overcoming barriers to justice, freedom and solidarity, of how it is or is not an effective sign of something greater than the liturgical assembly.”<sup>8</sup> Since its articulation in the 1970s, the notion of the ‘liturgy after the liturgy’ has become a catch-all term for nearly everything that Christians do outside the liturgical assembly, including evangelisation, education, social ethics, spirituality, ecological action, and even ‘coffee hour’ meals among parishioners after liturgical services.<sup>9</sup>

Despite its wide proliferation in Orthodox circles, very little theoretical depth has been added to the notion of the ‘liturgy after the liturgy’ since its formulation in the 1970s. Indeed, the recent document promulgated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, *For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church*, unreflectively assumes that the liturgy supports the social vision the document’s authors expound without explaining why this might be the case.<sup>10</sup> The under-theorisation of the concept results in two major problems. The first is that the use of the word ‘liturgy’ (or ‘eucharist’ and ‘eucharistic’) in this context conflates worship and social action to the extent that they both risk losing their distinctiveness. It is important to be clear about what liturgy is and what it is not. By describing extra-liturgical actions as a kind of ‘liturgy,’ the actual liturgical worship of the Church risks losing its specificity

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6 Bria 1996, 21.

7 Bria 1996, 23–24. Hart and Chryssavgis (ed.) 2020, 9, similarly reads, “The Eucharist is a prophetic sign as well, at once a critique of all political regimes insofar as they fall short of divine love and an invitation to all peoples to seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice.”

8 Bria 1996, 16.

9 Bria 1996, 21. See also Yannoulatos 2010.

10 See, e.g., Hart and Chryssavgis (eds.) 2020, xvii, 2, 4, 5, 9, 14, 60, 101, 106. See the discussion in Harper 2022, 336–339.

as the ritual space of symbolic exchange of sacrifice between God and humanity, to borrow terms from Louis-Marie Chauvet. Extra-liturgical social actions are not symbolic in this way but are rather (ideally speaking) concrete acts of sacrifice in imitation of Christ's sacrifice.<sup>11</sup> If even the liturgy can or does inform how Christians act in the world, those actions are not, strictly speaking, liturgical. The second problem with the 'liturgy after the liturgy' is that it can fall prey to the reigning ideology of a given culture. One can detect in Bria's account the optimistic ethos of liberal theology from the 1970s that permeated the World Council of Churches.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, the aims of freedom, justice, solidarity, ecological action, hearing and heeding the cry of the poor and marginalised are laudable and arguably should be pursued by the Church. But there is no clear reason, in the absence of further theological explanation, how and why these actions might be 'liturgical' or inspired by the liturgy.<sup>13</sup> Can any extra-liturgical action blessed by church officials become legitimised as a 'liturgy after the liturgy,' and ushered into Orthodox social teaching? Is the Russian bombing of hospitals and schools in Ukraine since 2022 a 'liturgy after the liturgy,' since many leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate preach that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is for the triumph of the Kingdom of God?<sup>14</sup>

Despite its shortcomings, the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' rightly seeks to link the Church's liturgical life and social mission. But given the notion's inveterate lack of depth, I propose a shift in focus to better ground a theology of social action and its relationship to the liturgy: to clarify the theological concept of the Kingdom of God. This is a key concept used by several modern theologians that implicates both liturgy and social action, and whose manifestation is the Church's ultimate objective and purpose in all it does.<sup>15</sup> As I analyze the writings of Schmemmann, Zizioulas, and Bulgakov on the Kingdom of God, my intention is to clear the ground for a more rigorous theological justification of Orthodox social action, exploring the connection between the liturgical manifestation of the Kingdom of God and the possibility of extra-liturgical manifestations of the Kingdom in history.

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11 See Chauvet 2001, 69-96.

12 FitzGerald 2004, 105-134. Hovorun argues that the *For the Life of the World* document continues this line of thought. See Hovorun 2022a, 350.

13 For a critical discussion of the relationship of Orthodox liturgical worship to ecological action, see Gschwandtner 2018.

14 See Hovorun 2022b, 1-10. For a recent statement on the "Russian world" ideology that frames Russia's role in Ukraine and the broader world as the "Restrainer," from 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, who holds back the reign of the "man of lawlessness" or antichrist, see Russian Orthodox Church 2024.

15 See the discussion in Louth 2007, 233-247.

## Alexander Schmemmann

Alexander Schmemmann (1921–1983) is best known for his influence on the field of liturgical theology. For him, it is in the Church and her liturgy that the eschatological presence of the Kingdom of God is manifested on earth: “Each time that Christians ‘assemble as the Church’ they witness before the whole world that Christ is King and Lord, that his kingdom has already been revealed and given to man and that a new and immortal life has begun.”<sup>16</sup> Already in this world, “we confirm the possibility of communion with the kingdom, of entrance into its radiance, truth and joy.”<sup>17</sup> Such an awareness of the presence of the Kingdom of God, Schmemmann argues, was especially present among the early Christians: “For the first Christians the all-encompassing joy, the truly startling novelty of their faith lay in the fact that the kingdom was *at hand*. It *had appeared*, and although it remained hidden and unseen for ‘this world,’ it was already present, its light had already shone, it was already at work in the world.”<sup>18</sup> Although Christians’ heightened awareness of the presence of the Kingdom of God waned over time, the liturgy, he argues, preserves and manifests its presence.

For Schmemmann, the liturgy witnesses to a world undergoing *transfiguration*, a term he uses to describe the effects of the Kingdom of God in the world, which Zizioulas and Bulgakov use also, as we will see.<sup>19</sup> The transfiguring presence of the Kingdom is symbolised in the rhythms of liturgical time. He writes that Sunday, the “Lord’s Day,” is the eschatological, eternal day that is manifest through the eucharist, a witness to the Kingdom of God breaking into the world and transfiguring it from within. However, though Schmemmann makes much of the sanctification of time in liturgical prayer, he denies any outward sanctification of *history writ large*.<sup>20</sup> Instead, he asserts, the presence and transfiguring effects of the Kingdom are *hidden*: “The kingdom of Christ is accepted by faith and is hidden ‘within us.’ The King himself came in the form of a servant and reigned only through the cross. There are no

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<sup>16</sup> Schmemmann 1988, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Schmemmann 1988, 47–48.

<sup>18</sup> Schmemmann 1988, 42.

<sup>19</sup> The transfiguration of the world as part of the liturgy and social mission of the Orthodox Church is a major theme in Hart and Chryssavgis (ed.) 2020. See 4, 9, 19, 24, 27, 28, 41, 92, 93, 100–101, 103, 111.

<sup>20</sup> On sanctification of time, see Schmemmann 1966, 69–72.

external signs of this kingdom on earth."<sup>21</sup> The hidden transfiguration of the world is revealed only in the liturgy, and even then, only partially.<sup>22</sup>

Schmemmann assures us that God is transfiguring creation, but it is a reality which believers merely 'witness to' in the liturgy. Other than liturgical celebration, the human role is passive: he rejects the suggestion that social action outside the liturgy has any bearing on the manifestation of the Kingdom of God and the transfiguration of the world in history.<sup>23</sup> The lack of a social dimension in Schmemmann's thought has to do with his disdain for theologies of liberation influential in the 1960s and 1970s. He writes in the preface to his book on the eucharist,

Not faith, but ideology and utopian escapism are determining the spiritual state of the world. At a certain point, western Christianity accepted this point of view: almost at once one or another 'theology of liberation' was born. Issues related to economics, politics and psychology have replaced a Christian vision of the world at the service of God.<sup>24</sup>

Schmemmann was writing in reaction to theological trends of his day, including the kind of liberal theology that influenced the World Council of Churches at the time the notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' was formulated.<sup>25</sup> Yet in his reaction against what he saw as efforts to reduce Christianity to yet another kind of 'help' for a suffering world, Schmemmann undermines his own ideas about the transfiguring presence of the Kingdom of God in history. Even if the transfiguration of the world is a reality that is hidden from the view of most people, it is arbitrary to restrict the signs of the present Kingdom to the liturgy alone without justifying the reason for such a restriction. Questioning this inconsistency within Schmemmann's thought, Bruce Morrill asks, "Are the signs of the kingdom *only* evident in the liturgy?" He answers, "No, signs of the kingdom, while only fragmentary now in the time or history of this world, are nonetheless powerfully real for people who see with the eyes of faith."<sup>26</sup> While Morrill holds out hope that Schmemmann's theology could justify Christian social action despite his pessimism, it remains the case that Schmemmann's

21 Schmemmann 1988, 41.

22 Schmemmann 1988, 33–34.

23 See Schmemmann 1988, 107–108.

24 Schmemmann 1988, 10.

25 See Morrill 2019, 183–200.

26 Morrill 2000, 134.

view of the transfiguration of the world is decidedly “impersonal,” looking solely for the eschatological work of God in history without explicit human involvement or cooperation here and now.<sup>27</sup> I turn now to John Zizioulas, whose thinking on the Kingdom of God seems to unite the liturgical and extra-liturgical more fully.

## John Zizioulas

Like Schmemmann, John Zizioulas (1931–2023) sees the Kingdom of God as manifest on earth in the liturgy, especially the eucharist. The eucharistic liturgy, for Zizioulas, is first and foremost an eschatological reality. It is a foretaste of the future Kingdom of God, and “draws from its being and its truth.”<sup>28</sup> While Zizioulas shares with Schmemmann this strongly eschatological understanding of the liturgy, he finds traces of the Kingdom of God in the eucharist’s social and communal dimensions:

The Kingdom of God, the eschatological community, will be a gathering (of the ‘people of God’ and the ‘many’) [...] The variety and multiplicity which [nevertheless] does not break up the unity of the body but holds it together will assuredly be a characteristic of the Kingdom as it is of the Church. All these things are ‘imaged’ by the Divine Eucharist as an image of the Kingdom.<sup>29</sup>

For Zizioulas, the eucharist is the revelation of the Kingdom of God as the “community of the last times.”<sup>30</sup> The eschatological character of the eucharist informs the eschatological character of love between persons, which, he writes, “is the experiential quintessence of the Kingdom.”<sup>31</sup> In contrast to the ‘individual,’ whose existence is constituted abstractly by rights and property according to modern thought and politics, the ‘person’ is constituted by concrete encounter with the other. This encounter occurs primordially in the eucharist; the liturgy is an eschatological encounter in which I see the other “not

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27 For the language of “impersonal” regarding hyper-eschatological approaches to transfiguration in history, see Harper 2022, 340.

28 Zizioulas 2011, 45.

29 Zizioulas 2011, 70.

30 Zizioulas 2011, 69.

31 Zizioulas 2011, 76.

as he was yesterday or is today, but as he will be in the future in the last times, which means as a member and our neighbour in the Kingdom."<sup>32</sup> In this way, the Kingdom of God manifested in the eucharistic liturgy is, for Zizioulas, "essentially social" while inexorably eschatological.<sup>33</sup>

Zizioulas, like Schmemmann, uses the word transfiguration to refer to the effects of the Kingdom of God in history, but seems more willing to accentuate its social dimensions. He writes, "What we have in the Eucharist is not a flight or deliverance from space and time or from history, but the biblical perspective of the transfiguration of place and time, as indeed of all the creation which God's love made 'very good.'"<sup>34</sup> He goes beyond Schmemmann in affirming, in theory, the pertinence of social action in conjunction with liturgical worship, writing, "Worship and social action, sacred and profane, are no longer two different domains [...] the mission of the Church is not an *attitude vis-à-vis* the world, but a compassionate and sanctifying *presence* in it."<sup>35</sup> However, when it comes to the question of what extra-liturgical action accomplishes and what it might look like, Zizioulas is silent, stopping short for fear of identifying the eschaton with history.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, at times Zizioulas states, like Schmemmann, that it is *only* in the eucharistic assembly that one sees signs of the Kingdom of God.<sup>37</sup> Within Zizioulas's writing, there is only one clear extra-liturgical exception, one manifestation of the Kingdom outside of what he calls the "sacramental structures"<sup>38</sup> of the Church: the reconciliation of a person with their enemy.<sup>39</sup>

Zizioulas's limitation of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God to the liturgy (with the possible exception of enemy-love) contradicts his own understanding of what the Church is and does, which is not limited to the celebration of the liturgy alone. The Church, for him, is a pre-eternal reality called to the cosmic and complex task of the union of the created and uncreated.<sup>40</sup> The Church is the context in which fallen humankind can complete the task that was given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. "Man was cre-

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32 Zizioulas 2011, 78.

33 Zizioulas 2011, 127.

34 Zizioulas 2011, 81.

35 Zizioulas 2010, 88.

36 Zizioulas 2010, 88.

37 Zizioulas 2011, 68.

38 Zizioulas 2010, 88.

39 Zizioulas 2011, 76.

40 See Zizioulas 2011, 68.

ated," Zizioulas writes, "[...] so that he would bring all that is created to the uncreated God and unite them in permanent relationship."<sup>41</sup> Human beings are the hypostatic center of creation, uniquely endowed with the freedom to act to bring about this union; they are the condition of possibility for the uniting of the created and uncreated.<sup>42</sup> To unite creation with God is an active calling and historical task that cannot be limited solely to liturgical celebration. However, Zizioulas's writing on extra-liturgical action in the world remains hampered by a hyper-eschatological orientation that renders social action all but theologically meaningless.<sup>43</sup> I turn now to Sergius Bulgakov for a stronger articulation of the theological basis for social action.

## Sergius Bulgakov

The creative and controversial theological writings of Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944) predate those of Schmemmann and Zizioulas and the theories of eucharistic ecclesiology that inspired them, but provides a corrective to their eschatologism.<sup>44</sup> Like Schmemmann and Zizioulas, Bulgakov believes the Kingdom of God is manifested primarily in the liturgy.<sup>45</sup> For him, the Kingdom of God is at hand because of the Incarnation of Christ, which is extended in history via the Church and manifested above all in its sacramental rites. He writes,

[Through] the entire grace-bestowing life of the Church, with her prayers, liturgies, sacraments we enter into the kingdom, we commune with it. And this must be said especially of the sacraments, in which the grace of the Holy Spirit is continually given, and in the first place and most of all concerning the Eucharist, the sacrament of the incarnation. The Divine Liturgy is the coming kingdom of God, which is essentially the incarnation.<sup>46</sup>

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41 Zizioulas 2008, 90.

42 Zizioulas 2008, 94.

43 Demetrios Harper rightly critiques Zizioulas's ideal thus: "If we as Orthodox are to be capable of articulating a social ethos that can truly grant a foretaste of eschatological life in history, the Eucharistic ideal of 'being as communion' must be more than an ecstatic or even transcendental ideal; it must be planted in the very soil of history while, at the same time, maintaining a constant mindfulness of humanity's ultimate destiny." Harper 2022, 341.

44 Bulgakov is best known for his theology of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, which was controversial in his day and remains so. On the theological issues surrounding Sophiology, see De La Noval 2020. I avoid discussing Sophiology directly in this essay. While the ideas here discussed are part of Bulgakov's overall Sophiological vision, for my purposes they can be readily understood without reference to the intricate metaphysics that undergird them.

45 Bulgakov 2021a, 9–10.

46 Bulgakov 2021a, 14.

At the heart of Bulgakov's thinking about the Kingdom of God lies the question: What is the task of the Church in history?<sup>47</sup> The Incarnation of Christ formed a bridge between the created and uncreated, a bridge that carried over into the Church: "The Incarnation of Christ accomplishes the unification of divine and creaturely life, man's deification, which is precisely the power of the heavenly Church manifested in the earthly Church."<sup>48</sup> Bulgakov's notion of the Church as a continuing Incarnation, subsisting in the world as an unconfused union of the human and divine, is the hallmark of his approach to the Kingdom of God in history.<sup>49</sup> The Church abides in two natures, heavenly and earthly, as in the Christological definition of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. But, crucially, it also abides in two *wills*, divine and human, as affirmed of Christ at the Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680–681 AD in Constantinople.<sup>50</sup> Not only is it the task of each individual Christian to unite their will with the divine will but it is also the Church's. The uniting of the divine will and the created will, accomplished in Christ, is a task to be accomplished by the church in every historical epoch. Bulgakov writes, "History is a divine-human affair: the divine power is combined with human freedom, as the dogma of dithelitism makes clear. As the common work, history is a synergism."<sup>51</sup> Insofar as the Church is the dynamic meeting point of divine and human, it is also the inner meaning of history.

Like Schmemmann and Zizioulas, Bulgakov uses the word 'transfiguration' to describe the effect of the Kingdom of God in history. Unlike them, it is something he sees in both liturgical and extra-liturgical actions. For him, the transfiguration of the the world is, paradoxically, a historical process with an eschatological fulfillment. It does not remain suspended in the static antinomy of the 'already' and the 'not yet,' but operates as a dynamic *becoming* in time and history that nevertheless cannot be fully completed within history's immanent horizon.<sup>52</sup> Just as the two wills in Christ are distinct and unconfused

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47 He writes, "Does *history* exist at all for Christianity, or is it an unconquerable duration of *empty* time in which there is already nothing left to accomplish, 'the *last days*'?" Bulgakov 2021b, 34.

48 Bulgakov 2002, 257.

49 A perspective he shared with Georges Florovsky and Dumitru Stăniloae. See Florovsky 1952, 52. On Stăniloae, see Coman 2018, 203–224.

50 The notion of the Church as not only "dyophysite" but also "dyothelite" is an original and productive aspect of Bulgakov's ecclesiology, distinguishing it from, for example, the Chalcedonian ecclesiology of Florovsky. See Florovsky 1989, 62.

51 Bulgakov 2002, 343. Dithelitism (or dyothelitism) is the dogma of the two wills of Christ, human and divine.

52 Bulgakov 2002, 318.

according to the dogma of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, the boundary between heavenly and earthly in the Church's life marks the boundary between history and eschatology, which are also not to be confused. Bulgakov levels a harsh critique of those he calls "godless progressivists" who chase after social progress and technological immortality in hopes of achieving "the triumph of immanentism by assuring the possibility of definitively making oneself at home on the earth."<sup>53</sup> For him, the ongoing transfiguration of the world in both liturgy and extra-liturgical acts is not linear or progressive. Yet, despite sin and corruption, luminous glimpses of alignments between the heavenly and earthly are possible; possible, but not permanent, since the Church "remains dual in the world process until the end of the world."<sup>54</sup>

However, if the transfiguration of the world, the manifestation of Kingdom of God in history, does not unfold progressively with tangible, ever-improving results, then what is the point of extra-liturgical action? Bulgakov writes that social action in the world is a *necessary condition* for the Kingdom's full eschatological manifestation. He writes,

The building of the city of God in history does not *diminish* the significance of God's new creative act in the transfiguration of the world [in the eschaton] but *prepares* for the world the material that is the content of history, its creative activity. The new city is not created out of nothing but is the transfiguration of history.<sup>55</sup>

For him, the inbreaking of Kingdom of God on the eschatological day of the Lord requires the raw material of social action by the Church now, even if some of those efforts are ultimately thwarted or abandoned.<sup>56</sup> Bulgakov's idea that the Church contributes to the transfiguration of the world through social action is rooted in the idea of human beings as co-creators with God, a theme that is present but somewhat muted in Schmemmann's and Zizioulas's writings.<sup>57</sup> Bulgakov writes, "Having created man in the fullness of his potential tasks, God entrusts to him their fulfillment. In this sense, the world created by God is completed by man, not as a creator 'out of nothing' of course, but as the

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53 Bulgakov 2002, 345.

54 Bulgakov 2002, 264.

55 Bulgakov 2002, 326–327.

56 Invoking the book of Revelation, Bulgakov writes, "History is a tragedy, the confrontation of two powers, which by the end of history reaches its fullest intensity and maturity." Bulgakov 2021a, 25.

57 Bulgakov 2002, 320.

accomplisher of God's designs [...]" And here is the crucial point: "Without this [human] accomplishment the fullness of the universe *cannot be manifested*, and the universe *cannot attain its end* and its ultimate transfiguration, the passage to the new state of the future age."<sup>58</sup> For Bulgakov, in contrast with Zizioulas and especially Schmemmann, to act outside the liturgy with a view toward the manifestation of the Kingdom of God is not only possible, it is the Church's "duty."<sup>59</sup> This, for him, is a truly Orthodox approach to history as opposed to the "pseudo-ascetic – Manichean rather than Christian – view which takes away Christian responsibility for history while expecting everything to happen by divine activity."<sup>60</sup> There is no place for passively waiting around for the Kingdom of God to come, safe inside the walls of the Church.

Bulgakov uses organic metaphors to describe how the Kingdom of God is manifest in history through extra-liturgical action: "It is by these creative efforts of man, which are stamped with Holy Spirit's gifts of grace, that the kingdom of God is realized in history, *ripens* in history like a plant grown from a seed, like a vineyard entrusted to the workers, as in the Gospel parable [Matt 20:1–16]."<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere he draws upon the metaphor of the tree, from John 15, which bears healthy branches that will endure and enter into the final transfiguration of the world, while its sick branches must be cut off and will burn in the fire of the day of the Lord.<sup>62</sup> The connection between history and eschatology is open and porous, but it remains "unfathomable for us in this world. On the one hand, a *transcensus*, an act of 'new creation,' passes between them, although it is based on the original creation [...] Transfigured history is in fact eschatology."<sup>63</sup>

Bulgakov's positive, if somewhat pessimistic, assessment of Christian social action is rooted in his understanding of the Church as a dyothelitic institution, called to align the human will with the divine will, the heavenly with the earthly, and accomplish the task described congenially by Zizioulas as the uniting of creation with the uncreated. This leads Bulgakov to envision the manifestation of the Kingdom of God not only as a liturgical reality, but also an extra-liturgical reality of creative social action, action which is incum-

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58 Bulgakov 2002, 321. Emphasis added.

59 Bulgakov 2002, 332.

60 He goes on, "In practice this means reconciling with the power of sin and evil in its crassest form, and even worse – consenting to it." Bulgakov 2021a, 25–26.

61 Bulgakov 2021a, 26.

62 Bulgakov 2002, 332.

63 Bulgakov 2002, 347.

bent upon the Church as much as the liturgy is. What shape would that social action take in the modern world?

Bulgakov does not offer prescriptions for specific social initiatives but rather provides three “basic maxims of practical eschatological historicism.”<sup>64</sup> First, “nothing earthly should be absolutized.”<sup>65</sup> Surveying various attempts to “enchurch” history, culture, and society, be it through the Holy Roman Empire in Western Europe or the symphonia of Church and state in Byzantium and Rus’, Bulgakov argues that they correctly sought the transfiguration of life and history. But these medieval approaches have been shown to be ultimately inadequate because of their failure to appreciate the freedom of the person. Bulgakov writes,

[Today], the Church strives with new strength for the sanctification of life, for life’s rebirth in the Church, yet not from without but from within. The Church must not and cannot strive to once again pick up or possess the sword of government after it was wrested from its hand by the judgment of history. It is a harmful and deceptive utopia to hope to restore the old order, for the clock of history shows that it is already the last hour [...] the old, coercive theocracy must give way to freedom.<sup>66</sup>

Bulgakov finds a renewed approach for the Church in modern society “from below” in what he calls the “soul” of socialism: “History is not made by the sober prosaics but by dreamers, people of faith, prophets, ‘utopians.’”<sup>67</sup> The goal is not an immanent Utopia with a capital “U,” as Schmemmann argues and Bulgakov agrees is a demonic impulse embodied by the horrific methods of Bolshevism, but little “utopias,”<sup>68</sup> imagined and created to respond to changing historical circumstances. Broadly speaking, the task of Christian social action is “the achievement of social justice with personal freedom,”<sup>69</sup> a process that will take different forms depending on time and place, and certainly need not conform to the demands and assumption of bourgeois liberal individualism.<sup>70</sup>

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64 Bulgakov 2002, 347.

65 Bulgakov 2002, 347.

66 Bulgakov 2021a, 23.

67 Bulgakov 2021b, 31.

68 Bulgakov 2021b, 37.

69 Bulgakov 2021b, 31.

70 Harper justifiably worries that the For the Life of the World document does not question, and

Bulgakov's second maxim is this: "Man's likeness to God is actualized in historical creative activity. In God's world, man creates his own historical world."<sup>71</sup> This maxim affirms human attempts at world-building, imagining communities, and creating forms of life that preserve the freedom and dignity of persons made in the image of God. The emphasis in this maxim is on the word *creative*, which implies a perpetual state of incompleteness. It is important that social arrangements do not remain stagnant, resting upon a set of founding principles with no possibility of change or evolution. Such social arrangements forget that the call of human society is to strive for the Kingdom of God, not to simply 'settle' in this world, a settling he sees especially in "'petty bourgeois' comfort and satisfaction" that fails to call human beings "onward and upward."<sup>72</sup>

Bulgakov's third and final maxim: "All earthly things must be perceived in light of the coming end, the eschatological culmination."<sup>73</sup> In other words, any social action or political arrangement must be undertaken with a view toward its contribution to the final transfiguration of all things. Whatever a given social arrangement favored in a particular time and place may be, it is impermanent and will be subject to the purifying fires of the *Parousia*. Yet this maxim also affirms that social action is serious work. It gives significance to history and forms the basis of its final transfiguration, even if the ultimate value of particular actions will only become clear at the Last Judgment.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

The notion of the 'liturgy after the liturgy' in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Orthodox theology rightly seeks to integrate the Church's social mission with its primary act, the liturgy, but it suffers from a lack of theological depth and rigour. The theological basis for social action can be better formulated and grounded by framing extra-liturgical action in terms of the Church's ultimate referent, the Kingdom of God. Each of the three modern Orthodox thinkers I have put into conversation in this article holds that the Kingdom of God is present in this world in

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thereby tacitly blesses, the assumptions of liberal individualism. See Harper 2022, 337–338.

71 Bulgakov 2002, 348.

72 Bulgakov 2002, 348.

73 Bulgakov 2002, 348.

74 Bulgakov 2002, 347–348.

some sense, transfiguring it, a transfiguration that is revealed and manifested in the liturgy above all. Both Alexander Schmemmann and John Zizioulas limit the possibility of the Kingdom's manifestation to the liturgy only, which, I have argued, contradicts their own thinking about the transfiguring force of the Kingdom of God in history through the Church.

By contrast, Sergius Bulgakov makes a robust case not only for the possibility of extra-liturgical manifestations of the Kingdom in social action, but indeed for the *responsibility* of the Church to undertake such action. Bulgakov advocates for a qualified utopianism: Christians should strive to enact social justice "from below," without resorting to political coercion, and respect the absolute dignity and freedom of the human person. In practice, Bulgakov's vision is congenial to small-scale Christian activist communities like the Orthodox Action organisation of his disciple Mother Maria Skobtsova, or the Catholic Worker movement founded by Dorothy Day. Bulgakov is careful to separate earthly from heavenly, divine from human, and historical from eschatological, though in the church these antinomies are always present simultaneously. Keeping in mind that any seeds planted by the Church in the world for its future, final transfiguration may not blossom and grow, Christians must nevertheless plant them, dream up creative forms of life, and make 'little utopias,' responding to the needs and circumstances of time and place, even if ultimately it is God who determines the final shape of His Kingdom.

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