

UNFADING LIGHT: CONTEMPLATIONS AND SPECULATIONS. By Sergius Bulgakov. Translated from Russian by Thomas Allan Smith. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012. Pp. vii + 512. \$48.

As Smith, the translator, remarks, *Unfading Light* [1917] is a “watershed in Bulgakov’s intellectual output.” It “sums up everything that precedes it and charts the course for all that follows” (xxx). In this text, which combines biblical exegesis, philosophical dialectics, biographical accounts, and systematic theology, B. evolves from a philosopher of religion to a theologian. The book’s first half examines traditional questions in the philosophy of religion, e.g., how is religion possible, and what are the nature and role of religious experience (1–214)? These questions lead him to conclude that religion is based on the experience of the antinomy of God’s transcendence and immanence that is best expressed in his sophiological interpretation of Christianity. The book’s second half elucidates this conclusion and examines the basic tenets of B.’s Sophiology (214–436).

From a historical perspective, Smith’s translation is an invaluable contribution to Bulgakov studies in the English-speaking world. The text provides insight into B.’s personal life and the development of his thought—B. himself refers to the text as his “spiritual autobiography” (xlii). It is the first major work where he seriously engages the Orthodox tradition and approaches Sophiology from a patristic perspective. Moreover, with the exception of his Pneumatology and ecumenism, nearly every major theme that is elucidated in his minor and major theological trilogies are found here in an incipient manner.

However, while the text itself has strengths, it also has weaknesses. As to the latter, B. argues that Sophia is “a fourth hypostasis” that is eternal, albeit not consubstantial, with the Persons of the Trinity (217). B. fails, however, to provide a clear definition of what exactly this means and how his doctrine of Sophia is consistent with orthodox trinitarian theology. Interestingly, B later dropped the language of “fourth hypostasis.”

The massive scope of the work is impressive, but it is also problematic. B. does not explain his ideas in detail. For instance, although he addresses the important relationship between angels and humankind, he fails to explain the nature of this relationship (311). The reader will have to consult *Jacob’s Ladder* (1939) for B.’s elaboration of this insight. Moreover, B.’s methods are distracting. In addition to the main text and footnotes, within the text B. uses a smaller font for relevant discussions that are nonessential to his overall argumentation. B., in fact, informs his readers that these sections can be skipped (xxxix). Some are indeed tangential and interrupt his argument, but others are relevant, offering helpful overviews of specific thinkers and providing the context for B.’s thought.

Despite these shortcomings, this is an impressive and exceptional work, replete with B.’s unique insights and illuminative of his personality. His

treatment of Christian anthropology is exceptional. He clearly expounds on the nature of sex and the relationship of sexuality to the image of God, topics that, in his more mature works, are rather obscure. In fact, in his mature theological works, B. refers the reader back to this account. Here he argues that to be made in the image of God is to be made a sexual being, who is not only a member of one biological sex but also contains both the male and female sexual principles (294–311). Every person contains a “*dukhovnaya dvupolost.*” Although S. correctly translates this term as “sexual duality,” recent research by Evgenii Bershtein on the Russian Religious Renaissance, suggests that “sexual bisexuality” is a better translation, conveying more accurately to a modern audience what B. means.

Nevertheless, Smith’s attentive and careful translation, corrections to B.’s citations, and updates to his references are notable. With this exceptional translation, S., who also translated *The Burning Bush* and *Jacob’s Ladder* for Eerdmans, has established himself as one of the foremost translators of B. This work is highly recommended for readers interested in religious philosophy or B.’s theological development.

University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto

WALTER N. SISTO

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY. Edited by Stephen B. Bevans and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012. Pp. xi + 139. \$18.

This collection of essays brings together the work of eight scholars, who, in April 2009, took part in a conference on contextual theology held at United Theological College (UTC) in Sydney, Australia. As noted by Bevans in his preface (ix), the conference was sponsored by Communitas, a UTC program specializing in contextual theology and missiology. Speakers at the conference explored the nature and purpose of contextual theology in the 21st-century church, focusing on the challenges faced by the Christian churches of Australia and its neighboring nations, but also pausing to consider the role of contextual theological reflection in the life of the churches. According to the editors of this volume, the work of speculative theology, if it is to be relevant, must be grounded in a profound appreciation for the contextual character of every experience of “church”—something that ought to both color theological scholarship and inform the theological education of the next generation of Christian leaders.

The first three essays explore the question of contextual theology from a methodological perspective. B.—who authored the seminal study *Methods of Contextual Theology* (2002), as well as the more recent *Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (2009)—sketches a portrait of 21st-century