

The Christian Socialism of Fr. Sergii Bulgakov: Toward an Orthodox Political Economy

Nikolas K. Gvosdev is Associate Director of the J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University, Waco, TX

and

Daniel P. Payne, is a Ph.D. fellow in the J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University, Waco, TX.

With the fall of communism in the former Soviet Union, Eastern and Western intellectuals have rediscovered the important political, theological, and aesthetic works of Russia's "Silver Age." Focus has been given to such Russian thinkers as Nikolas Berdiaev and Pavel Florensky. However, very few writers outside of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian academy have paid attention to the thought of Fr. Sergii Bulgakov, who was a convert from Marxism to Orthodox Christianity. Most of his work has been inaccessible to most of the West due to the lack of translations. Recently, Paul Valliere and Rowan Williams have written works on the theological thought of Bulgakov, and a portion of his magnum opus, *The Lamb of God*, has been translated into English. In addition, Rowan Williams and Catherine Evtuhov have recently translated some of his political and economic thought into English, making it accessible to Western readers. However, no one has critically evaluated his political and economic work.

Because Bulgakov was a trained economist and theologian, his work has relevance today for Christian reflection on political economy. Bulgakov, who vehemently rejected Marxist economic materialism, provides an additional critique to laissez faire capitalism. For Bulgakov both Marxist socialism and laissez faire capitalism destroy the human spirit with their emphasis on economic materialism. Christianity provides a correction to such materialism by emphasizing freedom of the spirit. For Bulgakov such freedom can only properly be exercised within a social environment. This leads Bulgakov to develop a Christian socialism where human responsibility is emphasized over the rights of the individual. In Bulgakov's thought the individual is not denied nor destroyed, but rather given freedom to exercise the Christian responsibility of love of the neighbor.

In the paper, we will provide a synopsis of Bulgakov's thought on political economy, touching on his move from Marxism to Orthodox Christianity, which provides a basis for his later thought. Both the influence of Slavophilism and the thought of Vladimir Soloviev will be highlighted. In addition, his thought will be brought into conversation with neo-conservatives and Rawlsian liberalism. It is our contention that Bulgakov's work can provide a Christian alternative to the individualism of both classical and modern liberalism supported by modern Christians in the West. Furthermore, Bulgakov may provide the economic theory necessary for Russia to escape the economic morass in which it finds itself today.

Nikolas K. Gvosdev He is currently the executive editor of the *National Interest* and senior research fellow at the Institute on Religion and Public Policy. His publications include *Imperial Policies and Perspectives Towards Georgia, 1763-1819* (2000); *Emperors and Elections: Reconciling the Orthodox Tradition With Modern Politics* (2000); *Church-State Relations in the Byzantine and Russian Empires* (2001); and *Civil Society and the Search for Justice in Russia* (with Chris Marsh, 2002).

Daniel P. Payne He is researching Orthodox political theology. He has written and presented works on Orthodoxy and secularism, globalization, and the predicament that Orthodox nations face with the spread of Western human rights norms.