A Communion in Faith and Love

Doxa & Praxis

Exploring Orthodox Theology

PANTELIS KALAITZIDIS, *series editor*

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A Communion in Faith and Love
Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's Ecclesiology

Edited by

SARAH HINLICKY WILSON
and
AIKATERINI PEKRIDOU

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Foreword

AIKATERINI PEKRIDOU

"The great person is ahead of their time,
the smart make something out of it,
and the blockhead sets themselves against it."–
Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007)

The legacy of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (1907–2005) proves French sociologist Baudrillard right. Behr-Sigel has been acknowledged not only as a theologian shaped by the historical events and debates of her time but also as an intellectual who made the most out of the hardships of war and was so courageous as to raise and explore questions ahead of her time. Her strength, ecumenical openness, wide theological knowledge, and inherent sense of justice are the key attributes that shaped her work.

The deep spirituality and compassion of this Orthodox theologian impelled her to live out her faith in Christ, transforming it into meaningful action and help for those in need. Her vision of community, oriented towards communion with the triune God, defined her view of the church and the relationships between its members as well as with those who do not belong to it. Perhaps her most widely known contribution is with regard to the ministry of women in the church and the thorny question of the ordination of women, both of which research areas were innovative for her time.

Behr-Sigel's theological thought was undoubtedly shaped by the geographical, cultural, educational, and confessional context in which she studied. Her German and French background, her theological upbringing in both the Lutheran and the Reformed traditions, and the openness of the Protestant and Catholic faculties in eastern France that allowed for mutual exchange – to say nothing of her in-

teraction with the Orthodox tradition – all contributed to her own openness to what was different. Behr-Sigel came of age in a liberal scholarly culture that promoted academic excellence combined with a lived faith aiming at service to the pastoral needs of congregations. This prepared the ground for Behr-Sigel's later engagement with the great social problems of her time.

One might speculate that Behr-Sigel inherited her ability to create community with people of other religious affiliations. Born to a Lutheran father and a Jewish mother, she later made the choice to embrace the Orthodox tradition. However, she managed to retain her ecumenical sensitivity and was always actively engaged in the ecumenical movement, accounts of which involvement are found in her writings in various theological journals. During World War II, Behr-Sigel constantly fought against fear and risked her safety to stand by those who were persecuted. Boldness was one of the essential features of her character that surfaced in the midst of the misery and anguish of this period, continuing to characterize her attitude and theological work to the end of her life. Her deep faith in the incarnation and its humanizing force sustained her during this period and became the solid foundation of her theology.

Behr-Sigel's theological work is characterized by her ability to translate the Orthodox faith and theology into a language understood in the West. Her close ties to the Russian emigration of Paris familiarized her with Russian Orthodox thought, which she was able to articulate and make known. Her studies on monastic spirituality and Orthodox theology revolve around an incarnated faith that radiates Christ's self-denial and kenotic love. This is particularly evident in her work on Alexander Bukharev. The Russian Orthodox influence can also be discerned in Behr-Sigel's theological anthropology and more precisely in her involvement in the debates surrounding Sergius Bulgakov's sophiology.

Behr-Sigel was an astute reader of scripture and patristic literature. Her anthropology, which reflected on the sameness and otherness of men and women within the church, was grounded in patristic commentaries on the Bible. Building a new community where men and women joined in the joy and peace of the Trinity implied for Behr-Sigel the reinterpretation, rather than the repetition, of church Tradition in the present. For her, "Tradition is the very life of the

Church in its continuity as well as in its ever-flowing newness,"[1] both of which are seen as the work of the Holy Spirit. The renewal of Tradition concerns the aspiration toward a new community "from which will be banished all forms of domination, servitude, and exploitation of one person or group by any others."[2]

Anthropology and ecclesiology are closely linked in Behr-Sigel's vision of this new community experienced in faith and love. Men and women are created in God's image, and so the gifts of both are needed in this new reality. The differences of culture, ethnic background, and social and economic status are overcome as persons are related to one another in the new community and oriented toward their relationship with the triune God. Every person has dignity and is to be respected because every person reflects God.

A pioneer during her college years, one of the few women who had been admitted to study theology and then was appointed as assistant minister in a Reformed parish, Behr-Sigel later became a pioneer for Orthodox theology by raising the question of the role and ministry of women in the church. She dedicated her life to raising awareness about the position of women, which she examined in relation to a patriarchal and hierarchical ecclesiology as well as in the context of the church lived and experienced as communion.

Behr-Sigel explored the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood in the context of the ecumenical dialogue. Her main question was whether the ordination of women to the priestly ministry would constitute a break from the faith of the apostolic church or whether it could be perceived as an acceptable difference depending on one's theological emphases. Behr-Sigel's view gradually shifted from the denial of women's ordination to the priesthood to the recognition that there were no convincing arguments against it that are actually rooted in the faith of the church.

All but two of the papers published in this volume were presented during the 2011 conference on "Being Human, Becoming Divine: Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's Contributions to the Church" at the Centre St. Thomas in Strasbourg, France. Special thanks and gratitude are owed to the theologians who envisioned, planned, and organized this

[1] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, trans. Steven Bigham (Redondo Beach: Oakwood, 1991), 94.

[2] Ibid., 95.

meeting whose fruits we can now enjoy: Rev. Dr Sarah Hinlicky Wilson of the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg and Dr Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi, then member of the Volos Academy for Theological Studies. In addition thanks are due to Dr Fulata Mbano-Moyo, Programme Executive for the Women in Church and Society Programme of the World Council of Churches, who has tirelessly accompanied Orthodox women theologians in their ecumenical journey, and whose programme has underwritten this publication, and to Dr Tamara Grdzelidze, then Programme Executive for the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order. A word of thanks is also due to Nikolaos Asproulis for his help in completing this volume.

The present volume is compiled and published in the hope that current and future research will be inspired by Behr-Sigel's life and theological work, which ventured into uncharted territories, to explore further its implications for theology and especially ecclesiology. Churches and academic institutions have much to learn from theologians like Elizabeth Behr-Sigel. She was actively engaged in the life of the church and did not shy away from the social problems of her time. A restless thinker, critical of her own tradition, she became a liaison between the Eastern and Western theological traditions as her view of communion was nourished by prayer and liturgical life and was extended in loving personal relationships in the human community here and now.

Introduction

SARAH HINLICKY WILSON

What is it about Elisabeth Behr-Sigel that draws the personal and scholarly attention of people from so many countries and across the ecumenical spectrum? The best explanation is probably that she is unique: truly one of a kind. Female theologians in any church tradition are rare, and perhaps even rarer in the Eastern churches than in the West. The fact that she is not a "cradle Orthodox" but a convert makes her reputation all the more remarkable. Nor did she dwell in a historically Orthodox country, but throughout her life inhabited dual worlds: French-German in Alsace, Lutheran-Reformed in her youth, an ecumenical Orthodox in adulthood, a French national who "repatriated" herself to a Russian-émigré church community, an active member of a conservative church in a highly secularized society. She devoted as much energy to commentary on literature and the writing of biographical studies as to more traditional theological loci. She combined probing studies of Russian spirituality with anti-torture activism. She was a prolific reviewer of books as well as the founder and chief author of her parish's newsletter. She was an editor and a wife, a scholar and a mother. And she had a great gift for friendship: the number of those who mourned her passing and still speak of her with enormous affection is impressive indeed.[1]

[1] Her life story has been told with great detail and insight in Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day: The Life of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, trans. Jerry Ryan, ed. Michael Plekon (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). The biography itself grew out of Lossky's friendship with Behr-Sigel and made use of Behr-Sigel's personal letters and diaries.

It helps, of course, to be born at the right place and time in history. Behr-Sigel came to her living faith in the risen Christ at a time when the ecumenical movement was newborn and tremendously energetic. Her first entry was via the youth movement, but she stayed the course through the many years of exciting developments: the initial meetings of Life and Work, and Faith and Order; the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC); the dawn of bilateral dialogue; the growing awareness of the world church; and the startling new roles and opportunities for women in every corner of Christianity. Behr-Sigel was certainly a pioneer as both an ecumenist and a woman active in public Christian discourse. She participated in all the major gatherings during the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women sponsored by the WCC and as often as not was *the* Orthodox voice. It is no accident that she was invited to present the keynote speech at the first-ever international gathering of Orthodox women at the Agapia convent in Romania in 1976. Notably, this occasion was the first time, at least on the written record, that she raised the question of female priests. Her answer at the time was no, but within five years she would reverse herself and begin to build her powerful case for a creative but faithful development of holy Tradition.

Women in the Church

It is hard to imagine anyone better situated to make this controversial case than Elisabeth Behr-Sigel. Blessed with a supernatural measure of serenity, and having attained the stature of years to put her beyond the usual dismissals issued to young women, her writings on women in the church are extraordinarily calm, measured, and peaceable. She did not hesitate to identify the concrete sins of sexism in the church or to dissect the traditional practices that betrayed the fundamental convictions of the church about the full humanity of women and men alike. But there is never a note of rage in her tone – occasionally, at most, of frustrated impatience.

Yet even then her confidence that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the church into all truth is the final word. She is not troubled that God takes time – centuries and millennia even – to re-form and re-mold the church and the societies of which the church is the leaven. It is a long work and the eschaton is always on the horizon. Con-

fidence in the present activity of the divine in our midst allows theologians the necessary courage to take up new challenges – whether of the role of women, or searching for peace in a violent world, or groping toward the reconciliation of divided churches.

Likely it is the serenity of her tone, alongside the force of her arguments that has influenced the course of her reception. There are many who, initially skeptical of what they saw to be only civil and sociological demands for equal rights imported into the church, came to be persuaded by Behr-Sigel's point of view: Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, and Olivier Clément among them.

But this is by no means a majority perspective. Plenty remain skeptical if not outright hostile to the notion of women priests. Yet, to this day, not a single sustained refutation of her arguments has appeared. At most there is the occasional snide dismissal, but no genuine engagement. One suspects that attacks would have been forthcoming if she had been any more virulent in her own writings, but the quiet confidence of a grandmother has silenced any potential screeds. This may be the best testimony to her insights: they are so good and so reasonable that they are dangerous to toy with and may ultimately demand real change.

Nevertheless, it is high time to see a more sustained engagement with Behr-Sigel's work. Neither quiet affirmation nor irritated avoidance is the response she deserves. It is, furthermore, important to recognize the whole arc of her reflection on the topic of women in the church. Although she came to favour the ordination of women soon after she began reflecting on the topic, her reasons for favouring it underwent a dramatic development. She came to reject her initial reasons for supporting it. It is essential to set her final support of the possibility of women priests within the context of her mature thinking on personhood.[2] Happily, in this volume, we include two essays that take up the challenge of the reception of Behr-Sigel's work on this very topic.

[2] This is the basic argument of Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, *Woman, Women, and the Priesthood in the Trinitarian Theology of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2013), to date the only book-length study of Behr-Sigel's theology.

The Russian Religious Heritage

Although Behr-Sigel remains virtually without peer on the question of the ordination of women, the mentality from which it arose is by no means unique. Here it is essential to see Behr-Sigel not as a lonely heroine traversing uncharted territory without help or support. Quite the contrary, she was and knew herself to be an heir to and participant in a long line of innovative Orthodox theologians.

Still little known to the West, where the neopatristic revival under Florovsky remains basically synonymous with modern Orthodox theology, the stream of thought originating with Vladimir Soloviev and Alexander Bukharev in the 19th century is the one that formed Behr-Sigel. The brightest light of this tradition was and still is Sergius Bulgakov – who, as it happens, was Behr-Sigel's confessor and one of her most important mentors early in her Orthodoxy. Her friends Paul Evdokimov and Lev Gillet also identified themselves with this stream, sometimes provoking severe criticism from the neopatristic party.[3]

As in most intellectual traditions, there are many twists and turns in the one under discussion here. But to distill it down to the simplest point, Behr-Sigel, her predecessors, and her friends sought not to repristinate a corrupt Orthodoxy through recourse to and repetition of the church fathers, but rather to develop and extend Orthodoxy in the spirit of the church fathers for the sake of witness to

[3] There is still only a modest number of studies of this stream of Orthodox thought available in English. An older work by Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), covers both neopatristic figures and those who defected from that position. The most important contemporary book-length study is Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology, Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000). See also Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and Their Journal, 1925–1940* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013) and Paul Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The collection *Tradition Alive: On the Church and the Christian Life in Our Time: Readings from the Eastern Church*, ed. Michael Plekon (Lanham, Md.: Sheed and Ward, 2003) offers a number of key essays by figures in the sophiological tradition. Translations of Vladimir Soloviev and Sergius Bulgakov are slowly appearing in English, but Alexander Bukharev remains virtually unknown.

and engagement with the wide world. For this reason Behr-Sigel was so fond of Jesus' charge to "discern the signs of the times." The times and the world are not simply innocent, not simply right; but they do have their own integrity, questions, yearnings, and insights on which the gospel and the wisdom of its long Tradition must be brought to bear. The faithful Christian does not flee but meets the challenge, offers counter-challenges, and radiates the joy of the resurrection. Behr-Sigel asked her fellow Orthodox countless times in her writings to respond to the "here and now." Soloviev, Bukharev, and Bulgakov would have been proud.

Behr-Sigel's glad adoption of the Russian religious heritage for herself was expressed in a number of ways. Her engagement with the pressing questions of modernity was one but certainly not the only way she lived out the sophiological tradition. Impressively, in adulthood she learned to speak and read Russian – no doubt aided by her Russian-born husband – and did primary research in Russian sources. These included reviews of Russian novels, studies in Russian spirituality (the Jesus Prayer in particular), and a master's thesis on Russian holiness, which remains the standard typology in the field. Her doctorate on Alexander Bukharev reviewed his spiritual practice, outlined his life, and translated a number of his letters into French. Even in 1960s France, her thesis was controversial enough to be pulled from publication early on and never reissued.

The Range of Behr-Sigel's Interests

There is no substitute for reading Behr-Sigel (or any other theologian) herself. With very few exceptions, all of her work was composed in French, but English readers have a substantial number of her most important works available in translation. These are *The Ministry of Women in the Church* (Oakwood, 1991); *The Place of the Heart: An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality* (Oakwood, 1992); *Lev Gillet: A Monk of the Eastern Church* (Oxford: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1999); with Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church* (WCC, 2000); and *Discerning the Signs of the Times* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001). Only available in French are her first book, *Prière et Sainteté dans l'Eglise Russe* (rev. ed. Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1982), and her dissertation, *Alexandre Boukha-*

rev, un Théologien de l'Eglise Orthodoxe en Dialogue avec le Monde Moderne (Beauchesne, 1977).

The books, however, represent only a portion of Behr-Sigel's writings. There is a large corpus of her articles that have not yet been collected into a single volume.[4] A significant number of these articles were book reviews; Behr-Sigel was an extraordinarily devoted reader on a wide range of theological topics, including books by Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians in addition to Orthodox ones. Another category of her relatively unknown articles are short pieces for *Bulletin de la Crypte*, the parish newsletter she started and edited for her Paris community. These range from reports on her own activities at conferences and church events to spiritual reflections on holy days. Other such reports, often variations on those for *Bulletin de la Crypte*, appeared in *Service Orthodoxe de Presse*. Furthermore, as editor of the theological journal *Contacts*, Behr-Sigel made many lengthier contributions, from theological studies of such figures as Gregory of Palamas and Tikhon of Zadonsk to her forays into biographies of Mother Maria Skobtsova and Lev Gillet. She published numerous reflections on ecumenism as well, both in Orthodox journals and those of other churches, and both wrote about and participated in theological education. Many and various of her articles have been translated into other languages besides English, including Russian, Bulgarian, Italian, and Portuguese.

Behr-Sigel was, overall, far more of an occasional writer than a systematic one. In such cases, the reading of the original texts is greatly enhanced by knowledge of the wider context and background of the occasions that provoked the writings. Therefore, the essays collected in this volume will offer indispensable guidance to Behr-Sigel's theology and its wider significance.

The Conference and Its Findings

From August 31 to September 3, 2011, Orthodox and Lutheran theologians gathered at the Centre St. Thomas in Strasbourg, France,

[4] The first attempt at a complete bibliography of Behr-Sigel's writings appeared in a festschrift dedicated to her, *"Toi, Suis-Moi": Mélanges offerts en hommage à Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, ed. Carmel de Saint-Rémy/Stânceni (Iasi: Editura Trinitas, 2003). I updated and expanded this bibliography in my own aforementioned book.

to participate in a conference entitled "Being Human, Becoming Divine: Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's Contributions to the Church." In cooperation with the Women in Church and Society Programme of the WCC and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies in Greece, the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg hosted this event to consider Behr-Sigel's life, thought, and ecumenical impact.[5]

The setting was particularly appropriate, since it was in Strasbourg that Behr-Sigel was born and raised, was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran church, enjoyed the fruitful mentoring of leading Reformed pastors in the youth movement, and was among the first women to enter theological studies at the University of Strasbourg. Important friendships with Russian and Romanian Orthodox émigrés and a love for the liturgy and ecclesiology of the East led Behr-Sigel to enter the Orthodox Church as a young adult. Although it is commonly thought that Behr-Sigel converted upon marriage to a Russian Orthodox, in fact she met her future husband on the occasion of her chrismation, which took place in the young man's apartment. Her decision to enter the Eastern Church was a matter of spiritual conviction, not marital convenience or influence.

The papers presented at the 2011 conference are collected here, engaging various aspects of Behr-Sigel's life, theology, and witness. The foundation is set with an examination of important developments in Behr-Sigel's personal life. Elisabeth Parmentier offers a glimpse into the situation of the Protestant faculty in Strasbourg during Behr-Sigel's studies in the 1920s and the growing acceptance of female lay and ordained pastors in the church of Alsace. While Behr-Sigel was not the absolutely first woman to study theology or exercise a public ministry in the French Protestant churches, she certainly was among the first to do so. Parmentier illustrates the internal struggle of these churches to allow women to take on such a role and the limitations still imposed upon them – for instance, only single women were allowed to serve as lay pastors, despite the fact that the blessing of clerical marriage was a major theme of the Reformation.

[5] It was a particular privilege of the conference to welcome among its participants several of Behr-Sigel's descendants: her son Nicolas Behr, her daughter Nadine Arnould, and two of her grandsons, Cyrille Arnould and Michel Arnould. The first evening of the conference was devoted to hearing their memories of their beloved mother and grandmother.

Olga Lossky, Behr-Sigel's biographer, relates how the young theologian formed an ecumenical resistance circle during World War II. Here if anywhere Behr-Sigel found the "new community" that she had been looking for since her youth. Her initial attraction to Orthodoxy was very much based on its ecclesiology, "a communion lived in faith and love," in contrast to the hierarchical structure she perceived in her Protestant community. There was much to disappoint her in the reality of lived Orthodoxy, but the solidarity and strength in her circle in Nancy during the war years remained a lifelong inspiration. Lossky also reports how Behr-Sigel helped refugees and on occasion hid Jewish children from the Nazis.

Two essays in this volume delve more deeply into the historic precedents of Behr-Sigel's work. Michel Evdokimov examines its deep roots in the Russian spiritual tradition, particularly the countercultural witness of controversial Russian ex-monk Alexander Bukharev. Evdokimov brings to light the common themes of longing for a new community alongside frustration with the lived reality of church in both Bukharev and Behr-Sigel. The two were deeply moved by the doctrine of *theosis* and the full humanity of God, applying these profound realities to the social issues around them.

Antoine Arjakovsky continues in this vein, but with a focus on Sergius Bulgakov instead. Behr-Sigel wrote the earliest study in French of Bulgakov's sophiology, defending her mentor amidst an explosive dispute about the topic in the Russian church that reached all the way into France. Arjakovsky concludes with a consideration of contemporary Roman Catholic theologian Celia Deane-Drummond, who in her own way picks up the themes of sophiology and extends them into a wider ecumenical setting.

From there the essays turn to a closer examination of Behr-Sigel's own innovative work. Teva Regule examines Behr-Sigel's holistic, ecumenical vision of the church. This opens up fresh approaches to ecclesiology, which in turn has implications for theological anthropology. Naturally, Behr-Sigel was particularly concerned to develop the interconnections of ecclesiology and theological anthropology where women are concerned, but ultimately her vision is for all people created in the image of God.

The next two essays follow logically on these insights. Valerie Karras explores Behr-Sigel's creative retrieval of the patristic tradition. Contrary to popular perception, the fathers did not take men

and women to be radically "other" but emphasized their common humanity in Christ. Karras defines this as the "non-gendered character of Greek patristic theology," both building on and in places gently critiquing Behr-Sigel's use of the patristic sources. Maria Gwyn McDowell draws out further the implications of Behr-Sigel's writings on the ordination of women in showing how the Eastern Church's use of icons points to the ability of each individual to become transparent to Christ. She draws on the writings of Theodore of Studios, one of the only early church theologians to consider the maleness of Christ as a distinct topic, and then turns to consider the femaleness of the Theotokos. These call into question conventional assumptions about masculinity and femininity, which in turn have implications for the practice of ordination in the church.

The following two contributions dwell on questions of spirituality in practice. Amal Dibo analyzes Behr-Sigel's commitment to "discerning the signs of the times," exhorting Christians and especially the Orthodox churches to follow in her footsteps. Dibo notes Behr-Sigel's courageous willingness to engage with pressing political and social questions in the creative tension between authority and liberty in the church, a gift that can be offered to a world suffering from nihilism and despair. Heleen Zorgdrager, though not present at the conference, offers a valuable insight into Behr-Sigel's personal and theological witness regarding *kenosis* and suffering. The incarnation is the central point of hope for creation – God took humanity into his own life – and it transforms both our understanding and our experience of suffering.

The volume concludes with my own contribution, in which I analyze Behr-Sigel's hagiographical studies, an important though somewhat more neglected aspect of her life's work. Already in writing her master's thesis on Russian saints, Behr-Sigel began to see women in the church with new eyes. Her unflinching willingness to face the sinful side of the saints as well as her profound understanding of personhood prompts me to make some suggestions about how a renewed discipline of hagiography could take root in my own Lutheran tradition. As an accompaniment to this discussion of hagiography, the final entry in the book is Behr-Sigel's own essay on the Russian saint Juliana Lazarevskaya, which has not hitherto been published in English.

Several of the conference papers were published in French by the journal *Contacts* (Issue 246 [2014]) under the title *Élisabeth Behr-Sigel (1907–2005): Une théologienne bâtisseuse de ponts*; namely, those by Parmentier, Evdokimov, Regule, Dibo, and Wilson.

Ecumenical Implications

Behr-Sigel's theology has gained a hearing well outside of her native Orthodoxy. It has enriched the discussions about the ordination of women in Western churches. Protestants are challenged to look beyond language of rights and justice, while Catholics are challenge to look beyond notions of natural resemblance. She remains a standing challenge to feminist theology, as one who both made use of its critiques and yet issued her own critiques in turn, convinced as she was that the dogmatic foundation of the church in the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ are assets, not liabilities, for Christian women. As the ecumenical movement itself is, in a certain sense, really a multifaceted debate about the nature of Tradition, Behr-Sigel's faithful yet flexible approach has much to teach all parties. On a less controversial level, her introductions to the Russian saints and to the spirituality of the Jesus prayer remain invaluable resources to all Christians seeking to live more authentically in the light of Christ.

In one of the discussions that took place during the conference, an Orthodox colleague asked me whether I, as a Lutheran theologian and pastor, had any regrets that Behr-Sigel had left the Protestantism of her youth to become Orthodox. It was a thought-provoking question for me. Given her importance and signal witness to the Orthodoxy she embraced, I could not feel any real sadness that she made her move to the Eastern Church. But on a deeper level, I came to realize, the question betrays a mindset that all of us are still working to break free from. The underlying assumption is that by joining and serving the Orthodox Church, Behr-Sigel was no longer a sister in faith to me or one of "my own."

But the ecumenical discovery is precisely the opposite: we do not exist in strict isolation from one another. We are all part of the one body, in ways that often defy understanding, in ways that we defy with our competitive and slanderous treatment of one another. If anything, Behr-Sigel was a gift to me precisely *as* an Orthodox theo-

logian in a way she never could have been had she remained in the Lutheran or Reformed Church. We are both baptized into the one body of Christ, and so we belong to each other. And so do those who participated in the conference, whatever their church affiliation; and so do those who read her works, whether they react with delight or anger. We are one, like it or not. May God grant us the grace to like it, and may Behr-Sigel's theology help form us into the kind of people who do.

Chapter One

Behr-Sigel's Theological Education and Ministry in Strasbourg

ELISABETH PARMENTIER

The coincidences or the grace of history gave birth to the young Elisabeth Sigel in a very special region: the eastern border of France. This was a region of two cultures, in a space charged with conflict and painful history, but also a field of potential reconciliation between the Germans and the French, between the churches, and even between the religions. It is still the area of France that is most affirming of its religious identities and most in relationship with the rest of Europe.

The situation of the churches in Alsace-Lorraine is very special. This region was first French after Louis XIV, then German from 1870 until 1918 and the end of the First World War, French again until 1940, German from 1940 to 1945, and French since then. As a result, this region has kept a certain number of laws that are not valid in the other regions of France.

The Lutheran Church and the Reformed Church in Alsace-Lorraine have been subject to the "Organic Articles" of Napoleon I since 1802. Lutheran and Reformed pastors, Catholic priests, and Jewish rabbis are appointed and paid by the state. In the rest of France, where a Lutheran and a Reformed Church exist along with many other churches linked to the Reformation, the situation is different and more difficult. Since 1905, the churches in all the rest of France are separated from the state and must provide for all their needs themselves.

The unique situation of religion officially recognized by the state that exists only in Alsace-Lorraine explains several elements that will be developed here. The faculties of Protestant theology and Catholic theology, belonging to the university and issuing state diplomas, are the only ones of their kind in France, and they could only exist because of this territorial exception of the acceptance of religion

in Alsace and Lorraine. This anomalous situation has fostered ecumenical relations between the two faculties and stimulated the interest of students from all over the world – including Orthodox students – who still come to the two faculties. The importance of theology was never due to the large number of students, as these kinds of studies hold little attraction for the French. But since theology and religion in this region have a recognized place in public life, the faculties have played an important role in church and society.

I will pursue two aims in this essay. First, I will underline the theological climate at the faculty of Protestant theology in Strasbourg at the time Elisabeth Behr-Sigel was studying there. Second, I will consider the discussions of the pastoral ministry of women, which began in the Protestant churches in France exactly at the time when she finished her studies. This period – covering Behr-Sigel's years of theological study and her year of Protestant ministry – was particularly rich in discussions and significant developments, on the one hand concerning theology at the end of the First World War, on the other regarding the place of women in the church.

The Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Strasbourg

A brief summary of the history of theological studies in Strasbourg is needed to understand the specificity of this place.[1] While it is common to find state faculties of theology in other European countries, it is an absolute exception in France.

In Strasbourg, the creation of the university is linked to the period of the Lutheran Reformation (which won over the city in 1524) together with the humanism that was already very influential throughout the Rhine area. In 1538 the "Upper School" (*Haute Ecole*) – the ancestor of the university – was built. Its upper section taught juridical sciences, literature, and Protestant theology. This School became an Academy, also offering instruction in medicine and philosophy, and in 1621 it was recognized as a university. Meanwhile, in

[1] Marc Lienhard, "Histoire de la Faculté," in *La Faculté de théologie protestante de Strasbourg: Hier et aujourd'hui, 1538-1988*, ed. Marc Lienhard (Strasbourg: Oberlin, 1988), 13–75.

1617, a Catholic university had been founded in Molsheim: the Academy of the Jesuits.

The Lutheran Academy exclusively taught the Bible, while in other places courses on theological issues were added. For example, in Wittenberg, Melanchthon taught courses on his *Loci Communes* based on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Famous theologians taught courses in Strasbourg: Martin Bucer, John Calvin, and Jean Marbach. In 1621, four chairs had been allocated to the theology department, and, up to the French Revolution, the professors had to be Lutheran.

The French University was dismantled during the Revolution in 1789 and only restored under Napoleon. In 1802, the "Organic Articles" established an Academy for the Lutherans in Strasbourg and another for the Reformed in Geneva. In 1803 the Academy of the Protestants of the Augsburg Confession was created, which in 1808 became the Protestant Seminary, led by the local Lutheran Church, under the authority of the French government.

Shortly after, an Imperial University was founded, which also had a faculty of Protestant theology and a faculty of Catholic theology. But the project took time, as the Reformed Christians of Strasbourg claimed this faculty for themselves. Finally, the faculty was created in 1819, in addition to the Protestant Seminary, under the authority of the University and therefore of the French state.[2] At that time there were three chairs: dogmatics, church history, and ethics. Two others were added later: exegesis and sacred eloquence. In response to the Reformed call to have their own teaching, a chair of Reformed doctrine was created in 1820. Professors therefore taught both at the Seminary and at the faculty. The faculty was responsible for the examinations and the state diploma, but the Seminary was supervised by the church. The double location allowed a greater diversity of courses to be offered.

In 1851 a conflict broke out that continues to be significant in the teaching of theology to this day. The Strasbourg faculty was known for its liberal orientation, but in the 19th century an awakening Lutheran Pietist revival raised the question of whether priority should be given to education for pastoral ministry instead of academic-scholarly training. Surprisingly, it was the minister of the government who argued that "the Protestant Seminary was established with

[2] Ibid., 39–41.

the view, not of training theologians and scholars, but of preparing students to exercise pastoral functions." A commission appointed by the church added that "the teaching of a Seminary or of a faculty should not only form preachers and catechists but theologians, and that a strong scholarly culture is an indispensable condition for true eloquence in the pulpit and in catechetical instruction."[3] So both aims were supported: scholarly rigour and intellectual honesty should go hand in hand with Christian belief. Strasbourg's reputation for its "free" theology, advocating the scholarly and critical study of the Bible, would thus not be in competition with a confident faith and the life of the church.

Between 1870 and 1918, Alsace-Lorraine was annexed to Germany, and the German university provided the faculty of theology with seven chairs (beside the Seminary, which was maintained). The faculty was installed in its current location at the University Palace. The teaching continued with its liberal orientation, and the students who were more influenced by the Lutheran revival went to study at Erlangen or with the Pietists at Halle.[4]

We come now to the period after 1919, following the end of the war and just before Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's arrival at the faculty. Alsace-Lorraine was again part of France, and the faculty of Protestant theology returned to the French University, with six chairs: dogmatics, ethics, Old Testament, New Testament, Christian history, and practical theology. The specific chair for a Reformed theologian was abandoned, and the professors, like the students, were both Lutherans and Reformed. From that time onward, an increasing inter-confessional orientation would be the norm.

There were only 25 students in 1919, 70 in 1924, 98 in 1928, and 103 in 1933.[5] Although Elisabeth Behr-Sigel states that in 1927 she was part of the second promotion of women, this does not correspond with historical research, which has found that that the first registration of four women took place in 1920 and that these took only certain courses. The first woman undertaking the full curriculum arrived in 1922. From 1920 to 1945, there were only 22 women students altogether. Elisabeth Sigel was therefore one of these pioneers,

[3] Ibid., 50.

[4] Ibid., 55–59.

[5] Ibid., 61.

since at the time it was not widely accepted that women could study theology. Indeed, it was only after 1930 that women were accepted to study at the "free faculty" of Paris, and Elisabeth spent a year at this faculty, from 1930 until 1931, finishing her master's degree.

Why were female students of theology accepted earlier in Strasbourg than in other places? This was not necessarily due to any internal decision or request coming from the church – or, at least, no trace of such discussions has been found. But the faculty of Protestant theology in Strasbourg, like its Catholic neighbour and the Protestant faculty in Geneva, is a state faculty, belonging to the university, and for this reason they could not legally refuse female students. Their participation became significant only after 1969, when 40 percent of all students in Protestant theology were women. It must also be mentioned that Strasbourg did not offer specific courses for women, who were only destined to become assistants to the pastor, whereas in Geneva a specific Institute for Female Ministries had been created in 1918, offering theological courses of only two years instead of a full course of education as in the faculties of Strasbourg and Geneva.

When Elisabeth Sigel studied in Strasbourg, courses were offered on the history of the Hebrew people, the history of religions, and the biblical books by Antonin Causse, who also taught also Hebrew, Greek, and New Testament. A course on Luther and the Reformation taught by Henri Strohl was also offered. Contemporary religious movements in France were part of the program of contemporary history taught by Charles Sabatier. The famous dogmatician Charles Hauter taught philosophy of religion and introduced important authors, later adding a course in ethics by Christian Ehrhardt. Practical theology offered courses in parish and missionary science taught by Monnier, and worship and preaching by Robert Will. We don't know which courses Elisabeth took, as she had studied philosophy before and was able obtain a theological degree with a shorter curriculum by equivalence.

Coming to the end of this discussion of the faculty of theology, we are left with a decisive question: Why, with such a rich teaching, anchored in a long tradition, could Elisabeth Sigel not find her spiritual way in the Lutheran Church?

In the first place, we can inquire about the situation of her family. Is it because her parents lived as an inter-religious couple, so that out of mutual respect neither of them wanted to impose convic-

tions that might exclude the other? Elisabeth Behr-Sigel says that her parents were detached from any religious practice. It is significant, and it remains for me a matter of astonishment, that she, to my knowledge, did not seek to develop her Jewish roots either. According to Jewish belief, any child born of a Jewish mother is Jewish; therefore, she was actually Jewish. But neither in Judaism nor in the Lutheran tradition did she find a real spiritual place for herself.[6]

Should we therefore attribute this to the theology that was taught to her? There are indeed two factors to consider: I repeatedly mentioned the rather liberal orientation of this teaching, and I have also insisted on the fact that the faculty formed academic theologians, not only pastors – meaning students capable of interpreting scripture using available scholarly resources, with faith only in second place. However, this distinction was less marked than today, and all the scholars at the faculty at that time were also involved in the life of the church and preached regularly.

It remains therefore mysterious to me why, in her writing on Lutheran theology, she does not develop the aspects that are most decisive for Lutherans: justification by faith, the spirituality of grace, the Christocentric orientation, the importance of the sacraments, the love of the church. She especially criticizes "Protestant libertarian individualism," which is rather a characteristic of the new Protestantism after the 18th century than of the spirit of the Reformation. It is true that, except for a course in Reformation history, no course on Lutheran dogma appears in the program, only the philosophy of religion, so perhaps a study of the Lutheran faith was not available to her. In this case, it would not be surprising that she was looking elsewhere for what she was unable to discover in her own tradition.

Nevertheless, despite these criticisms of Strasbourg's theology, one dimension of her personality and of her work undoubtedly comes from that particular place at the crossroads of religions: her ecumenical and international openness. The faculty of Catholic theology was founded in 1902 and installed in the University Palace in the corridor opposite the Protestant faculty. This location explains the working relationships that easily developed between the faculties

[6] Her children, however, say that even though she became aware of it late, she would never forget it. She also helped a Jewish child during the Nazi years; and she would always feel close to Jewish people.

despite confessional conflicts.[7] This proximity of the faculty of Catholic theology, encounters with the Orthodox students on both sides of the corridor, and engagement in the students' federation provided ideal space for meetings and ecumenical commitments, as is shown in the biography of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel.

The Ordination of Women in the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France

In 1931, Elisabeth Sigel, now a graduate of theology, was sent by the Reformed Church of Alsace as an assistant pastor to the rural parish of Villé-Climont. The parish of the area of Villé (with its annexes, Climont and Saales) brought together Protestants from 22 villages across the valley. This small parish covered a wide territory of the Protestant diaspora, and by her own account, she was very well accepted there. Although she claimed that she was the first woman in France to hold such a female pastoral ministry, this fact is not certain. The parishes of the Protestant minority churches in France had placed women in situations of pastoral responsibility very early, employing women to replace the pastors who had been sent to the war. This created the question, after the war, of how to recognize the service of those women who had faithfully ministered in this situation of emergency.

Another question that remains unanswered is why Elisabeth Sigel, who was of Lutheran origin, was sent after her studies to a Reformed and not a Lutheran parish. After the 1960s, the collaboration between these churches was so close that the movement of a pastor of one church to another was no longer problematic. But this was not yet the case in 1930.

I did not find an answer to this question in my reading of her biography or other accounts of her life. But it was suggested to me by my colleague Sarah Hinlicky Wilson that the most important Protestant Christian leaders she knew were Reformed, not Lutheran: Suzanne de Dietrich and Marc Boegner. So she had closer ties as an adult to the important spiritual figures of the Reformed Church than

[7] For the history of the faculty of Catholic theology, see "La théologie dans l'Université et dans l'Église. Centenaire de la Faculté (1902–2002)," *Revue des Sciences religieuses* 1 (2004).

those of the Lutheran Church. Her son, Nicolas Behr, confirmed this and explained to me that she had asked pastor Marc Boegner what she should do, and he had advised her to "go to the desert" in that valley of Villé. Although at that time she was already Orthodox in her heart and in her official ecclesiastical affiliation, she obeyed. She must have met Marc Boegner during her study year in Paris, as he was at that time the pastor of the parish of Passy and already well known for his ecumenical engagement. In 1929 he was elected the president of the Fédération Protestante de France, and in 1938 he also became the president of the Église Réformée de France.

I turn now to the historical circumstances of the debates concerning women pastors, which will show the novelty of the situation at that time.

The Debate about Women in Pastoral Responsibility in the Reformed Church of Alsace-Lorraine (ERAL)

The Reformed Church of Alsace-Lorraine was the first church in France to give women the opportunity to exercise the pastoral ministry, and this happened in 1926. The Synod of May 20, 1926, raised the point that "[t]he shortage of pastors, which becomes more acute from year to year, forces churches to seek all means to solve the problem," and suggested that the "Ministry of women could be one of these means, all the more effective that it will also help to respond to other needs of the churches."[8] The Synod ultimately made the following decisions:

> (a) that women, in principle, have the right to preach (*venia concionandi*) if they have completed their regular studies in a faculty of theology and are in possession of all required academic qualifications;

[8] I discovered these details in an unpublished working document from 1979, written by a former professor of the faculty of Protestant theology in Strasbourg: René Voeltzel, *Les ministres*, unpublished working paper of the Conseil Permanent Luthéro-réformé, 1979, who cites from the Synodal Paper, v. III, N° 8 (July 1926), 135. The official documents quoted in these footnotes come from this analysis. See also Martine Millet, "Le ministère pastoral des femmes dans le protestantisme français," in *La religion de ma mère. Le rôle des femmes dans la transmission de la foi*, ed. Jean Delumeau (Paris: Cerf, 1992), 343–61.

(b) that those women, after having passed their examinations (*pro ministerio*), can be consecrated to the ministry, and will have the right to administer the sacraments;

(c) that the Regional Councils (*Consistoires*) may authorize the Parish Councils to employ these women as "suffrageantes" in all the services of the church: that is, in preaching, religious instruction, pastoral counseling, social work, ecclesiastical acts, etc.; and

(d) that the synodal commission would establish a statute regulating the status of women pastors in the church.

Two interesting points emerge here: first, the decisive argument in this case was the shortage of pastors and not any biblical or theological reason; and second, the practical and contextual background is underlined by the fact that there had been women who had studied theology. The question was: What can these persons bring to the church? The third decision made by the Synod above advises letting these women take over responsibility in the parish work.

Hence three possibilities appear. First, women who have required academic qualifications but who are not yet ordained or "consecrated" (this expression has been preferred to "ordination" in the Reformed churches of France) will have the right to preach, but not to celebrate sacraments; this was Elisabeth Sigel's situation. Second, women who have also completed the practical and ecclesial part of the education (which is called *pro ministerio*) can celebrate the sacraments after their consecration. Third, all women who have fulfilled these conditions can take over a pastoral responsibility; however they are not to be called pastors, but *suffrageantes*, which is the equivalent of "helpers." Today almost the same word, *suffragants*, is used for students or junior pastors who replace a pastor for a short time.

But even such interim situations were so unimaginable that the statute provided restrictive conditions for these women. The statute adopted during the Synod a year later, in 1927, asked for two very specific limitations. First, these women in pastoral responsibility had to remain unmarried: "The employment of a woman in the functions of worship will cease the day of her marriage."[9] This would continue to be the case until the Synod of 1968,[10] although a widow could be

[9] Synodal Paper III, N° 11 (April 1927), 191, 214, 215.

[10] Synodal Paper, v. VIII, N° 8 (February 1969), 405.

accepted for a limited time. Second, this woman would be called the "helper of the pastor" (*aide-pasteur*). This was approved by the French government, but it was added that these women could not become licensed pastors (*pasteurs titulaires*).[11] The possibility for a woman to be a *pasteur titulaire* only came about after the Synod of 1937[12] (and only with the approval of the French government) for those women who had been helpers of the pastor for at least five years, a condition that would last until 1961. It was not possible for them to have a regional presiding responsibility, namely to be *présidents de consistoire*.

We can assume that these two decisions were made primarily to avoid competition between men and women: as long as the men were absent, women could replace them, but the power of decision had to remain in the hands of the men. In addition, the requirement of celibacy, which was limited to the women and is not at all a Protestant habit, can be explained by the fear that their ministry could negatively affect family life and household care. But it must also be said that the French government imposed the same restriction for women who became schoolteachers. For this reason it is difficult to say how far the decision was dependent on the church or the state. It is clear, however, that although this ministry was not yet considered equal to that of the men, it became the gateway to recognition of the public presence and voice of women.

The Synod of this church approved the ordination/consecration of women very early, in 1930, and Berthe Bertsch (1904–1988) was the first woman to be consecrated – on March 23, 1930. She was a pastor's daughter, and had also been a student at the faculty of Protestant theology of Strasbourg, where she received her diploma in 1928. But in fact the parishes had been used to the presence and leadership of women pastors since 1926.

The Debate in the Lutheran Church of Alsace-Lorraine (ECAAL)

In 1929, the Synod of this Lutheran Church (*consistoire supérieur*) adopted a resolution similar to that of its sister-church: women

[11] Official Paper of the Government, 5 July 1927, 215–16.

[12] Synodal Paper v. V, N° 1 (April 1937), 7, and Official Paper of the Government, 20 January 1937.

who had completed the full course of theology could "dedicate their engagement to pastoral help."[13] The resolution was accepted by the French government in November 1929. First the students had to complete an internship of one year under the direction of a pastor (this is still the case today for all candidates), and then they were allowed to perform specific functions: religious instruction, youth work, pastoral counselling – especially for women – and preaching. But preaching was only possible in certain ecclesial institutions – not during Sunday worship in front of the parish – and required a special authorization from the church leaders. The women pastors were still called "helpers of the pastor" (*aide-pasteur*), a situation that also meant a lower salary, and celibacy was imposed as an obligation, while widows could exercise the ministry.

It took an entire generation to see further developments in women's status. The official title of "pastor," instead of "helper of the Pastor," was granted to them in 1948.[14] After 1949 women pastors could also operate alone in the parishes. The rule requiring celibacy was repealed only in 1969.[15] But the requirement was lightened over time: women pastors who occupied a position in religious education at a school, for example, were allowed to marry. In 1959 a new question was asked: Can a divorced woman become a pastor? After discussion, the Synod decided, "The nomination of a woman is however admissible after dissolution of her marriage. . . [But i]t belongs to the Executive Board to decide in each case."[16] This implied an incredible situation: a divorced woman could expect access to pastoral ministry as early as 1959, but it remained impossible for a married woman until 1968. Discussion continued in this church on the question of whether the ministry of women should be treated as "a specialized ministry" or be fully recognized as "the" pastoral ministry. Nevertheless, their ministry was in some sense recognized through all these years.

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[13] Recueil officiel des Actes du Consistoire supérieur et du Directoire de l'Église de la Confession d'Augsbourg [hereafter cited as R.O.], t. 80, pp. 98–99.

[14] R.O., t. 93, p. 89.

[15] R.O., t. 113, pp. 175–77.

[16] R.O., t. 104, p. 301.

The Debate in the Reformed and Lutheran Churches Elsewhere in France

The issue of the ministry of women arose in the other parts of France after 1935 but was postponed because the Protestants were in a process of union between the Reformed and the evangelical wings, which resulted in the creation of the Église Réformée de France (ERF) in 1938. This church discussed the "female ministry" in exceptional situations and with a "pastoral mandate" at the National Synod of 1943. After 1949, The ERF allowed women to become "parish assistants" or "helpers of the parish," "responsible for teaching," or "missionary Ladies."

These tasks were not considered as a service equal to the pastoral ministry, as the Synod affirmed in 1943: "The female ministry, in its various forms, is not the equivalent of the pastoral ministry. It completes it, but does not replace it. It does not have the responsibility of a parish with the loads that are specially attached to it. It does not include the exercise of the preaching in Sunday worship, the administration of the sacraments, and the blessing of marriages." The candidates also had to be prepared for practical work among families with other vocational training (as nurses, teachers, and social workers). If this was not the case, such training had to be finished before entry in ministry.[17]

We can see here the wish to confine women to subordinate tasks or to make them less present in public life, and to restrict their tasks to those more traditionally assigned to women, such as education and social welfare. This at least may be true on paper, but testimonies of the pioneer women who exercised this ministry from the 1930s to the 1960s show that the reality at the grassroots was different, and that they performed all tasks, particularly when they were alone in pastoral responsibility or when no one else was there to chair parish councils or lead worship services.

This is the case, for example, with the ministry of Elisabeth Schmidt (1908–1986), the first woman consecrated in the ERF. She had studied in Geneva from 1931 to 1934, and received, in 1934, the

[17] Jean-Paul Willaime, "Les femmes pasteurs en France: socio-histoire d'une conquête," in *Ni Eve, ni Marie. Luttes et incertitudes des héritières de la Bible*, (ed.) Françoise Lautman, Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1997, p. 133.

award of the Protestant faculty for preaching. She had also previously studied philosophy, and before her ordination in 1949 had been exercising her ministry for 14 years. She was first sent to a little parish in the Cévennes, then from 1942 to 1958 to the city of Sète. The decision to finally ordain her came from the parish council of Sète itself: after two years, the members of this council wrote a letter to the president of the ERF asking for Schmidt's consecration:

> Considering that, in those two years, we could not find anything that would show some inferiority or any failure of the pastor in the performance of a particularly physically and spiritually difficult ministry, the parish Council of Sète expects that, without waiting for a final decision concerning the ordination of women, Miss Schmidt should receive total pastoral consecration.[18]

The national Synod in 1949 agreed to introduce this ordination, but only as an exceptional case:

> The national Synod thinks that the Ministry of women in the ERF is not normally the pastorate in its current form. But the Church can, in exceptional cases of which the national Synod can be the sole judge, give this ministry to a woman with the authority conferred by the consecration to the pastoral ministry, given the fact that this authorization is granted or maintained only for a woman who is not married.[19]

With these restrictions, Elisabeth Schmidt was consecrated on October 20, 1949, in the ERF. The opinion of Marc Boegner, at that time the president of the ERF, surely contributed to this positive decision. As he was, some 20 years ago, the person who recommended to Elisabeth Sigel to engage in a pastoral ministry in the ERAL, one can suppose that he was favourable to women's ministry in general. It is interesting to note that the two Elisabeths met later, in Nancy, where Elisabeth Schmidt would exercise a pastoral ministry, and they participated in the same ecumenical group.

René Voeltzel, in his analysis of these developments, suggests that the question in this church was not addressed, as it had been in Alsace, because of the lack of pastors due to the war. Nor was it di-

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[18] Letter of 1 January 1945, to President Marc Boegner, quoted in the book of Elisabeth Schmidt, *Quand Dieu appelle des femmes* (Paris: Cerf, 1978), 104.

[19] National Synod of Paris-Saint-Esprit, Decision XI, Acts of the Synod, p. 22.

rectly related to the pastoral ministry, as such, but only to the issue of the ministries of women: What could the ministries of women in the church be?[20] On the one hand, we find arguments concerning the specificity of "the" woman and her qualities; on the other hand, we hear the argument that ministry is not bound to a person but is important in itself as a service, and that in Protestant ecclesiology authority is always shared with other leaders in a collegial manner. The same discussions held in 1965 had already taken place in Alsace in 1928. It was in 1966 that the ERF accepted and fully recognized the pastoral ministry of women.

In the Lutheran Church of France (Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne de France), the question was not openly debated, but approached with pragmatism. The ministry of women was fully recognized there after 1973. Geneviève Jonte (1906–1983), daughter and granddaughter of a pastor, was the first woman pastor of this church in the region of Montbéliard.

It is notable that in these four Protestant churches the acceptance of women pastors did not cause fundamental problems for parishioners. In my view, this was because they were prepared by the fact that pastors' wives had, for generations, already assisted their husbands; and, as pastors' daughters, these women knew what the ministry involved and what the needs of the believers were. In spite of the institutional difficulties, their acceptance in the parishes was already granted. These years fall in a period dominated by two wars and their consequences, a time when all rules were broken and boundaries crossed. This created some confusion, but also a new freedom.

It should also be noted that the confessional Reformation churches were not, as one might think, the last to open up to the pastoral ministry. Madeleine Blocher-Saillens (1881–1971) was the first woman Baptist pastor in France. She was daughter and granddaughter of a pastor. and also a pastor's wife. In 1929, she became responsible for the parish founded by her husband, and in 1952 she transmitted it to their son. The Union of Protestant Free Churches in France, a grouping of several evangelical churches, accepted women pastors starting in 1995.[21]

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[20] Voeltzel, *Les ministres*, 45.

[21] Willaime, "Les femmes pasteurs en France," 131.

Elisabeth Sigel left the ministry for two reasons: first, because she was going to be married and would have been obliged to leave anyway, and second, more essentially, because she had discovered Orthodox spirituality and tradition. In fact, she had already been received into the Orthodox Church when she was conducting her ministry in Villé. She stopped when she realized that she couldn't be part of both churches at the same time, but she did not lose her ecumenical spirit and her desire to be a bridge between East and West and between separated churches.

We can hope that her years of theological study have contributed to ecumenical engagement. One of the scholars of her time, Professor Henri Strohl, wrote: "This was the essential contribution of the faculty to the great ecumenical movement: to prepare, for the future, generations of theologians who would be friends during the time of their studies, who would have felt that they were spiritually living on common ground, who would, in the future, more easily live fraternal relationships in large ecumenical meetings."[22]

So Elisabeth could become a true *pontifex*, a bridgebuilder, precisely because she was able to understand two cultures, the two worlds of East and West, and bring together Protestant and Orthodox believers. And in a difficult time, dominated by suspicion after a schism that had lasted for more than a thousand years and was increased by the Cold War, she did it boldly.

[22] Henri Strohl, *Le protestantisme en Alsace* (Strasbourg: Oberlin, 2000), 437.

Chapter Two

The War Years in Nancy: Behr-Sigel's Theology in Action

OLGA LOSSKY

Following her wedding to André Behr in 1933, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel settled in Nancy, where her husband had found a job as a chemist. The Behr family spent almost 40 years in this town. At the beginning, they lived a period of domestic quietness, punctuated by the different jobs of Elisabeth as a teacher and the birth of their two daughters. However, this familial serenity was quickly threatened by the war declaration. André's mobilization in August 1939 had a strong impact on the family life. After one year – during which Elisabeth was sent to Brittany to teach philosophy in a school for refugees – the family eventually met again in Nancy in 1940.

This started a very special moment of the theologian's life during the Occupation. In the discussions I had with her, Elisabeth defined this period as "an extremely intense period of interior life." World War II was for the theologian a fundamental experience in many aspects, in which we can discern the seeds of her further theological positions. During these years, the fight was very intense, not only from a material point of view, in order to survive despite the great shortage, but also from a moral and spiritual point of view. A unique testimony of the interior life of the theologian during this time is contained in the notebooks in which she wrote her everyday thoughts. These war notebooks start in August 1939 and continue until the Liberation. They reveal the theologian's personal progression as well as showing historical events from an inside point of view. Throughout these notebooks, we can follow the double challenge Elisabeth faced in these troubled times: the fight of faith against fear and the fight of evangelical love against hatred. We will follow these

two guidelines, these two fights, to see how the war years in Nancy are the basis of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's later theological commitments.

Fighting Faith with Fear

Elisabeth's Boldness

The war years reveal a character trait of the theologian that she would have till the end of her life: her boldness. This daring can be perceived through concrete situations during the war. For instance, counting on her German origin to protect her, Elisabeth went with Jewish people to police headquarters to act as a translator, despite the danger she was running because of her own Jewish roots. The Behr family also hid a little Jewish girl several times. Elisabeth recounted another time when, seeing was a roundup of Jewish shopkeepers taking place in her street before her very eyes, she wanted to throw herself under the van that took the prisoners away. Her spirit of contestation could thus lead her to have such desperate thoughts.

This daring was sometimes tinged with bravado. All through the war, the theologian kept a little tricolour flag at the bottom of a picture of Strasbourg in her living room, which was never noticed by any German soldier. Furthermore, once, having obtained a pass to go to her hometown to see her father, Elisabeth came back with a truck full of black market food, as well as some china hidden in her daughters' pajamas. She then found a way to be taken home from the railway station in a car belonging to the German army. Another time, when the fight between the Germans and the Allied troops came to a climax, Elisabeth, who was expecting a son at that time, took her daughters to a field in Nancy to watch the bombings.

The theologian thus presents us with the image of an adventurous young lady who didn't shy away from taking risks, sometimes even useless risks, not only to help her relatives survive but to break the atmosphere of fear and the tendency to withdraw into oneself during the war. Later, this daring would play an important role in the theologian's positions. She would never fear tackling sensitive subjects, such as the controversial question of the role of women in the church or the jurisdictions' quarrels in France. Her pugnacity, which would allow her to follow each reflection to its end, was revealed through this war experience, as was the strong and decisive character by which she would be known in the theological domain.

Abandonment to the Will of God

Although this daring could sometimes turn into rashness, Elisabeth was nevertheless extremely affected by the uncertainty of the war times. The events her notebooks relate during the time of André's mobilization show how insecure her future was. Life had to be built day by day, with no planning of possible projects for the next day. "There are some sunny days when we forget war," she writes in September 1939. "However, we have to deal with it. It could appear as an anguishing and terrifying adventure that would disrupt the narrow frameworks of our bourgeois life and would have led us to give ourselves to our real measure, to accomplish something. It is actually, especially at the moment, a wait without doing anything, neither knowing anything about the day after." The war thus appears as an unbearable uncertainty, not as much as an opportunity for heroic actions as the strong character of Elisabeth would prefer. The real heroism is to accept events with patience, which turned to be a very difficult fight for the theologian.

Her notebooks reveal this fight against the fear and the despair she endured at every moment. A few days after her husband was mobilized, Elisabeth decided to find a refuge with her daughters close to Paris in order to avoid the threat of imminent fights. After attending a mass, she noted in her notebook: "The words of the Gospel reading from that day fall into my heart and embed themselves deeply there: 'Do not worry about your life . . . nor about your body. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest will be given you as well. Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble on its own.'"[1] All the war would be for Elisabeth a struggle to abandon herself totally to God's will.

Everyday life during this period was unpredictable. The Behr family was, like everyone else, at the mercy of historical events. This is shown in the chronology of the family's moves. In September 1939, Elisabeth obtained a post as teacher on the other side of France, in Brittany. At first, when she had no news of her mobilized husband, the words "anguish" and "uncertainty" frequently appeared in her

[1] Olga Lossky, *Towards the Endless Day: A Life of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre-Dame Press, 2010), 66.

notebook. Once the family was gathered together again in Nancy, in September 1940, the situation was not much better. Elisabeth had to give up her new post of teacher because it was too far from home. She was consumed by the need to find food every day, and there were many other causes of anguish for her, among which the health of her elder daughter was prominent. After 1943, we read of the hope of the Germans' capitulation in Elisabeth's notebook. She lived with the rhythm of the news from the battlefields. Soon the bombings became intensive, even in Nancy, and the family house was touched several times. When Elisabeth gave birth to her son in 1944, she could hear the sound of artillery.

As she faced this tenuous dramatic situation, not knowing what would happen from one day to the next, the theologian progressively learned to abandon herself more and more to God's will. She would eventually reach a point where she felt carried by a strength that transcended the difficulties of the period. "These last few weeks," she wrote in 1940 just after she returned to Nancy, "have been full of providential signs and of indications, of miracles."[2] In the surrounding chaos, some significant events made the young woman feel how much she'd been supported. For example, by providential luck she met up again with her husband in a train in 1940 on her way to Nancy to see if it would be possible to come back with the girls. In the same spirit, also in 1940, she obtained a pass to Strasbourg that was, according to her, "totally unexpected," so she could go and see her father, whom she had not seen for two years. Step by step, throughout the uncertainty of the events and the everyday struggle for life, Elisabeth was led to discern the work of Providence in every aspect and to put herself into God's hands. However, she had to carry on an interior fight at every moment to keep her trust in God and not to be submerged by anguish. Making a comment about the sentence in the Lord's Prayer "Thy kingdom come," she exclaimed, "What can I do at the moment for His kingdom? It seems so much that here it is now the kingdom of Antichrist" (30 August 1940).

Through this fight between faith and anguish, Elisabeth learned to open herself to what was given at the moment, especially the immediate beauty of nature to which she was very sensitive during these hard times, for its contrast with the atmosphere of harsh-

[2] Ibid., 76.

ness. "I can't help rejoicing in this extraordinary summer. With this anxiety, it seems to me that my joy in living becomes stronger than ever,"[3] she wrote while she was in Brittany. Also, the very rare moments of family camping, above the Gerardmer Lake, appeared as a precious haven of peace. "It is nice to lie down on the warm, moss-covered stones in the middle of the afternoon and be cradled by the shivering in murmuring silence of the pine forest. And then . . . you have to return to everyday life with the errands for provisions, the lines, the tickets, whatever has to be done to stave off hunger."[4]

In this hardship, the theologian seemed to come out fortified in her faith in God, as she wrote in 1942 just after a bombing: "Amid the collapse of everything, faith endures."[5] The interior fight remained constantly present, however, until the end, and would become more intense as the Liberation got closer. "It's hard to see God in all this terrible disorder," she wrote in September 1944. "What can be seen are pathetic human beings and demons." And further: "Lord have mercy. I don't have the strength for any other prayer."[6] The theologian thus went through the depths of humanity's distress during those years. However, even in the darkest moments, she kept putting herself into God's hands. We can say that these war years were the occasion for her to have a deep experience of the sentence that God gave to Saint Silouan: "Keep your mind in hell and do not fall in despair." Elisabeth built on this intense interior fight against fear and anguish to forge her future personal strength, and, above all, her firm belief that God would never abandon her. This very deep faith would be the basis of all her theological thought, with its lively and existential dimension.

The Prayer of the Heart

In the violence of the spiritual fight to defeat fear and despair, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel clung to church. First, she had the experience of the strength that comes from eucharistic communion in such circumstances. She wrote about the "immense blessing of frequent communion" (18 November 1941). She also had the experience of how

[3] Ibid., 73.

[4] Ibid., 80.

[5] Ibid., 86.

[6] Ibid., 93.

vital prayer is, as she wrote: "I have never felt the power of prayers as palpably as I do know"[7] (25 October 1940). Facing such a chaos, without any news from relatives and friends, she found that only prayer remained as a strong spiritual link between people. Elisabeth could thus feel how close her family was, despite their remaining in Strasbourg, as well as her Parisian friends, among whom was Father Sergius Bulgakov and Father Lev Gillet, who had settled in London. Bulgakov's letters gave Elisabeth great relief as well as an orientation to her spiritual fight. She wrote in 1941: "Father Bulgakov's letters helped me to have a discipline."

Among other things, the theologian found her strength in the Jesus Prayer, which she practised as much as she could: during the endless queues in front of shops or while cycling in the countryside from one farm to another trying to find butter and eggs. The Jesus Prayer would be the subject of one of the few intellectual works she would have time to pursue during the war. The title of her eventual essay was "The Jesus Prayer, or the Mystery of Orthodox Monastic Spirituality," published in 1947 in the journal *Dieu Vivant*. This essay is an illustration of the scholarly talents of Elisabeth and her theological precision. But above all, its authenticity came from the sincere practice of the Jesus prayer, deeply lived at the heart of fear. She wrote: "For the person aware of his own misery, this prayer was no longer a 'merit-earning work' pleasing to God but rather a cry of the heart, a cry of despair and hope, an irresistible and never-ending need to call upon Christ to help us in our powerlessness, in our struggles against the forces of Satan and against our own evil inclinations, which make us accomplices of the devil."[8] This study of the Jesus Prayer was the contact point between the reflection the theologian started in the 1930s about Russian spirituality and the application of this spirituality to her own life. Such an experience of prayer would strengthen her interest in spiritual issues, which she would later go into much more deeply.

The war years were thus for Elisabeth a spiritual fight to keep her trust in God despite the innumerable difficulties that characterized the period. She had the opportunity to deepen her faith while making the most of her natural daring and overcoming the tempta-

[7] Ibid., 76.

[8] Ibid., 97.

tion to despair. She would also have the experience of the Jesus Prayer, by which she would strengthen her real contact with the living God. The following is a prayer Elisabeth wrote on 8 August 1943: "Blessed be You for all this, and grant that I might never lose the spiritual sense of Life."[9] We can affirm that she not only kept this spiritual sense of life to the end of her very long existence, but tirelessly transmitted it through her thought and personality.

Fighting Hatred with Evangelical Love

Elisabeth's spiritual maturation during those years of fighting bore fruit and gave her the strength to act as a witness of the gospel during a period when the notion of human dignity was threatened. Her time was devoted to her friends and her family, to finding food for them, but also to all those she met who were in distress.

A Link between Two Nations

In those years of the Occupation, when two nations at war lived together, Elisabeth had a special role to play. Thanks to her birth in Strasbourg at a time when Alsace still belonged to Germany and to her mother's German nationality, the theologian benefited from a German education. Therefore, she felt as German as she did French. For her, a war that opposed two nations to which she felt the same attachment was a cross to bear. She had already noticed the growing hatred between the two countries during her stay in Berlin in 1931. She wrote to her fiancé at that time: "We have to systematically work among our circles of friends to dissipate the lies that people believe about one another."[10] In 1940, during the invasion of France, Elisabeth noticed with relief that the German soldiers, as she put it, "have been received with more curiosity than fear."[11] All through the war, she never hesitated to speak in German with them, as she knew the language perfectly. Elisabeth thus tried to have friendly relationships with both sides. For Christmas 1944, she invited two young German telephonists who lived next to her: "The children sang some old French carols, then the German women sang: *Stille Nacht, heilige*

[9] Ibid., 88.

[10] Ibid., 41.

[11] Ibid., 73.

Nacht in two-part harmony. . . . We all felt like crying. Silent communion, beyond all words and yet what an insurmountable wall of misunderstanding and distress separates us."[12] The theologian kept always in mind the reality of the human person she had in front of her, even if that person belonged to the enemy. She refused to give way to the climate of hatred, even if she felt very close to the victims of the Nazi barbarity because of her Jewish origins. Elisabeth always found herself at the crossroads of two worlds: German and French, Protestant and Orthodox, Jewish and Christian, Oriental and Occidental, and so on. This position explains her constant will – to the end of her life – to build bridges, to create a dialogue between two different realities.

Faith in Human Dignity

In this perspective, Elisabeth didn't cease to act according to her faith in human dignity and the necessity of love commanded by the gospel. In those times of racial hatred, the requirement of love involved risks that could lead to martyrdom. However, Elisabeth wasn't afraid to hide the daughter of a Jewish colleague of André in her home, claiming the child was a cousin of her own children. Thanks to telephone contact with Mother Maria Skobtsova, Elisabeth was able to organize evacuation of the child and her mother to a free area.

Elisabeth would join in this fight for human dignity rooted in compassion for the suffering neighbour all her life. It would be visible in her commitment to such organizations as ACAT, which fights for the abolition of torture, or CIMADE, which takes care of refugees, but she would also involve herself in a less visible way in everyday life. For instance, a few days before her death she took in a young Iranian couple from the Orthodox parish of Manchester, and wrote a speech in their defense to prevent them from being expelled from Great Britain.

The Ecumenical Group

It was especially through a small group of friends gathered around the Behr family that this type of mutual help was organized during the war. A fraternity network was created so that people could

[12] Ibid., 88–89.

assist one another. Elisabeth was one of the pillars of this group, which was constituted by what was in the heart of all its members: faith in Christ. It was therefore naturally ecumenical, gathering the Protestant Joss family living upstairs from the Behrs; Pastor Mathiot of the Resistance; Doctor Châtelain, a Catholic neighbour; the Mojaïskys, who were Russian Orthodox colleagues of André; and a few other people from various confessions. Some meetings took place at the Behrs' house. It was an occasion both to share theological thinking and to help one another. Discussions about faith were very deep. Elisabeth sent reports of the gatherings to Sergius Bulgakov, who described them, in one of his letters to the theologian, as "events of the spiritual life." At the same time, the people in the group supported each other during these difficult moments, sharing the little food they managed to obtain. When Elisabeth's bicycle was stolen one day, a Protestant friend gave her another. Doctor Châtelain provided the group with vegetables from his garden. All had discreet common activities to protect other people in danger because of the roundups, but nobody knew precise details about the commitments of the others in the Resistance.

The ecumenical group was not well received by the ecclesiastical authorities, which gave it a clandestine dimension. It thus appeared as an authentic experience of the evangelical life together, despite dogmatic and historical difference – similar to how it must have been in the early days of the church when the first Christians shared everything, even the risk of persecution. This intense interconfessional fraternity constituted for Elisabeth the real basis for all her later ecumenical activity. From this point on, throughout the many ecumenical initiatives in which she was involved, she kept looking for this climate of fellowship characterized by a common life in Christ. She tried to deepen common theological reflection – especially at the WCC, in which she played an important part – as well as to act concretely against injustice with other Christians – as in ACAT or CIMADE.

Thus the war years in Nancy represent for Elisabeth Behr-Sigel a moment of intense struggle from a spiritual and evangelical point of view. In the face of a chaotic situation and despite the difficulties of the times, she fought to keep all her faith in God. In the face of dehumanization, she kept her eyes fixed on what was essential: respect for all human beings and love of her neighbour. This experi-

ence fundamentally formed the theologian's personality and thought and put her faith to the test, obliging her to embody her convictions through actions that could have cost her life. From this ordeal, Elisabeth understood how deep evil can be and how necessary it is to fight against it with love. Although the war ended with the armistice in 1945, the fight was nevertheless not finished for Elisabeth: throughout her life, the theologian would, thanks to her audacity and pugnacity, keep fighting for the triumph of her faith in Christ and express more and more of this faith in her actions and thought.

Chapter Three

The Religious Thought of Alexander Bukharev (1824-1871) and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel

MICHEL EVDOKIMOV

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel had a paradoxical personality. She was deeply Christian in her inner freedom, which motivated her to explore new approaches hardly ever discussed at her time – such as the role of women in the church – or which were almost completely unknown during the past century, such as the world of Russian religious thought. She acquired a deep knowledge of this thought, which she articulated with great talent and sensitivity, as if this French woman had been brought up in a completely Russian environment.

Indeed, she did marry a Russian, and was on close terms with several professors of the Saint Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, such as Father Sergius Bulgakov and George Fedotov, whose works deeply influenced her. She became acquainted with lay theologians Vladimir Lossky and also Paul Evdokimov, with whom she was on very friendly terms until his death. These theologians were all great witnesses of Russia, their native country. It is remarkable to see that this woman, who belonged to a Protestant church during the first part of her life, and who was imbued with French culture, managed to play a leading role in initiating the French people in the spirituality of distant and remote Russia. Through Elisabeth's writings, this Russia, its churches decorated with luminous icons and crowned with elaborate cupolas, becomes close and familiar, and its saints seem to enter into dialogue with all of humankind.

In her first book, published in 1950, *Prayer and Holiness in the Russian Church*, Elisabeth demonstrates a far-reaching knowledge of all that pertains to the development of Christianity in Russia. But I want now to focus on her second major book concerning Russian spiritual thought, which is devoted to Alexander Bukharev (1824-1871), a Russian monk and a great theologian of the 19th century. It

was my father, Paul Evdokimov, who introduced Elisabeth to the ideas of this monk, of whom he used to say, "His thought is ahead of us."

Elisabeth worked hard on this book over many years and it eventually became a doctoral thesis that she defended at a French university. We cannot but be struck by the astonishing familiarity and spiritual affinity between the 19th-century monk and Elisabeth. Both had a peaceful and at the same time tormented soul. In this respect, Elisabeth definitely had a Russian character. Both suffered from the discrepancy between the ideal of beauty, prayer, and holiness in the Russian Church, which filled them with admiration, and the disappointing life of the church institution, whose squabbles and tensions are far from the exalted vision of "*sobornost*" – that is, the conception of the church as communion. Both Elisabeth and Bukharev were impatient, and both had prophetic overtones.

Alexander Bukharev was the son of a Russian deacon, one of the poor members of the clergy living in the countryside (just as in France or in England, the Russian country clergy at that time were often poor.). As a child Alexander asked his father, "Is it true that God is very poor?" "Why?" his father asked. "Because he loves the poor so much," the boy responded. The boy had a keen awareness and a lively intelligence.

He studied theology at the famous Trinity-Saint Sergius monastery near Moscow but always maintained a strong interest in secular culture, literature, philosophy, painting, and music. He read voraciously, including the novels of Gogol (his contemporary) and of Walter Scott, and the plays of Shakespeare. At that time in Russia there prevailed a sharp conflict between the church and secular culture. Many members of the clergy felt unconcerned with the worldly expressions of art, or were even openly hostile to them, neglecting the fact that secular culture paints the way in which men, God's creatures, live, suffer, and rejoice, or gives voice to those who have no voice. In this way, secular culture turned increasingly away from the church and from church life. This tragic divergence, which is still the case today in Russia and also in Western countries, would prove fatal when the time of revolution came. In her thought, Elisabeth maintains a fair balance between the two cultures: as a Christian she immersed herself deeply in theological studies while displaying a keen interest in the various expressions of secular art. Together with these interests, throughout her life Elisabeth was also involved in various

creative and humanitarian actions, including the very important role she played in the work of ACAT (Action des chrétiens pour l'abolition de la torture) as an Orthodox vice-president.

Alexander Bukharev became a teacher of theology and philosophy at the Moscow Theological Academy. He liked to mix with his students, to join in their conversations, never appearing as a distant, haughty professor or a demagogue. When any member of the student community committed a serious misdeed, he would pray, fast, and suffer inwardly. His disciples would say that he had a remarkable gift to teach a living theology, far from the dry, abstract idealism that dominated the church at that time.

The Monk

As a young professor, Bukharev sought to develop his own approach. The official religion of the church could not satisfy or appease him. It bore the weight of the institution and was hampered by a strict ritualism. The main problem he had to solve was how to reconcile the mystical life with the worldly reality. He was drawn towards a monasticism that would not mean withdrawing from this world, but on the contrary would be united with all people, be they Christians, Jews, or Muslims, in a different and new way. He found inspiring models in the long line of Russian saints, such as Sergius of Radonezh, who civilized part of the north of Russia by founding monasteries; Tikhon of Zadonsk, who was the model of Dostoevsky's figure of a modern saint in his novel *The Demons*; and Seraphim of Sarov, who greeted each of his visitors with, "My joy, Christ is risen!"

The church in the 19th century, according to Bukharev, does not fulfill its true mission when it fails to denounce social plagues and injustices, especially the shameful reality of serfdom. He believed that the church should illuminate social relations and economic structures as well as the creative effort of thinkers and artists.

The Split between the Church and the Intelligentsia

The split between the church and the intelligentsia would continue to widen until the outbreak of the revolution. The intelligentsia was divided between the Slavophiles, who wanted to preserve the ancient traditions and the Christian faith of Russia, and the Westernizers, who were keen on propagating the Western Enlightenment,

rationalism, and the democratic spirit in Russia. The leader of the Westernizers was a publicist called Belinsky who at first had ardently admired the literary works of the author Nikolai Gogol. But when Gogol wrote an explanation of the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, the publicist responded with an unquenchable fury and published articles full of violent abhorrence for the church, for its beliefs such as asceticism or pietism, and full of hatred for Christ himself. This irretrievable denial of the sacred would later find an echo in the person of Lenin.

The young monk Bukharev felt distressed, full of anguish, when contemplating his country torn apart by these two antagonistic movements, full of passion and hatred for one another. On the one side, there are those who preach highly spiritual ideals but betray them by neglecting to incarnate them in a culture that should be progressively permeated with the Holy Spirit of God; and on the other side, those who profess to be the defenders of the dignity of human beings but forget or ignore that such dignity can reach its fullness only in the God made human. In Dostoevsky's novel *The Demons*, a revolutionary called Shigalov discloses his program as starting with absolute freedom and inevitably ending with absolute despotism. This program became reality in the Revolution of 1917, in the confrontation of two Russias: a Christian Russia, rooted in the contemplative and mystical tradition of the Eastern Church, and a Russia fascinated by the Western Enlightenment, with its liberal ideas, its faith in rationality, and its efficiency.

What Is to Be Done?

At the heart of both Alexander Bukharev's and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's thought is a criticism of the dissociation between a Christianity closed in on itself, confined in a liturgical piety, full of beauty but where the creative spirit is absent, and a secular culture in decline, which moves away from God and its vital sources, which continues fruitlessly and is unable to give sense to life. According to Elisabeth, there is a parallel with 20th-century France, dominated by Marxism and dialectical materialism, where the philosophies of the absurd, of a desperate nihilism, of abstract structuralism, are in full sway. With Michel Foucault, man is but an epiphenomenon that is doomed to disappear.

So, what is to be done? Far from the great fractures of the modern world, a return to the dogma of the Godhead-humanity that is at the core of the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon, which proclaimed that in the person of Christ the human and the divine are united, without confusion and without separation; such should be the calling of the church: to be in the world, prevent it from becoming a place of suffering and injustice, and strive hard to transform it into a place of transfiguration. Soloviev used to say that men should not dream of changing the world into a paradise, but should rather seek to prevent it from becoming hell. Elisabeth noticed that this position is akin to that of Saint Theresa of Lisieux, who invites us "to sit down at table with sinners and people of bad repute," and the 20th-century Saint Silouan the Athonite, who heard the Lord telling him, "Keep your mind in hell and do not despair."

We are here at the core of Bukharev's as well as Elisabeth's message. For both, authentic Orthodoxy changes the way a Christian considers the world and other people, be they pagans, Jews, Muslims, or atheists. A church father said, "in any person contemplate God." Indeed, God took on himself human nature in order to save the world, to save humanity. Modern society tends increasingly to a form of Arianism. This heresy, as we know, sees in Christ a mere creature, not the Son of God, and does not recognize in him the supreme principle, the fundamental source of everything. Today, the Christian part of society in France perceives Jesus in the same way; according to recent statistics, 40 percent of French people who identify as Christians do not believe in Christ's resurrection. Arianism is the denial of the Fourth Ecumenical Council held in Chalcedon in 454, which decreed that the human and the divine natures are equally and fully united in the person of Christ. In a meditation on Christmas, Bukharev proposes that the incarnation dogma, in its Christological and anthropological aspects, calls for a concrete engagement in the battle against contemporary social injustices such as serfdom, anti-Semitism, and the negation of human dignity in the persons of the weak, the poor, and the oppressed.

The church should come out of the intimacy, the ritualism in which it is enclosed as in a ghetto. Bukharev does not condemn rites in general but the rigid, dry way in which they are sometimes lived. That does not mean the church should turn toward a horizontal, humanitarian activism. Its vocation is the *theosis*, the transformation,

the transfiguration of the world in the light of the Spirit. Our monk is a prophet in the full sense of the world, which means proclaiming the divine word in the face of the world. Today, the church must descend from heaven in order to raise humankind up to heaven. All that is to be done with a deep sense of repentance, and with a strong sense of solidarity with all people.

Conclusion

Bukharev was the forerunner of a new spiritual spring that is late in arriving. He finds his place in the Eastern Christian tradition of Saint Simeon the New Theologian, Saint Gregory Palamas, and Saint Seraphim of Sarov. He had great successors, such as Pavel Florensky, Serge Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Paul Evdokimov. In a distorted world, both East and West have to join their efforts in a deep sense of humility, of responsibility for the future of the world. We have neither to judge nor to condemn anything that is human, except what belongs to the horror of sin, and to assume the integrity of the human in the kenotic Christ, both human and divine. Thus Bukharev's way of analyzing the modern world in the light of the venerable and holy tradition of the Eastern Church fascinated Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, for it inspired her own ideas and outlook on modern life and enriched her own faith and love for the God made human.

Chapter Four

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, Celia Deane-Drummond, and Sophiology

ANTOINE ARJAKOVSKY

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel is known principally for her original reflections on the place of women in the church. Her major thesis, that there is no theological argument within Christian doctrine adequate to deny a woman's ascension to the priesthood, is much debated. But few have asked about the sources of her thought, about what it was that allowed her to formulate an anthropology so original and yet so Orthodox. I would like to suggest in what follows that this French theologian drew a part of her inspiration from sapiential theology. More precisely still, it was her encounter with Father Sergius Bulgakov, the notorious theologian of the Wisdom of God, that constituted the principal inspiration for her personal synthesis.

Bulgakov was a professor at the Saint-Serge Institute of Orthodox Theology in Paris between 1925 and 1944. Starting in 1929 – the date of Elisabeth's conversion to Orthodoxy Christianity – he became her confessor and spiritual father and remained so until the end of his days. Elisabeth thus knew him very well and was one of his rare disciples to know his thought in all its depth. This permitted her to adopt an attitude full of discernment during the great dispute over sophiology that took place in Paris between 1926 and 1944.

In order to support my thesis, I would like first of all to return to the article Elisabeth Behr-Sigel wrote in 1938–39 for the journal *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse* on the subject of Bulgakov's sophiology. Then, secondly, I would like to place Behr-Sigel's work alongside that of a British theologian and scientist, Celia Deane-Drummond, since the latter is, like the first, an informed sophiologist and theologian very sensitive to the themes of divine creation and the place of women in the church. We will reach in this way a better understanding not only of the dynamic of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's work,

but also of the extraordinary contemporary fecundity of a current of thought that she sustained for nearly three-quarters of a century.

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and the Wisdom of God

Let us begin with the famous dispute about Sophia. This is not the place to present in detail this violent debate that shattered the Russian church and intelligentsia between the world wars.[1] Let us simply remember that two camps opposed each other, principally in Paris on September 7, 1935, the date of the condemnation of Bulgakov's theses on the wisdom of God by Metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky of Moscow. Certain professors of Saint-Serge – such as Leon Zander, Georges Fedotov, Anton Kartachev, Bishop Cassien Bezobrazov, Vladimir Iljine, and so forth – supported the vision of the professor of dogmatic theology, believing that the nature of God did not have to be understood in an abstract fashion and that the *ousia* of God was not other than the figure of the Wisdom of God that appeared in an enigmatic fashion in the book of Proverbs speaking in the first person.

In addition to the primate of the Russian Church, the other camp was composed of Metropolitan Seraphim Sobolev of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia whose seat was at that time located in Serbia, who vigorously condemned Bulgakov's doctrine on October 30, 1935, and a number of other important personages such as Vladimir Lossky, then a doctoral candidate at the Sorbonne; Alexis Stavrovsky, student at Saint-Serge; Georges Florovsky, professor of patristics at Saint-Serge; and Sergius Tchetverikov, then chaplain of the youth movement of the Action Chrétienne des Etudiants Russes. To this group can be added Emmanuel Lanne, a Benedictine monk at the Abbey of Chevetogne, and Lev Gillet, an Orthodox monk and theologian friend of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, both of whom published mixed reports on sophiology in 1936. This second group took upon itself the task of criticizing Bulgakov for mixing without discernment in his theology the nature of God with the trinitarian persons. For

[1] A detailed discussion of the debate can be found in my book, *La Génération des Penseurs Religieux de l'Emigration Russe* (Paris and Kiev: Dukhi i Litera, 2000), recently translated into English as *The Way: Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and Their Journal, 1925-1940*, trans. Jerry Ryan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013).

these thinkers, sophiology was a pantheistic doctrine that effaced the limits between God and his creation. Suspicious about a non-hypostatic reality at the heart of the Trinity, they insisted on a mystical, apophatic approach to the divine life.

The first group responded to these criticisms in several works. Starting in 1936, Bulgakov composed a twofold response, meant especially for Metropolitan Evlogy, where he responded point by point to all the criticisms and did not hesitate to point out the deficiencies of the occasionalist soteriology of Bishop Stragorodsky and the pietism of Bishop Sobolev. In the journal *La Tradition Vivante*, published in 1937 by the YMCA Press with the support of Berdiaev, the professors of Saint-Serge and in particular Ivan Lagovsky brought to light the "tritheism" and "nominalism" of sophiology's adversaries.

The widespread recollection in the Orthodox world today usually forgets that before the War, the intellectual, spiritual, and ecclesial victory belonged to the first group. After 1944, which is to say after the death of Bulgakov, the generation of thinkers born at the beginning of the 20th century – sadly still more affected by the wrenching experience of exile in a way that was not the case for the previous generation – imposed an apophatic theology on Orthodoxy, banning any renewal of kataphatic patristic theology. But before 1944, it was the generation of the "silver age" of Russian thought that won the battle for the truth. Indeed, the commission chaired by Bishop John Leontchukov that Metropolitan Evlogy had gathered together to respond to the double condemnation of Bulgakov by Metropolitan Stragorodsky of Moscow and Metropolitan Sobolev of Sofia, Bulgaria, concluded, after two years' work, on July 6, 1937, that there was nothing heretical in the thought of Bulgakov.

Florovsky and Tschetverikov, who were part of the commission, had no other choice but to assent to this conclusion. They published a document in the annex to the resolution of the commission underlining three "weak points" in Bulgakov's sophiology but without challenging the rehabilitation of the theologian. They even admitted that the ecclesial condemnations of the Muscovite Church and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia had been hasty. As the declaration of Metropolitan Stragorodsky had no canonical status (since it hadn't been signed by his synod), and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia to which Metropolitan Sobolev belonged was not at that time recognized by either the patriarchate of Moscow

or the patriarchate of Constantinople, only the decision of the Exarchate of the Russian Church, placed under the omophor of the ecumenical Patriarchate, prevailed.[2]

It was in this context that Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, close to Vladimir Lossky and Sergius Bulgakov at the same time, published an article on the eve of the Second World War in the *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse*.[3] The young theologian of 32 years rejected with authority the accusations "of having introduced a dualism into the heart of the Trinity" against Bulgakov. She showed that Bulgakov had avoided the errors of Soloviev, in his referring meticulously to the commentaries of the fathers of the church, which concentrated as much as on created Wisdom as uncreated Wisdom. She knew that the Russian theologian did not consider the Wisdom of God to be a hypostasis, that it is to say an awareness of itself that belongs only to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Bulgakov considered Wisdom to be like a "hypostasibility," like the capacity by which each creature arranges to turn itself toward its creator, like the faculty that possesses all uncreated energy to mount back up to its personal source. Against Lossky, who, following the example of Latin scholasticism, thought of Wisdom as an attribute of God, she understood the Wisdom of God as "the love of love," as the divino-humanity in action. Behr-Sigel did not hesitate even to show her annoyance at the kind of Orthodox theology that identifies Orthodoxy with fideism. For her, Bulgakov "by his living ontology makes us leave the ruts of scholastic Aristotelianism where we have often remained, stuck in that which concerns our trinitarian theology."[4] For her, as for the Eastern patristic Tradition, it is necessary to understand the divine-

[2] It would be good if the Russian Church today would recognize this fact and undertake the rehabilitation of Bulgakov's sophiology, notably in introducing his teaching in theological seminaries. Metropolitan of Volokolamsk Hilarion Alfeyev began to do this before he was called to new responsibilities, but we can imagine that his present position permits him to take another step in this direction. I believe that this could contribute towards the restoration of the fabric sadly torn since the time of the Russian emigration.

[3] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "La Sophiologie du Père Serge Boulgakoff," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 2 (1939), 130–58, reprinted in *Le Messager orthodoxe* 57:1 (1972), 21–48. Citations taken from the latter.

[4] Ibid., 48.

human union as *perichoresis*, as a circle of glorification between God and humanity, and not as a watertight coexistence in Christ of two spirits, divine and human.

The Orthodox theologian Behr-Sigel mastered her subject so well that she concluded her article by posing an essential question, a question that had occurred at the same time to Bulgakov himself: "How can the sophiological conception of the progressive deification of the world be reconciled with the apocalyptic eschatology of the New Testament?" Between 1939 and 1944, Bulgakov sought to respond to precisely this question in composing two major works, *The Bride of the Lamb* and *The Revelation according to Saint John*. He took up again in particular the intuition of Gregory of Nyssa on the "eternal now," in the course of which the cosmos is created with humanity at its heart to understand the dynamic relation between time and eternity, created wisdom and uncreated wisdom. Be that as it may, we can only establish that a degree of intimacy existed between the dean of Saint-Serge and the young French theologian. To show further the link between sophiology and the anthropology of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, it is fitting to make a little contemporary detour to study the work of another female disciple of Bulgakov.

Celia Deane-Drummond and the Wisdom of God

Celia Deane-Drummond is a Roman Catholic professor of theology and biological sciences at the University of Chester in the United Kingdom. In the year 2000, she dedicated to Bulgakov one of her major works, *Creation through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology*.[5] In this article she critiqued, following the example of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, all theories of creation that cannot distinguish between the creator and his creature and only amount to a pantheistic representation of the world. She says that she appreciates the theses of James Lovelock uniquely in that their theories on Gaia/the earth have permitted the reintegration of the immanence of God in the process of evolution. But she reproaches the English scientist for not having sufficiently drawn out the consequences of the sufferings of the creation and of the dreadful disappearance of great numbers of

[5] Celia Deane-Drummond, *Creation through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

species in the course of this evolution. According to her, only a sophianic Christology permits us to understand the creational process as an eschatological phenomenon of co-creation. It is here that the work of Bulgakov plays an essential role in the vision of the British biologist: "to restrict Wisdom to Christology does not do justice to the variety of the Wisdom texts. . . . It is fair to say that Bulgakov has incorporated the personal nature of God into God's being, but a separation of person and nature in the way Lossky seems to suggest is unnecessary and artificial."[6]

Creation, according to both Deane-Drummond and Bulgakov, is inseparable from the divine work of incarnation and redemption. This is why she understands evolution as a cross associating the natural order with the ethical order of the divine-human relation. She refuses to reduce wisdom to pure rationality, as in the tragic replacement of Sophia by Logos in medieval theology.[7] In her sapiential approach, science is no longer separated from virtue. According to her, positivistic evolutionism, incapable of distinguishing between the different qualities of temporality and with a Richard Dawkinsian fixation on the behaviour of the "egoistic gene," does not manage to explain certain anomalies of evolution or certain complexities of human behaviour, such as celibacy.

This reconsideration of trinitarian essentialism, in favour of a biblical and sapiential vision, consequently leads Deane-Drummond to rehabilitating the dynamic character of femininity in creation. She agrees with Anglican theologian Sarah Coakley that the feminine should be thought of in a trinitarian fashion. Traditionally, theologians have associated the feminine with the Holy Spirit. In the same way that Behr-Sigel amicably reproached her friend Paul Evdokimov for his "reduction" of the feminine to the Holy Spirit, Deane-Drummond rejects a theology that sees Mary only as a figure of passivity. She refuses just as much a certain feminist theology that wishes to return to a primitive matriarchy.

> While I am fully in favor of using Sophia-Wisdom as a means of reimaging the Trinity, I would prefer a *transforming* role of Wisdom, so that she becomes the *feminine face of God*. . . . There is a sense, then, that God can be thought of as having the character of both

[6] Ibid., 91.

[7] Ibid., 136.

> Mother and Father. This goes beyond Moltmann's suggestion of a 'Motherly Father,' while refusing to go as far as Johnson in her proposed image of God as Mother.[8]

Deane-Drummond adds that if we translate Proverbs 8:22 as "YHWH acquired me" (instead of "created me"), we perceive better the dynamic and uncreated nature of Wisdom. We understand better the work within creation of Wisdom, which searches eternally to lead creation toward its fulfillment. In this sense, Deane-Drummond understands Bulgakovian pan*en*theism as a participation of the created world in the divine body, a participation whose playful quality (Prov. 8:30) the Bible describes to us and whose eschatological or synchronic character we can today begin to imagine. Deane-Drummond cites in this respect John Polkinghorne, the contemporary British Anglican physicist and theologian, professor of mathematical physics at the University of Cambridge until 1979. Famous for his formula according to which "nature is cloud-like rather than clock-like," Polkinghorne takes very seriously the notion of parallel universes existing in synchronic fashion. After all, writes Deane-Drummond, this is exactly what Christians suggest in speaking of their unity with the communion of saints. In this perspective, natural law is understood by the Catholic theologian as a participation of the created world and the terrestrial Jerusalem with eternal law and the celestial Jerusalem.

Thus the sophiological work of Bulgakov has enriched two talented women theologians. His intuitions about the femininity of God opened up for Behr-Sigel a new representation of the place of women in the church and for Deane-Drummond a postmodern conception of evolution as a great theanthropic work. This of course has many consequences. Thus the growing rediscovery of the world of theology and of sapiential anthropology could equally well have repercussions in the evolution of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue and in particular in ecumenical and inter-religious education.[9] Theirs is a vision of an ecumenical world, yet another common point in the works of Bulgakov, Behr-Sigel, and Deane-Drummond.

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[8] Ibid., p134.

[9] It is this that emerges from a recent article by Turkish thinker Mehmet Önal, "Wisdom as a Holistic Basis for Inter-religious Education," in *International Handbook of Inter-religious Education*, ed. Kath Engebretson et al. (New York: Springer, 2011).

Chapter Five

According to the Whole: Behr-Sigel's Ecclesiological Vision

TEVA REGULE

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed proclaims that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's vision of and for the church included all of these marks, but much of her life and work focused particularly on living out the catholicity of the church. For her, catholicity was not only understood as "universal" but in accordance with its Greek roots (*kath olos*) as "according to the whole."

Behr-Sigel believed that the church is not primarily an institution. For her, it is "new life with Christ and in Christ, guided by the Spirit."[1] This new life is something to which all are called. To participate in the fullness of this new life in Christ is what it means to be fully or wholly human. As the unity of the transcendent and immanent, and the bridge between the uncreated and created, Christ is also our way to becoming divine – what is known in Greek as *theosis*. Elisabeth believed that at the core of our being, humans are not merely individuals, but persons, those in relation. We are made in the image of the triune God and called to grow into this likeness through Christ. The life with and in Christ begins with our baptism in water and Spirit, its sealing with chrism, and our reception of his body and blood at the eucharist. It is our incorporation into the body of Christ, the community of the church. For her, the church is best expressed as a communion of persons participating in the life of the Trinity. The trinitarian theology of the East is the basis for her understanding of the human person and the community of the church.

For Elisabeth, ecclesiology is a seamless extension of anthropology. Elisabeth had a vision of the whole person – body, mind, and

[1] Sergius Bulgakov, quoted in "The Bible, Tradition, the Sacraments: Sources of Authority in the Church," in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Vision of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, ed. Michael Plekon and Sarah E. Hinlicky (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 86.

spirit – turned toward communion with God. While all people are made in the image of God, they use their intellectual and spiritual capacities to grow to their full and unique potential. Likewise, she had a vision of the church as a divine-human community that is also oriented toward God; one that is rooted in a deep inward spirituality yet engages the world to sanctify the entire created order. All continue to grow into the likeness of God through their time and place in history. She grounded her understanding of the Christian person on the baptismal injunction of Paul: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Based on this passage, she had a vision of a community that, while respecting difference, transcended ethnicity, nationality, and culture; one that reached out to those enslaved through economic, physical, or psychological circumstance; and one that included the gifts of women as well as men. Lastly, she had a vision of the person and church in relation to others. She believed that we could engage others different from ourselves without losing our own uniqueness. Likewise, she had an ecclesiology that respected the experience of Christians outside the canonical bounds of the Orthodox Church, engaging them through ministry, shared work, and ecumenical dialogue. This paper will explore these areas of her thought further.

Behr-Sigel's Introduction to the Orthodox Church

Elisabeth was introduced to the Orthodox Church through an ecumenical encounter with Russian émigrés living in Paris in the years after World War I, among them Nicholas Berdiaev, known as a philosopher of creative liberty; Sergius Bulgakov, a former Marxist who became a noted Orthodox theologian; Vasily Zenkovsky, Evgraf Kovalevsky, Paul Evdokimov, and Vladimir Lossky; the monk Lev Gillet, her mentor and friend; and Mother (now Saint) Maria Skobtsova.

It was through them that she was introduced to the thought of the 19th-century Russian theologian Alexis Khomiakov and the concept of *sobornost*. Khomiakov embraced a view of the church as a living community of faith and love. Elisabeth adopted this view as her own and it would continue to form her ecclesiological vision. In an interview with the *St. Nina Quarterly* in 1999, Elisabeth summarized this vision of church: "It was a vision of Church unity as communion,

a free accord of the conscience in faith and love, an accord that was in some ways musical. Etymologically, the Slavic word '*sobornost*' means 'conciliation.'"[2] This understanding of the church versus what she perceived as the poles of "judicial and authoritarian unity of the Roman Catholic Church and the libertarian individualism of the Protestants" was liberating for her.[3] The combination of respect for tradition with openness and freedom was appealing. It was a vision of Tradition that was grounded but living. While the essential contents remained the same, it changes as it confronts new and different situations, allowing the church to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit or, as it says in the gospel of Matthew, "discern the signs of the times" (16:3). In an answer posed to a question at a conference exploring this theme, Elisabeth clarified how she understood this movement. She said, "It was precisely Jesus himself who was the 'sign of the times.' But it can also be interpreted to mean that this is how we discern the activity of God through history. It is one of the main traits of Christianity that presents itself precisely in the form of the history of salvation."[4]

The Person and the Church as Integrated Body, Mind, and Spirit Encountering History

Elisabeth had a vision of the church that took history seriously. For her, the church is an extension of the human person growing toward God through time and place. While remaining the same, it responds to different circumstances using the totality of its being. Just like the person, the church is a whole of body, mind, and spirit. In order to be fully itself and fulfill its mission of bringing all of creation into unity with Christ, the church must nurture its inner life as well as engage the world.

For Elisabeth, Mary – the Theotokos – is an embodied model of the person and the church. She embraces the totality of a life in

[2] Unpublished interview with Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 17 August 1999, for the *St. Nina Quarterly* [hereafter cited as 1999 Interview].

[3] Ibid.

[4] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "Discerning the Signs of the Times Conference – Public Forum Questions and Answers," 31 May and 3 June, 2003, for the *St. Nina Quarterly* [hereafter cited as 2003 Public Forum].

Christ. She says, "Mary is not just the body through whom the Word passed in order to become flesh. It was with her entire being – body, soul, will, and intelligence that she participated in the divine mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God."[5] Mary is the one who heard the word of God and kept it, pondering it in her heart (Luke 2:19). Her "yes" allowed God to work through time. Elisabeth continues, "Mary is the anticipation of the new [person], the new being and new humanity, transfigured."[6] Following Mary, we are all called on in the church to become those who bring Christ into the world.[7] She is the model for the church transformed.

Elisabeth points to the early church fathers and their encounter with Greek philosophy as an example of the church engaging and ultimately transforming the culture of the time. Referring to the work of Georges Florovsky, she says that the Greek fathers "used an intelligence that dared to invent new words and inspire new attitudes while remaining faithful to the evangelical and apostolic core of the ecclesial faith."[8] She saw a continuation of that tradition in the thought of Alexander Bukharev (also called Archimandrite Theodore). Her doctoral dissertation focused on his life and work. While engaging the philosophy of German idealism prevalent in the intellectual circles of the time, particularly the thought of Hegel, Bukharev sought to "unite the peaceable interior spiritual life of the monk with the creativity directed toward the world of the Renaissance man."[9] He focused on the temporal aspect of the Judeo-Christian revelation. For Hegel, the age of the gospel was the "space of God's patience and freedom for His people, the dimension where God's benevolent plan is realized."[10] While Bukharev was drawn to this view, he was also critical of its lim-

[5] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "Mary and Women," in *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, 109.

[6] Ibid., 112.

[7] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Otherness of Men and Women in the Context of a Christian Civilization," in *The Ministry of Women in the Church* (Redondo Beach: Oakwood, 1991), 79.

[8] Ibid., 102.

[9] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "A Monk in the City: Alexander Bukharev, 1822–1871," in *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, 56.

[10] Ibid., 58.

its. For him, not all history was a movement toward God, implying that one had to be able to discern the authentic work of the Spirit.

For Bukharev, this work of the Spirit was embedded in the tradition of Russian piety, especially its monastic expression. It was a life modeled on Christ, an experience of actual participation in the resurrection as well as the suffering on the cross. For Bukharev, this mystical theology illuminated a true spiritual path. Unlike a pseudo-spirituality that holds the human being in disdain and can be reduced to sentimental religion, true spirituality is the contemplation of mystical union. He says, "The Spirit is given to the Christian so that he might participate in Christ, by having communion in his sacrificial love, for the salvation and transfiguration of the world here and now."[11]

Elisabeth was drawn to this contemplative and mystical current within Russian spirituality. For her, it was an intelligence united with the heart. Her early work focused on this aspect of the church. In fact, one of her first books – *The Place of the Heart* – was put together for a correspondence course exploring the theme of spirituality within the church.[12] Here she traces the historical development of this thread. It was a thread grounded and constantly renewed through the scriptures and shaped by the experience of the primitive church – by martyrdom, spiritual gifts, and eschatological hope. It was a tradition that breathed in trinitarian love consciously by repetition to a point of unconscious rest or tranquility. This hesychastic movement, exemplified by the continual recitation of the Jesus Prayer, fed the believer and radiated outward. In the words of Seraphim of Sarov (1759–1833), "Acquire peace and thousands around you will be saved."[13] This practice was not just for the individual edification of the practitioner. For Elisabeth, the goal is "not our solitary communion with Him, but the union of everyone in the love of God, through the Holy Spirit. This is the church in its mystical reality."[14]

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[11] Ibid., 61.

[12] See Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Place of the Heart: An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality* (Torrance: Oakwood, 1992).

[13] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "Orthodoxy and Peace," in *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, 22.

[14] Letter of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel to André Behr, 18 February 1932, quoted in Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day*, 38.

Through her work on Bukharev, she wondered if it was the vocation of Russian culture to "unite the fervor of faith to the rigor of thought and contemplation to historical effectiveness."[15] But this was not to be during Bukharev's lifetime. In fact, such thinking precipitated a split within the church, the institutional church becoming more rigid and inward looking while those looking to engage the world turned more toward ideals that were cut off from their spiritual roots. Both were poorer for it. Elisabeth saw the danger of this type of Orthodox fundamentalism. In an interview with the *St. Nina Quarterly*, she explained,

> Orthodox fundamentalism is a way of refusing to think. It is a way of confusing Tradition itself with the way Tradition is transmitted. Tradition is not something to lock inside a closet. . . . I agree with Fr. Alexander Men, who said that Christianity is just beginning. Christianity gives a meaning to history, not the other way around. This is an important point. Christ gives the Holy Spirit who will give you the whole Truth. The Church has to cross the desert of history. Christ did not dictate the gospel, but it was given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We must not confuse the historical moment with the true life of the Church today.[16]

The church, just like the human person, is radically incarnational. It is made in the image of the Trinity and called to grow into its likeness using the totality of its being. It was "baptized" to do so at Pentecost. Just like the human person, through baptism, the church is joined with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Through the work of the Spirit, the trajectory of human history is changed.

The Person and Church of Galatians 3:28

Elisabeth took the baptismal injunction of the Christian found in Galatians 3:28 – there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ Jesus – to heart. It was the basis for her inclusive vision of the church.

"There is no longer Jew or Greek." For Elisabeth, this injunction to the Christian became real during World War II and the persecution of the Jews by the Nazi regime. To be formed and shaped by the Holy Spirit meant that one had to respond to the exigencies of history. She explained how, "during the Second World War, we had

[15] Behr-Sigel, "A Monk in the City," 63.

[16] 1999 Interview.

to fight against the Nazis. We could not turn away. We helped the Jews. . . . In order to work for what is right, we must be open to the Holy Spirit and at the same time, we must act. The difficulty is in discerning whether to adapt or not, and when."[17] When asked to describe her deepest spiritual experience, she mentioned this period.

> My husband and I lived in the East of France. This was what the Germans called the "Forbidden Zone." We could not, were not allowed, to leave that zone and my husband and I started a [an ecumenical resistance] group. It was quite easy in the sense [that] I knew all the Protestant pastors. . . . There was also in the group a Catholic monk. . . . The group was a movement of spiritual resistance to Nazism, but also a group of people who clung to God. They were also trying to save Jews who were being arrested and set for deportation to Germany. One member of our group was arrested and tortured and killed, and several others were arrested and deported. But we were trying to resist in a spiritual way as witnesses to fight against Nazi barbarism.[18]

For her, the work of the Christian (and by extension, of the church) was to speak truth to power and when necessary to act.

For Elisabeth, this baptismal injunction could also be understood within the Orthodox Church, itself, in response to the need for inculturation and against Orthodox (particularly in her context, Russian) nationalism. For instance, she advocated for a francophone Orthodox parish in Paris, pleading for the need to adaptations of the outward expression of the church into its new context, such as the language of the liturgy, so that it could continue to be a messenger of the gospel. She characterized the situation at the time as a crisis, one that can lead to death or life. For her, it had baptismal resonances. It could be the beginning of a necessary mutation of a death in view of a new life, as in John 12:24, "Unless the grain of wheat that falls on the earth dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it will bear much fruit."[19] For her, this was not only a pastoral necessity for the faithful, but an important outreach to the world. In a letter to Metropolitan Vladi-

[17] Ibid.

[18] 2003 Public Forum.

[19] Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day*, 184.

mir,[20] she wrote of her hope that a fully indigenous French Orthodox Church "would become a beacon from which the universal Orthodox Truth would shine forth on the West."[21]

She continued to work for an inculturated expression of Orthodoxy through her writings. Along with Olivier Clément, she refounded the journal *Contacts*, for which she served on the editorial board and as a theological writer and consultant. The journal linked both theological reflection and the experience of the faith in its new cultural context. For Behr-Sigel and Clément, it was an expression of ecclesial research that was "deeply rooted in the living Tradition as its inspiration for solutions, in a contemporary language, to the problems of the times."[22] While retaining the fullness of Orthodox theology, it served as a bridge between Christians of East and West.

Elisabeth was also instrumental in helping Orthodox Christians of all nationalities to transcend their ethnic and old-world political differences and see themselves as one in Christ. In the 1960s, she helped to form the Orthodox Fraternity,[23] an organization founded to overcome the break in communion between the various factions within the Orthodox community in France at the time.[24] Elisabeth believed that bringing all Orthodox Christians in the West together to live their faith in common would not only guard against the dangers of ethnic division and fragmentation, but help to facilitate the implantation of an authentic local Orthodoxy. Her constant concern was to probe more fully "the essence of the apostolic message for *all*

[20] At the time, Metropolitan Vladimir was the head of the diocese of the Russian Orthodox churches in Western Europe.

[21] Letter of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel to Metropolitan Vladimir, 8 May 1956, quoted in Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day*, 128.

[22] Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day*, 135.

[23] Orthodox Fraternity was a lay organization whose work encouraged more cooperation between the bishops in France. It eventually led to the formation of the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops in France.

[24] Véronique Lossky, "Orthodox Fraternity in Western Europe," *MaryMartha* 5:2 (1997). Available online at http://members.iinet.net.au/~mmjournl/MaryMartha/.

peoples and its radiance *here and now* in the countries where [they] live."[25]

Elisabeth believed that young people held the key to an indigenous and vital expression of Orthodoxy in the West. In order to encourage their participation in the church, she served on the Coordinating Committee of Orthodox Youth Movements. This was an organization that sought to bring together young people from various Orthodox jurisdictions and traditions. In 1975 this organization merged with the Fraternity, becoming the Orthodox Fraternity of Western Europe. The group subsequently organized a number of conferences, engaging various ecclesial topics of the day while providing opportunities for spiritual enrichment for the participants.

"There is no longer slave or free." For Elisabeth, the question of engaging the world as a Christian was not only a matter of orienting the world to Christ – a "churching" of the world – but of wrestling with the question of the work of the church in the world. How is one to cooperate with Christ's work in time and history? Referring to her study of Bukharev, Elisabeth believed that to become one with Christ means "descending into this hell [of the fallen world] armed only with the weapons of faith, hope, and compassionate love."[26] For Bukharev, as for Elisabeth, the church was called to imitate Christ's kenotic love. Bukharev invited followers of Christ to "cast aside the Egyptian," a reference to Exodus 3:22. By this he meant that Christians should "convert the culture to its true divine-human calling: worship of the living God through service to others."[27] For Bukharev, the divine light was to penetrate the whole life of the world. Bukharev's questions and thought were later taken up by philosophers such as Berdiaev as well as in such movements as Orthodox Action and the work of Mother Maria Skobtsova.

Elisabeth met Mother Maria through the Russian Student Christian Movement, known by its French acronym, ACER (Action Chrétienne d'Étudiants Russes). It was an organization that provided social assistance to those in need and would later be called Orthodox

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[25] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Fraternity in France and Western Europe," quoted in Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day*, 191. Behr-Sigel's italics.

[26] Michael Plekon, "To Become Permeable to Christ: Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's Theological Vision," *The Ecumenical Review* 61:2 (2009), 165–76.

[27] Behr-Sigel, "A Monk in the City," 77.

Action. Mother Maria wanted to live monasticism in the world and open to the world. For Mother Maria, the injunction of Matthew 25 guided the life of a Christian and the church.

> The path toward God passes through love of our neighbor and there is no other way. At the Last Judgment, we will not be asked if we succeeded in our ascetic exercises. . . . We will be asked if we fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoners. For each poor person, each hungry person, each prisoner, the Lord says, "That is I. I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was sick and in prison."[28]

Elisabeth was attracted to this view, which helped to strengthen her understanding of the nature and mission of the church. The Christian and the church are to embody the compassion of Christ and to minister to all those who are enslaved in whatever their life circumstances. Both are to baptize and work to heal all of life, prefiguring the age to come.

To this end, Elisabeth would later become involved in Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT), serving as its Orthodox vice-president from 1981 to 1993. This was, and still is, an interdenominational organization (now found all over the world) that speaks out against all forms of torture, works to abolish it, and provides material and spiritual support to its victims who suffer the lingering effects of enslavement and abuse. Elisabeth saw the sacramental life of the church as offering additional help to heal these debilitating effects and set people on the path to wholeness. The church is both prophetic and sacramental in its capacity to minister to the whole person. The sacramental aspects of the church, along with the prophetic word, "address the believer's existential consciousness, here and now, of God's benevolent plan, that already exists although its realization is not yet clear in its fullness."[29]

"There is no longer male or female." It is this baptismal injunction that primarily occupied the last third of Elisabeth's life – quite by accident, as she would frequently say. Although she was often the only woman involved in the various endeavours of her theo-

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[28] Behr-Sigel, "Mother Maria Skobtsova, 1891–1945," in *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, 47-8.

[29] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Community of Men and Women: What Does This Mean for a Prophetic and Sacramental Church?" *MaryMartha* 4:2 (1996). Available online at http://members.iinet.net.au/~mmjournl/MaryMartha.

logical work, she did not systematically think about the place of women in the church until she was asked to give the keynote address to the first international consultation on the issue in Agapia, Romania, in 1976.

Elisabeth followed the anthropology of the Cappadocian fathers. For them, biological sex was a secondary consideration after the commonality of our human nature. They affirmed the distinction of persons in the humanity of man and of woman but emphasized that all are called to deification, all find the fullness of their humanity in God. The Cappadocians understood baptism as eclipsing the differences in biological sex. As Gregory of Nazianzus said, and Elisabeth quoted, "The same creator for man and for woman, for both the same clay, the same image, the same death, the same resurrection."[30] "Woman" was not a thing to be objectified, but someone with whom to have dialogue. Elisabeth admired the egalitarianism of the Cappadocians. It was "situated in the eschatological perspective of the completeness of the end of time when genital sexuality will be transcended."[31] She wrestled with what she understood to be the life-giving Tradition of the church and the rigid traditionalism that she frequently ascribed to the influence of "patriarchal societies" found so often in its practice. For her, discerning the living Tradition of the church in the midst of this traditionalism was an opportunity to discern a "sign of the times."

In challenging the customs of the day, Elisabeth always sought to uplift the ministry of women as found in the Tradition/tradition of the church, both ancient and modern, especially in the lives of saints and others who were recognized for their spiritual authority. For example, she pointed out that Macrina the Younger, sister to Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, was also their teacher, and that St Nina of Georgia baptized and preached the gospel to the Georgians. She also highlighted examples of the service of women in more recent times, especially the women who were faithful to the church during communist persecution: women who had their grandchildren baptized, those who saved the parish structures in Russia during this

[30] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Discourse* 37.6, quoted by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "Women in the Orthodox Church," trans. Constantinos Takles, *St. Nina Quarterly* 2:2 (1998), 8.

[31] Ibid., 9.

time as part of the "twenty,"[32] those who served as *starosta*,[33] and those who witnessed to Christianity by functioning as the intermediary or buffer between civil authorities and the priest.

Yet Elisabeth questioned practices that seemed to contradict the theological anthropology of the Cappadocians. These included the exclusion from the altar area of baby girls during their churching, not allowing females to serve or assist in the altar area during the liturgy, and in some places not allowing them to receive the eucharist or even be present in the worship space during their menstrual periods. Referring to baptism, she sets the scene:

> As the choir sings, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ," the newly baptized female (just as the newly baptized male), dressed in her baptismal gown is introduced to the Eucharistic assembly, the visible Body of Christ of which she has become a member. However, at the same time that all separation appears to be abolished by virtue of our baptism, a ritual usually follows that seems to contradict that notion. The baptized male is led into the sanctuary behind the iconostasis, while its doors remain closed for the woman or the girl.[34]

She rightly states, "Today, a growing number of Orthodox women feel that this ritual is discriminatory and wish for it to change."[35]

In addition to challenging certain liturgical practices that she believed unfairly excluded the female members of the body of Christ, Elisabeth advocated for the restoration of the female diaconate, a historical ministry in the church that had fallen into disuse. This was not

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[32] Under Krushchev, if 20 people were willing to publicly request a place of worship they would get one. Those who did so risked their jobs, social status, and possibly their lives and those of their loved ones. Ibid.

[33] The *starosta* is a layperson responsible for the day-to-day running of the parish.

[34] Behr-Sigel, "Women in the Orthodox Church," 8.

[35] Ibid. It should be noted that this practice is beginning to change in some places but slowly and unevenly. It should also be noted that treating males and females similarly during the churching ritual is a renewal of earlier church practice. For more information on the participation of women in the liturgical life of the church, see the doctoral dissertation of Valerie Karras, *Women in the Byzantine Liturgy*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

done using the paradigm of "equal rights" often associated with secularism, but from the perspective of utilizing more fully the talents of all the members of the church for the building up of the whole Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:7). She, as well as others in her Paris circle, researched the issue, noting and developing the distinction between diaconal and priestly ministry. They clarified that the primary function of the diaconate is to serve – not only within the liturgical assembly but also in world. They emphasized that there is no theological impediment to the restoration of the female diaconate and advocated not only for its restoration but also for its renewal to meet the needs of the church today.[36]

Elisabeth was acutely aware of the ministerial work that needed to be done in the parish setting. Reflecting on her own experience, she spoke to the issue during her time in the United States. She explained, "I was asked to read the gospel, to teach the gospel, to teach children, to visit the sick. All that took place in a parish that had been abandoned. The deaconess could help overworked priests. I think the deaconess today should not solely respond to the needs of women, but to the needs of parishes."[37]

Although the need remains and the restoration of the female diaconate was unanimously recommended by the international Orthodox consultation at Agapia (Romania, 1976) and has continued to be recommended by subsequent consultations (Damascus, Syria, in 1996 and Istanbul, Turkey, in 1997), there are no ordained female deacons in the Orthodox Church today. It was certainly Elisabeth's fervent hope that someday there would be. Remembering her own experience, she says, "I keep, pinned to the heart, the hope that one day women, responding to new needs, will be able to exercise a ministry analogous to mine in the bosom of the Orthodox Church."[38]

Later in her life, Elisabeth challenged the exclusion of women to the sacramental priesthood. She admits that this was a topic that arose from outside the Orthodox Church and one that the Orthodox

[36] See the "Letter to His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I," 9 July 2000, and signed by 13 others, including many notable names in the Orthodox world, published in *Contacts* 53:195 (2001), 254–58, quoted in Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day*, 240–41.

[37] 2003 Public Forum.

[38] 1999 Interview.

were ill-prepared to engage. Her writings dissect the initial arguments against the ordination of women to the sacramental priesthood and articulate her own developing theological thought on the issue.[39] She clarifies the meaning of Christian priesthood, understood in the sacramental sense. While initially thinking that the "iconic" argument rooted in liturgical symbolism had merit, she came to a fuller understanding of the symbolism in the "icon of Christ" based on her understanding of baptism.

In Orthodox theology, the icon is not a naturalistic portrait. She explains, "The authentic icon is the human face become transparent through grace, radiating the other Face, the mysterious person of the God-man."[40] During the liturgy, it is Christ as head of the church who offers to the Father. Christ is the only celebrant – the one offering and offered. All Christians participate in the ministry of Christ. It is within this context that she came to see the role of the priest as primarily functional although, implicitly, relational as well. She challenges those who understand Galatians 3:26–28, which she often cites, as referring only to baptism without realizing its implications for the sacramental priesthood. In her address to the Agapia Consultation participants, she writes,

> But surely the fundamental ontological unity through communion in the crucified and risen Christ as created by baptism is the foundation of the royal priesthood of all the baptized in which the ministry [specifically, the sacramental priesthood] has its origins as a special, personal vocation, according to the sovereign liberty of God. Moreover, the Church is a body made up of many limbs, with a hierarchy of functions to which corresponds the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit granted to each person (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:1–7). So, the question that arises is this: as a human being called by the Creator to fulfill herself according to the particular modes of her feminine being, can a woman not, therefore, aspire to the charism of the priesthood? In giving a negative answer to this, are we not in fact subordinating

[39] For a fuller explication of her thought on this issue, see her chapter, "The Ordination of Women: Also a Question for the Orthodox Churches," in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000).

[40] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Ordination of Women: An Ecumenical Problem," MaryMartha 2:2 (1992). Available online at http://members.iinet.net.au/~mmjournl/MaryMartha.

> grace to a biological determinism, to nature which can and will transform as the fire blazes in the burning bush yet does not consume it?[41]

In appealing to the indeterminacy of God and power of the Spirit, she privileges the divine aspect of the church. If the human part is to cooperate in the eternal offering of Christ, referring to the words of Chrysostom, she asks, why a woman could not be the one to lend her hands and tongue to Christ?[42]

It is when men and women work together to build up the Body of Christ that the church becomes more fully itself. She emphasizes,

> Finally, that the Church becomes that which she is – the supreme will of God: a community in faith, hope, and love, of men and women, of the mystery of individuals, ineffably equal yet different, in the image and radiance of the Divine Trinity. Such is the grand ecclesiological vision of the Orthodox Church. What remains is to translate it into our historical, empirical existence: a difficult task, seemingly impossible, to which we sometimes feel called, confident in the promise of the Christ to send us the Spirit from above who "will introduce the disciples to the entire Truth" (John 16:13).[43]

The thought of the apostle Paul summarizes the call of the Christian in the world. She writes, "He calls Christian men and women to the freedom in Christ which is in the heart of an eschatological community, a community that lives in the tension of the *already* and the *not yet* but that also has the vocation to be the here-and-now sign of the final reality."[44]

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[41] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Meaning of the Participation of Women in the Life of the Church," in *Proceedings from the International Consultation on the Participation of Women in the Life of the Church, Agapia, Romania, 1976* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1977), 27–28.

[42] John Chrysostom, *Homily 77 on John 4* and *On the Treachery of Judas 1,6*, quoted in Behr-Sigel, "The Ordination of Women: Also a Question," 22.

[43] Behr-Sigel, "Women in the Orthodox Church," 11.

[44] Behr-Sigel, "The Otherness of Men and Women," 70. Her italics.

The Person and Church beyond the Boundaries

Elisabeth's early encounter with the Orthodox Church was positive. She discovered a vision of the person and the church that was open to Christ in the other. She said, "I discovered an Orthodoxy open to Western thought and open to dialogue with other churches that shared the essence of the faith."[45]

She had experienced this openness in her early ministry. With the blessing of Lev Gillet and Sergius Bulgakov, she filled the pastoral need as an ecclesiastical supervisor of a small Reformed church that did not have a pastor due to the shortage of clergy after World War I. Later she would reflect on this experience in an interview with the *St. Nina Quarterly*.

> It was not without apprehension that I presented myself to my parishioners . . . [Yet] I am still amazed today at the facility with which the parish accepted me. The parish recognized, I believe, that I was there to assure the regularity of Sunday worship from which they [had been] deprived for so long, to announce the gospel, to take charge in the religious instruction of the children and teenagers, to visit the sick and the isolated of which there were quite a few due to the fact that this was a mountainous region.[46]

Her service was not an ideological matter of striving for ordination. It was to fulfill a need, to shepherd a community that needed tending. She explains, "It was a simple thing: to serve a Christian community that was calling me."[47]

During the Second World War Elisabeth experienced a practical and intensively lived ecumenism – one expressed in deeds. She recalls that the relationships formed and nurtured in her ecumenical group in Nancy gave its members the strength to fight the Nazis. Although some official circles within the Orthodox Church, as well as within other Christian churches were, and still are, threatened by engagement with the other and as such are against ecumenical involvement, Elisabeth received support from her friend and confessor, Sergius Bulgakov. In a letter to Elisabeth during the war, he wrote, "I

[45] 1999 Interview.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

am following the work of your circle [in Nancy] with great joy. It is of no importance that this is not representative of what the main ecclesiastical bodies are doing. The history of the church is not just what appears in official acts; and the seed, sown in souls, can eventually have much greater importance than we might imagine."[48]

After the war she joined the Fellowship of Sts Alban and Sergius, an Orthodox-Anglican dialogue based in Oxford, England. It was here that she met and subsequently became good friends with Andrei Bloom (the future Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh) and a young Anglican, Timothy Ware (the future Orthodox Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia). She described the dialogues of the fellowship as "intellectual, prayerful, and family-like."[49] The relationships from the group gave her a source of spiritual support, especially at a time when she felt isolated by the mostly Slavic immigrant community of her local parish in Nancy.

Her ecumenical work opened up an understanding of the church beyond its official boundaries, a glimpse of the whole work of the Spirit. According to her friend, Bulgakov, "We cannot define the limits of the church, either in space or in time or in the power of action. The depths of the Church cannot be plumbed."[50] For her, the mission of the church is to "go beyond ethnic and nationalistic limits and speak to all nations, always respecting the other."[51] Elisabeth saw this as the work of the Orthodox Church in ecumenical dialogue. Moreover, she embodied this vision. Leonie Liveris, a Greek Orthodox from Australia who participated in a number of ecumenical meetings with Elisabeth, writes, "Elisabeth . . . was the 'bridge' between traditional Orthodox/orthodox women and feminist Orthodox and Protestant women [from both the East and West]. She urged us all to find a place in our hearts to hear what each other was saying and be open to new images and new experiences of Church and faith."[52]

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[48] Letter of Sergius Bulgakov to Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 26 May 1942, quoted in Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day*, 83.

[49] Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day*, 101.

[50] Behr-Sigel, "The Bible, Tradition, the Sacraments," 86.

[51] 1999 Interview.

[52] Leonie B. Liveris, "Elisabeth Behr-Sigel: A Woman in My Heart," unpublished essay.

Elisabeth was acutely aware of the rift forming between the Orthodox Church that does not ordain women to the presbytery and other Christian traditions that do. In her work, Elisabeth pleads for a pluralism of discipline – which she sees as not necessarily incompatible with the unity of the faith and ecclesial communion.[53] For her, as for many of the fathers of the church, "In necessary things, unity; in doubtful things liberty; in all things, charity."

Conclusion

Elisabeth understood the church to be both sacramental and prophetic. It is both the church of Christ and the church of the Holy Spirit. Just like the human person, it is grounded in a baptismal ecclesiology that grows toward full eucharistic communion. In an article on the community of men and women in the church, Elisabeth spoke to the rites of Christian initiation – baptism, chrismation, and eucharist – from both an anthropological and ecclesiological perspective. I offer the following summary: the gift is offered to all without distinction; it is the common vocation of all. It is given to us as "persons," to each in his or her absolute uniqueness and mysterious "otherness." The church is not a collection of individuals, but a "communion of persons: persons of whom each one is unique while at the same time existing in relation to the Other and the others."[54] In baptism, Christ took on all humanity in order to sanctify it. He did not abolish otherness, but made it cease to be a means of exclusion, separation, and hostility. By the anointing of the sense organs in chrismation, the human person enters into relationship with others and the world. Finally, the eucharist is the "act which reveals, through participation in the universal offering of Jesus Christ, the essence of the church; that essence *is* communion."[55] The eucharist is a taste of the banquet in the kingdom. The life of the church is called to witness, within history, to this eternal mystery.

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[53] Janet Crawford, Review of *Le Ministère de la Femme dans l'Eglise*, *Mary-Martha* 1:2 (1991). Available online at http://members.iinet.net.au/~mmjournl/MaryMartha.

[54] Behr-Sigel, "The Community of Men and Women."

[55] Ibid.

Chapter Six

Patristic Gender Anthropology in Behr-Sigel

VALERIE A. KARRAS

The first time I came across Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's name was shortly after I started my master's degree program at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, the seminary for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America located in the suburbs of Boston. Someone – I believe it was Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald – told me and the other new women students about an international Orthodox women's conference that had been held four years earlier, in 1976, in Agapia, Romania. I bought my own copy of the conference booklet and was particularly impressed with two works: an article on the female diaconate by Evangelos Theodorou and the keynote address by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel. Interestingly, it was only as I began writing this article that I realized, over 30 years later, how profoundly those two papers from that conference have affected my research agenda and my entire academic career. The groundbreaking research Theodorou summarized in his Agapia paper became the foundation for my Catholic University dissertation and forthcoming book on women in the Byzantine liturgy, and Behr-Sigel's paper and related writings provided the impetus to my Thessaloniki dissertation on the patristic ontology of gender and my continuing research in this area.

Five years later, in the summer of 1985, I met Behr-Sigel for the first time. I was visiting Paris (also for the first time) and had gotten her phone number from someone – Nicolas Lossky, perhaps? – at the French-language Russian Orthodox parish of Ste. Marie des Affligés. I introduced myself to her over the phone as a graduate of Holy Cross and a doctoral student in Byzantine church history at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and I asked if I could meet with her. She readily agreed and gave me Metro and bus directions to her apartment. I spent a remarkable afternoon speaking with

her in a mixture of English and mostly French (my French was much better in those days than it is now, but her English was also much better than she claimed it to be). I drank her tea, ate all of the Walker's shortbread cookies that one of her children or grandchildren had brought back to her from a trip, and passed several hours discussing with her the church, the fathers of the church, and women in the church and in the fathers.

Behr-Sigel told me about an Orthodox women's conference being organized for the following year (the Rhodes conference) and gave me a copy of a theologically thoughtful, incisive, and scathingly critical two-page letter that Metropolitan Anthony Bloom had sent her about it. The letter – which Bloom had permitted her to copy and distribute to others as she saw fit – sharply rebuked the organizers for having decided the outcome of the proceedings beforehand: they had entitled the conference, "The Impossibility of the Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church." Bloom, writing in French, questioned why they were even bothering to have a conference if the question was already decided, and then, in the space of just a paragraph or two, launched into a brief discourse on protological gender anthropology and the egalitarian nature of humanity created in the image of God, cautioning against the theological error of making normative the fallen state of humanity's existence. Perhaps because of criticism by Bloom and others, the title of the conference was changed, but clearly the minds of most of the paper presenters – almost all male, at an international conference discussing women in the Orthodox Church – were as made up as had been the organizers the previous year.

On my next trip to Paris, I ran across a bookstore with copies of both Behr-Sigel's *Le ministère de la femme dans l'Église* (later published in English as *The Ministry of Women in the Church*) and Paul Evdokimov's *La femme et le salut du monde* (also later published in English as *Woman and the Salvation of the World*). I read Behr-Sigel's book eagerly, and over the years I continued to read Behr-Sigel's writings on women in Orthodoxy and on patristic views of sex and gender.

I also had the opportunity to meet her twice more. The first was during a family vacation to France in July of 2001; she invited me to attend a monthly theological circle that Sunday afternoon at which she presented a paper on the New Testament theology of Christ's

unique priesthood and of the royal priesthood. The last time I saw her, in June of 2004 (about a year before her death), was at the meeting of the Orthodox Theological Society in America, at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York. She was invited to present the prestigious Florovsky lecture at the Society's meeting, and her lecture showed that she had lost none of either her intellectual capacity or her ability to challenge the dominant paradigm within the institutional Church. Because of physical weakness, she chose to have Susan Ashbrook Harvey, the internationally known Syriac patristics professor at Brown University, read the paper for her. I still remember Susan's voice breaking and her eyes tearing as she read Behr-Sigel's words, plaintively asking whether it were not possible for the hands of a woman to lift up and offer the eucharistic gifts to God on behalf of the people.

My life has been irrevocably changed by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, both by her writings and by the woman herself, and I simply cannot imagine who I would be today if I had never heard of her. For almost a century, Behr-Sigel questioned, challenged, guided, and pushed those in the Orthodox Church and in Christianity more broadly on a variety of issues in the areas of ecumenism, ecclesiology, spirituality, and especially regarding women.

It is important to recognize that her questions, challenges, and nudges toward change were always well-grounded in both patristic studies and contemporary theological reflection. I believe that, as a Protestant-turned-Orthodox, and a woman at that, Behr-Sigel's contributions to the *ressourcement* dominated by French Catholic theologians, who used it as a foundation for their *nouvelle théologie*, has been underappreciated. While retrieving the theological wealth of the Cappadocians, Maximus the Confessor, and other early Christian writers became an important element in the re-envisioning of theological anthropology among Catholics and Orthodox alike, Behr-Sigel was one of the only scholars besides Jean Daniélou to examine in any depth patristic anthropology with respect to sex and gender.[1]

Moreover, not only did she read and write about the gender anthropology of church fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa, but she

[1] See, for example, his *Platonisme et théologie mystique: doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Aubier, 1944). Daniélou particularly focused on the theology of Gregory of Nyssa in this book and in several articles.

considered and internalized their theological reflections and was changed by them. Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, in addition to being owed a huge debt of thanks as the initiator and one of the principal organizers of the colloquium honouring Behr-Sigel that was held in Strasbourg in September 2011, is also owed a debt of gratitude for the biographical writings she has done on Behr-Sigel, most recently a two-part article in the 2010 volume of *Sobornost*. In the first part, Wilson discusses the development of Behr-Sigel's views on women and on the notion of gendered charisms, and she particularly traces Behr-Sigel's evolution from a rather standard, early feminist essentialism to a more holistic, non-gendered anthropology. That evolution was deeply rooted in Behr-Sigel's patristic research.

Behr-Sigel's early views were, as Wilson points out, similar to those of her long-time close friend Paul Evdokimov. In *La femme et le salut du monde*[2] Evdokimov articulated a full and generous theological anthropology constructed on a foundation of gendered complementarity that emphasized the value and fundamental importance of the prophetic, nurturing, and sophiological feminine while criticizing the imbalance of an overly masculinized church and society. Evdokimov's distinctly gendered anthropology, rooted in the sophiology developed by Bulgakov, corresponded well with the essentialist style of feminism that has predominated in Western Europe, most prominently today, perhaps, in the works of Luce Irigaray. In brief, essentialism views maleness and femaleness as fundamental components of human nature and of individual human personhood as "essential," in other words, with masculinity and femininity as complementary halves of the human whole. Negative effects result from an imbalance of this gendered yin-yang; historically, that imbalance has usually weighed on the masculine side, with violence, war, and exploitation as the consequent results of testosterone-driven human societies and even of the church.

It is not surprising that Behr-Sigel would have followed this essentialism since it characterizes both the traditional social and cultural morés of Europe (not to mention of Russia and other predominantly Orthodox countries) and the new sophiological theology being

[2] Paul Evdokimov, *La femme et le salut du monde* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1983); published in English as *Woman and the Salvation of the World*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994).

expounded by Bulgakov and others of the so-called "Paris school." What *is* surprising is that she eventually broke with her friends, colleagues, and mentors on this subject, although how she came to abandon her earlier views should really be no surprise to anyone who has studied this topic in the Greek fathers in any depth.

Actually, I went through a very similar process when undertaking the research for my Thessaloniki dissertation on the ontology of woman, focusing on Greek patristic exegeses of the creation accounts in Genesis. Despite having read some of Behr-Sigel's articles by that point, I nevertheless was convinced that a non-gendered theological anthropology existed only among *some* of the fathers *some* of the time. In fact, as I chose my topic and commenced my research in the fall of 1986, I explained my hypothesis to John Zizioulas, newly consecrated titular Metropolitan of Pergamon and intellectually the dissertation committee member who influenced me the most. When I asserted that I believed that men and women, while equal, were intrinsically different and that male and female imaged God differently in some way, and furthermore that I expected to find a fair amount of sexism and even misogyny in the fathers as products of their time and culture, Zizioulas simply smiled at me and said, "Well, I don't believe you will find what you *think* you will find, but the best thing for you to do is to begin your research, and we'll discuss your findings along the way." He then directed me to some patristic works and sent me on my way.

Zizioulas was right, of course. Not only did I find enormous consensus among the fathers, and consensus in a theologically egalitarian way that shattered the ingrained morés and assumptions of their late antique, Greco-Roman culture, but the Greek fathers changed my own views 180 degrees. Nevertheless, that took several years of spending all of my research time specifically on this question, reading the just-beginning literature in the field (such as Elizabeth Clark's *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends*),[3] and receiving the support of my committee members, all of whom were Greek and not much influenced by the trinitarian and consequent anthropological gendering that had developed out of Russian Orthodox sophiology.

[3] Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations*, 2nd ed., Studies in Women and Religion 2 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982).

So, what made Behr-Sigel break free of the accumulated weight of culture, history, friendship, and theological assumptions? I believe that two things came together for her. One was the patristic research she herself was undertaking, a couple of decades before Elizabeth Clark and others (including me). The other, which is what made it (as it did with me) convincing to her and not just interesting as a bit of historical theology, was her knowledge of Orthodoxy's spirituality and soteriology and her consequent recognition of the inherent dangers of rigidly gendered symbolism and anthropology. Let us examine each of these two factors in more detail, beginning with patristic anthropology regarding gender and Behr-Sigel's growing work in that area.

The Non-Gendered Character of Greek Patristic Theology

Behr-Sigel's transition is evident in *Le ministère de la femme dans l'Église*.[4] I have chosen to concentrate on the first chapter, entitled "The Otherness of Men and Women in the Context of a Christian Civilization." The second chapter, which quite specifically discusses the non-gendered patristic anthropology of the Cappadocians, especially Gregory of Nyssa, largely covers the same theological ground but in more compact form, with less analysis and reflection on Behr-Sigel's part, so I prefer to explore instead the much longer first chapter, which I believe also shows her continuing ambivalence between non-gendered and gender-essentialist anthropologies.

Indeed, despite the title's reference to the "otherness" of man and woman, in this first chapter (based on a conference paper she gave in Ottawa in 1984), Behr-Sigel clearly has moved a significant distance away from the essentialism and complementarity of Hopko, Evdokimov, and Bulgakov, and toward the non-gendered theological anthropology of the Cappadocians. Her ambivalence is present from the start. She begins the chapter within a framework of essential otherness by recognizing the ubiquity of human social and functional distinctions based on sex from ancient times to the present: "They vary according to societies and ages, but the otherness of men and

[4] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Le ministère de la femme dans l'Église* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987); published in English as *The Ministry of Women in the Church*, trans. Steven Bigham (Redondo Beach: Oakwood, 1990); now published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

women tends to appear as an absolute in relation to some unchanging, divino-cosmic hierarchy." However, she points out the inherent subordination of women in almost all such systems and the necessity of distinguishing *created* orders from the *divine* order: "The fate of women in this order is by no means an unhappy or degrading one, but her status nearly always implies a subordination to the male, and her otherness is expressed in terms of inferiority. This is a consequent result of confusing the natural order with the divine."[5] At the same time, she is ambivalent and cautious about the "de-gendering" aspects of the reduction of female subordinationism in modern Western societies. "Is it possible," she asks, "that the liberation of women (and of men), at the cost of denying their otherness, may only be a screen for an ideological weapon based on biology, in the hands of an oppressive system?"[6]

Behr-Sigel then moves on to summarize biological and genetic research in an extremely brief but nonetheless nuanced way, recognizing the "unquestionable organic base" of femininity and masculinity while noting that "there is no absolute barrier between the masculine and the feminine. Each human being of both sexes has a certain quantity of hormones of the opposite sex." Further undercutting biological determinism, she stresses the importance of cultural context, noting that "[n]o person . . . can be reduced to hormones. The behavior of men and women is . . . determined rather by external influences such as education, cultural models, and the symbolic value attributed to exterior sexual signs by any given civilization."[7] Combining this multiplicity of influences with her recognition of the ability of human beings to transcend both biology and cultural norms, she concludes, then, that "[i]n each person, we can therefore detect several sexes, or better put, several levels of sex: an anatomical physiological sex, a social sex, and a psychological sex. . . . Because it transcends the male-female otherness of the animal world, the otherness of men and women belongs essentially to the realm of symbols."[8]

At this point, Behr-Sigel launches into the heart of her article with an exegesis of the Genesis creation accounts, incorporating the

[5] Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women*, 26.

[6] Ibid., 32.

[7] Ibid., 33.

[8] Ibid., 33–34.

interpretations of the Cappadocians, especially Gregory of Nyssa. She introduces the subject by discussing the idea of humanity created according to the image of God and the multivalent ways in which the *imago Dei* has been understood – none of those in terms of sex or gender, though. She then delves more specifically into the question of the creation of humanity as man and woman, focusing on Gregory of Nyssa's treatise "On the Creation of the Human Being" (*De hominis opificio*).[9] While she used the (erroneous, I believe) term popular among patristics scholars of "double creation" to describe Nyssen's exegesis, she clearly understood his framework: what is called the "first creation" is God's creation of humanity from God's perspective, that is, outside of time as a single act of creating humanity in its entirety, while the "second creation" is the creation of individual human beings in the unfolding of time and space, with the first of those humans already created in view of their impending Fall. "First of all and in a logical and non-temporal sense, there was the creation of *anthrôpos* in the image of God, in man's unity and wholeness. Afterwards, there was the creation of divided humanity, in two sexes, having in view a procreation made necessary by the introduction of death resulting from sin and the Fall."[10] (Sarah Hinlicky Wilson has rightly observed that Paul Evdokimov also posits a double creation, with sexual differentiation part of the second creative act. However, the reason that Evdokimov does not cite Gregory, I believe, is that his own protological mythology is drawn not from Nyssen's anthropological treatise but from Plato's *Symposium* with its premise that each human is a complementary half in search of the missing other required to create a human whole.)

I disagree with Behr-Sigel's assertion that Gregory's speculative exegesis "has not been taken up generally by the patristic tradition."[11] It is true that other Greek fathers do not divide the creation account into a "double creation" – or, what I believe more accurately describes it, as the "God's-eye view" and the "human's-eye view." Nev-

[9] *De hominis opificio*, PG 44:123-256; English translation in *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises; Select Writings and Letters*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 2nd series, vol. 5 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 387–427.

[10] Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women*, 41.

[11] Ibid.

ertheless, many later writers wrote in similar terms regarding Gregory's basic contention that God added sexual differentiation – that is, the creation of humanity in male and female forms – for procreative purposes out of foreknowledge of humanity's coming Fall. These include Procopius of Gaza, the brilliant Maximus the Confessor (to whom Behr-Sigel herself later refers), and John of Damascus in his treatise *On the Orthodox Faith*, who, significantly, considers himself simply to be summarizing the accepted patristic theological tradition.

As a scholar who publishes almost entirely within the academic milieu, I have to admit that it can be frustrating, at times, to read Behr-Sigel's popularized approaches to these patristic texts. She almost always provides citations for contemporary authors, whether Orthodox or not, but unless she is quoting directly she rarely does so with patristic exegeses. Because I have been working with this material myself for so long, I recognize the sources, but most people would not be able to. So, while she did annotate the occasional direct quote (for example, from Gregory of Nazianzus or Clement of Alexandria), she chose not even to cite the work in which Nyssen's "double creation" account is found, despite devoting two paragraphs to it. Similarly, she rightly ponders whether "this otherness [is] fated to be overcome at the end of time, as certain texts of Maximus the Confessor seem to indicate," but provides no annotation to point the reader to chapter 41 of Maximus' *De ambigua*.

In any case, Behr-Sigel remains a bit ambivalent about the Greek patristic tradition on this subject. She is clearly uncomfortable with the lack of significance that the Cappadocians attach to sexual differentiation: "Robbed of any real spiritual meaning, is not the otherness of men and women reduced to a functional difference in relation to procreation?"[12] Also, while grateful for the fathers' emphasis on the unity of humanity, its common vocation, and the spiritual equality of the sexes, she observes with disapproval their "tendency . . . of expressing this equality in terms of a moral and psychological unity that shapes the female according to the mold of the male."[13] It is certainly true that the Cappadocians, John Chrysostom, and others used the Greek word *andrizo* ("to be courageous," but literally meaning "to be manly or virile") to describe strong Christian women they ad-

[12] Ibid., 42.

[13] Ibid.

mired. As scholars such as Elizabeth Clark and Nonna Verna Harrison have noted,[14] their use of terminology, characteristics, and symbols typically applied only to men subversively denies the reality of the gendered anthropological paradigm that Behr-Sigel criticizes while simultaneously reinforcing it symbolically.

Behr-Sigel continues her critique by perceptively noting the gap between the egalitarianism of abstract patristic anthropology and the fathers' general acceptance of a sexual hierarchy in human relations in practice: "For the Fathers, the subordination of the human female to the human male was in keeping with the law of nature."[15] She was particularly incisive in questioning why it was that only celibate women were permitted to escape male guardianship:

> Why does the consecrated virgin escape from the law of nature? Is it because she represents an asexual humanity or because she has integrated her sex, her femininity, into the divine image? Why is it not the same for the married woman who assumes her sexuality in the context of her human and Christian vocation, a vocation that is integrated into the personal dimension of her life? The answers to these questions do not appear clearly in the thinking of the Fathers. We can even ask if such questions were ever really asked.[16]

Obviously, this was an existential question for her, and it is certainly an existential question for a good many Christian women today. Monasticism is no longer the only alternative to the traditional vocation of a stay-at-home wife and mother, yet the hierarchical model for male-female relations persists within Orthodox ecclesiology and ecclesial practice as well as in much contemporary Orthodox pastoral theology regarding marriage.

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[14] See, for example, Elizabeth A. Clark, "Sexual Politics in the Writings of John Chrysostom," *Anglican Theological Review* 59:1 (1977), 18; Verna A. E. Harrison, "Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology," *Journal of Theological Studies*, 41:2 (1990), 446; and especially Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 214ff. For a twist on this idea, see also Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity*, Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[15] Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women*, 43.

[16] Ibid.

However, the patristic weighting of virginity over marriage is not monolithic. Perhaps a discussion of Gregory of Nazianzus' exaltations of his mother Nonna and sister Gorgonia, both married women with children, or the contrast of bad celibacy to good marriage in Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *On Virginity*,[17] or a few of the many places in his homilies and other works where John Chrysostom condemned virgins as selfish and egotistical and praised widows and barren women instead, could have provided a counterbalance to the emphasis on virginity and monasticism that, Behr-Sigel observed, is often found in the fathers.

At this point, Behr-Sigel analyzes the trinitarian dimension of patristic anthropology, and here again her ambivalence is evident. She clearly favours some type of recognition of the spiritual value of the sexual relationship and the ontological significance of the "otherness" of man and woman beyond simple procreation: "[S]omething in God corresponds ineffably to what we call womanhood in our human language. From this idea-intuition comes the possibility of using feminine metaphors to talk about the absolutely transcendent God."[18] She notes with approval the use of feminine imagery for God, and especially for the Holy Spirit, in the Syriac tradition.[19] I have no doubt that she read enthusiastically the article Susan Ashbrook Harvey published on the early Syriac *Odes of Solomon* in a 1993 issue of the *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*.[20] Harvey demonstrated numerous examples of strongly feminine imagery for all three Persons of the Trinity in the *Odes* and concluded that maleness and femaleness in humanity in some way reflects God, but not in a crude or simplistic

[17] See Mark D. Hart, "Gregory of Nyssa's Ironic Praise of the Celibate Life," *The Heythrop Journal* 33 (1992), 1–19, and "Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990), 450–77. However, see also my critique of the incomplete framework Hart constructs in the former article: Valerie A. Karras, "A Re-evaluation of Marriage, Celibacy, and Irony in Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 13:1 (2005), 111–21.

[18] Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women*, 48.

[19] Ibid., 48–49.

[20] Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the *Odes of Solomon*, and the Early Syriac Tradition," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37:2-3 (1993), 111–39.

one-for-one manner: all three Persons of the Trinity display characteristics that we describe as alternately masculine or feminine.

Unfortunately, certain contemporary theologians in the Russian tradition lack the level of theological subtlety and nuance that Susan Ashbrook Harvey displays in her analysis of the *Odes of Solomon*. Behr-Sigel applauds the "noble and generous vision of femininity" in the writings of Paul Evdokimov and Thomas Hopko, but she ultimately shies away from a Russian theological tradition, extending from Soloviev to Evdokimov and beyond, that ascribes gender to the characteristics of or, even worse, the Persons of the Godhead (the Son as masculine in a divine sense and the Holy Spirit as feminine), siding rather with Vladimir Lossky in recognizing just how far from patristic trinitarian theology is the 19th- to 20th-century Russian interpretation that "sexual differentiation is essential and grounded in God's very being."[21]

The Soteriological Necessity of a Non-Gendered Theological Anthropology

Here we see how Behr-Sigel could make the interconnections among various theological elements more readily than could many others, with her spirituality and spiritually rooted theological vision helping her to recognize, in particular, the soteriological necessity of a non-gendered trinitarian theology and consequent theological anthropology. There is, first of all, the obvious problem with sophiology and its descendants' tendency to do anthropological theology, that is, to extrapolate back from the human to the divine by attributing to the Godhead human characteristics (such as sex or gender) simply because we are created in God's image. Beyond the dangers of a trinitarian theology that makes God in humanity's image, though, there is the related soteriological question of how we as humans image God and so relate to God, a crucial issue given Orthodoxy's existential and incarnational understanding of salvation. Behr-Sigel perceptively observed that Hopko's description of women's vocation as being found in the Holy Spirit

> implies that the vocation of males is found in the Person of Christ. Are not Christ and the Spirit the two hands of the Father always act-

[21] Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women*, 46.

> ing together? Does that mean that there is a different salvation for men and for women? If this were so, it would be a dichotomy in complete contradiction with the great baptismal proclamations of Paul's letters (Gal. 3:28 and I Cor. 12:13). Need we add that it would contradict the whole range of the Church's teaching on baptism?[22]

In fact, it contradicts not only the teaching on baptism but fundamental Eastern Christian soteriology. The soteriological consequences of a gendered theological anthropology are particularly troublesome from an Orthodox perspective precisely because our soteriology is predominantly incarnational in nature. That is, Orthodoxy adheres to the famous dictum of Gregory of Nazianzus: "That which was not assumed is not healed."[23] The person doing the assuming or taking on, of course, is Christ, and it is human nature that he assumes and that needs to be healed. If sexual differentiation – human existence as male and female – is ontologically significant, in other words a fundamental characteristic of our humanity, then how are women saved, since the Logos clearly became incarnate as a male human being?

Moreover, a non-gendered theological anthropology is a virtual necessity for a church with monasticism. How can one maintain that humanity as a whole, and important social institutions such as the family and the church, need both male and female for completeness when there are entire communities considered to be spiritual rather than biological families, predicated on existing as single-sex entities?

I well remember a conversation I had several years ago with Nonna Verna Harrison, an extraordinary patristics scholar who has also done much research on gender issues.[24] We were discussing an

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[22] Ibid., 48.

[23] "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved." Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle* 51 (first letter to Cledonius); English translation in *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 2nd series, vol. 7 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 440.

[24] See Harrison's articles: "The Care-Banishing Breast of the Father, Feminine Image of the Divine in Clement of Alexandria's *Paedogogus* I," *Studia Patristica* 31 (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 401–405; "The Fatherhood of God in Orthodox Theology," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37:2–3 (1993), 185–212; "Women, Human Identity, and the Image of God: Antiochene Interpretations,"

article[25] published in a special issue of the *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* devoted to "God and Gender" (in fact, it was the same issue in which Susan Ashbrook Harvey's article appeared, as well as one by Thomas Hopko and one by Harrison herself). The author of the article in question had taken gender complementarity to its logical extreme and actually argued that women were saved through men, since man was woman's ontological source. The author *very* briefly noted at the end that his paradigm did not account for (actually, it completely excluded) monasticism, but he apparently felt no need to address that pesky little problem. Harrison exclaimed in outrage, "He has marginalized me both as a woman and as a monastic!"

Indeed, this is ultimately the problem when theological anthropology and, even worse, trinitarian theology are founded on gender essentialism. The logical extreme of such gendered anthropology lies at the root of the theology of a very non-O/Orthodox "church," namely, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, commonly known as the Mormons. In Mormon theology, gender exists at the "divine" level (note that God is understood as having once been similar to us) and so is reflected at the human level, with the result that salvation is attained only by couples, not singly, and at both human and divine levels the male dominates over the female, with the woman's very salvation dependent on her husband.[26] Again, this is a logi-

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Journal of Early Christian Studies 9:2 (2001), 205–49; and "Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology," cited in n. 14.

[25] Kenneth Paul Wesche, "Man and Woman in Orthodox Tradition: The Mystery of Gender," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 37:2–3 (1993), 213–51.

[26] Salvation as eternal life – the "celestial kingdom" – is open only to married couples, so man and woman are dependent on each other, but it is the man, the husband, who is in charge and is actually the gatekeeper who calls his wife to resurrection. "Do the women, when they pray, remember their husbands? Do you pray for brother Brigham? Yes, you should always pray for him. But when you pray for him, do you pray also for your own husband, that he may have the inspiration of the Almighty to lead and govern his family as the lord? Do you uphold your husband before God as your lord? 'What! – my husband to be my lord?' I ask, Can you get into the celestial kingdom without him? Have any of you been there? You will remember that you never got into the celestial kingdom [during the temple ceremony] without the aid of your husband. If you did, it was because your husband was away, and some one had to act proxy for him. No woman will get into the celestial kingdom, ex-

cal extrapolation of a gendered and hierarchically ordered theology and anthropology.

The Priesthood and Gendered Symbolism

Again, arising from her spirituality as well as her ecclesiological vision, Behr-Sigel recognized that some similar problems that resulted from the identification of gender with specific Persons of the Godhead also arose in the identification of the priesthood with the male sex. As with the question of gender symbolism applied to God, the problem is *not* in the use of gendered symbolism but, rather, in the *reification* of gendered symbolism, especially when that reification is applied only selectively.[27] For example, while Behr-Sigel admired and appreciated the gendered symbolism of the priest as Christ the bridegroom, she also astutely noted that the priest liturgically functions iconically predominantly as the church, the bridegroom's bride. Further research and reflection in both scripture (Hebrews 7 and 10) and relevant patristic works by John Chrysostom and Nicolas Cabasilas, together with spiritual guidance from the late archimandrite Lev Gillet,[28] led her to conclude "that in the Orthodox perspective, the priest does not represent Christ and is not the 'image' of Christ in the sense of naturalistic realism." She supported her conclusion by quoting St John Chrysostom and then adding her own remarks.

> "He [the priest] stands before us, makes the gestures that Christ made, pronounces the words that Christ pronounced, but the power and the grace comes from God." Thus the symbolic mediation consists in the action of the priest and in the words of the divine Word pronounced by him, or rather pronounced "through him" and placed on the bread and the wine, fruits of man's labor. Neither St. John Chrysostom nor Cabasilas spoke of the symbolism of the

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cept her husband receives her, if she is worthy to have a husband; and if not, somebody will receive her as a servant." Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 5 (London: Latter-Day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 291.

[27] Behr-Sigel, The Ministry of Women, 20–22.

[28] Gillet was a Benedictine monk who came to Orthodoxy; he published various theological and spiritual works under the pseudonym "A Monk of the Eastern Church," which also became the title of a biography of him written by Behr-Sigel.

> priest's masculinity. Moreover, the priest lends his voice and suppliant hand to the Church as well, that is, to the Bride, according to the symbolism of marriage. . . . The priest is the voice of the Bride longing for union with the Bridegroom. Here also, and even more so, the symbolism of sex does not determine his role.[29]

As a speculative aside, I'm not sure how much she thought about this area, but Behr-Sigel's rejection of gendered essentialism also bears ramifications within the sexually and gender-wise non-normative communities commonly referred to as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered), especially for those who identify as transgender. Rejecting as part of Orthodox theological anthropology the idea that human beings are intrinsically male or female from birth or even from conception – which is already problematic from a scientific point of view – would felicitously move Orthodoxy beyond the knee-jerk, moralistic rhetoric of "sin" and "perversion" and allow it to engage with and incorporate into its theological anthropology the genetic, biological, and psychological research currently being done with respect to sexual differentiation, gender construction, and sexual orientation. These are areas which Orthodoxy traditionally has held to be *theologoumena*: that is, matters that are open to discussion and differing points of view, as opposed to dogma or doctrine, which historically has been limited to revealed truths about the nature of God as Trinity and of Jesus as God incarnate.

Conclusion

It is clear that Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's own patristic research and her reading of the research of others, including Vladimir Lossky's, turned her away from a theological anthropology rooted in gender essentialism and Russian sophiology and toward the traditional trinitarian theology and theological anthropology of the Greek patristic tradition, which viewed sex and gender as something outside of the nature of the Godhead and which, within humanity, considered sexual differentiation to be a secondary, ontologically insignificant

[29] Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women*, 22. Behr-Sigel claims that the Chrysostom quote at the beginning of this passage is from the saint's *Homilies on Galatians* and gives a citation from Migne (PG 61:663), but I have been unable to locate it either there or anywhere else in Chrysostom's homilies on Galatians.

characteristic of humanity limited to its fallen state, created by God out of foreknowledge of humanity's Fall and to be transcended or even abolished in the eschaton.

In fact, I must here disagree with the rather negative assessment of neopatristic theology in the second part of Sarah Hinlicky Wilson's excellent article on Elisabeth Behr-Sigel. The retrieval of patristic theology – as with the retrieval of any historical theology, including biblical theology – should never be done in an anachronistic manner that either imposes contemporary questions willy-nilly on an earlier time period or presents as unchangeable doctrine the theological reflection of that earlier time period without situating it within its own cultural context. Behr-Sigel's use of Vladimir Lossky's historically based trinitarian theology to critique the association of gender with the Persons of the Godhead is a perfect example of the importance of patristic *ressourcement* when carefully contextualized and creatively applied to contemporary questions and issues. Behr-Sigel's patristic retrieval in this area opened new ways of thinking for me as a student and helped guide the beginnings of my own research. For that, I am eternally grateful to her.

Ultimately, Behr-Sigel's disenchantment with the gender theology of her mentors and friends such as Bulgakov and Evdokimov was based on several factors. First, the scriptural basis of theological ideas was still important to her; she herself used scripture to discuss men's and women's "otherness" and so criticized the lack of scriptural basis in Evdokimov's and Hopko's attempts to inject a type of gender into the Godhead with the idea of the Holy Spirit as the feminine complement to the Son's masculinity.[30] Second, she was uncomfortable with attempts to concretize and define in a divisive and limiting way the charisms and characteristics of human beings, whether male or female. She intuited – and saw confirmed in the baptismal and eucharistic life of the church – the unity of all persons in Christ through the Spirit and believed that all are called not only to make full use of the particularities of their personal existence (whether sex, class, or ethnicity) but also to *transcend* whatever the limitations of their personal context may be, so as to become completely and properly human in a holistic sense. In fact, I believe that her initial affinity for the iconic anthropology of the Cappadocians is what drew her into the

[30] Ibid., 18.

related anthropological question of their understanding of sex and gender. And, finally, she recognized the negative spiritual and soteriological consequences of a theological anthropology predicated on dividing humanity in half and attributing certain characteristics, gifts, vocations, and potentialities to one half only, whether male or female.

Yet Behr-Sigel was not satisfied with patristic anthropology, either, as I have demonstrated in part and as Wilson has also explored in the third chapter of her dissertation. The *grande dame* of French Orthodox theology recognized the cultural and philosophical influences motivating some of the fathers' views and frequently accused the Cappadocians of "angelism" because of the lack of significance they attached to sexual differentiation, despite the biblical nature of that angelism, rooted in Christ's response to the Sadducees, who questioned him about the woman married to seven men.[31] More importantly, though, their anthropology failed to answer some of her existential questions, particularly about the vocation of married women in our current postlapsarian human condition and the theological significance of sexual differentiation and sexual relationships in this same condition. She seemed prepared to accept the transcendence of sexual identity in the resurrection but, as with so much else, she sought to give it content and theological meaning "here and now."

[31] See Matthew 22:29–30; Luke 20:34–35.

Chapter Seven

The Hands of a Woman: Person, Image, and Ordination

MARIA MCDOWELL

After decades of gracious theological reflection on a subject she came to both unexpectedly and relatively late in her long and prolific life, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel saw nothing in the faith of the church or its theological reasoning "to prevent the Church from ordaining, that is, blessing, a female Christian for the exercise of a ministry which is an expression of the universal priesthood of all the faithful, while at the same time pointing to him who is its one divine source."[1] This conclusion stands at odds with her initial position, which echoed almost in its entirety the work of her friend Paul Evdokimov. In this initial position, Behr-Sigel shared Evdokimov's assumption of distinct male and female charisms, the latter of which precluded the participation of women in a ministry that required male charisms. The evolution into her mature position is chronicled and carefully examined by Sarah Hinlicky Wilson. This later position incorporates the personalism of Vladimir Lossky. According to Lossky, a key element of our common humanity is an ability to transcend ourselves. The false trail of "women's charisms," which elevates a distinctive femininity by denying women their common, personal humanity, is rejected by Behr-Sigel in the recognition that "women are not a set of charisms. They are persons with a variety of charisms who, again, transcend the nature of which they are an instance."[2] This

[1] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Ordination of Women: Also a Question for the Orthodox Churches," in *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church*, Risk Book Series (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000), 42.

[2] Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, "Woman, Women, and the Priesthood in the Thought of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel" (PhD Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2008), 298. See also the published book, *Woman, Women, and the*

personalism is also evident in Behr-Sigel's shift regarding the Theotokos: no longer is she a representative of women in particular, but rather, "she is matrix of humanity renewed."[3]

Rather than repeat the work of Wilson and explain Behr-Sigel's theological development, I will expand on the theological insights of her later years by engaging two areas Behr-Sigel left mostly, though not entirely, untouched: the significance of Christ's male body from the perspective of iconography (as articulated by Theodore of Studios, one of the few late ancient theologians to discuss the maleness of Christ), and the insights offered by "reading" the Theotokos as a uniquely feminine person who is a representative of all humanity. Both of these areas open up new areas for applying Behr-Sigel's arguments.

First, the work of Theodore gives us a frame with which to consider the radical particularity of Christ's maleness and offers us the insight that difference and variety increase the glory and honour offered to God. I examine his arguments regarding icons in wood and paint and their relevance to icons in flesh and blood, arguments which undermine core tenets of iconic arguments for an exclusively male to priesthood. Second, I will move from the Theodore's arguments concerning the maleness of Christ to an examination of the femaleness of the Theotokos, because arguments that exclude women from the priesthood are as much about supposedly archetypical feminine qualities as they are about the masculine qualities of men or the priestly office. Interpretations of the Theotokos have been at the crux of Orthodox arguments about the character of "woman" as essentially passive, receptive, and humble. This is an erroneously limited view of the Mother of God, who is consistently described by Behr-Sigel through the words of Nicholas Cabasilas as a "co-worker" with God. I will build on Behr-Sigel's critique of modern interpretations of the Theotokos and her femininity by examining more traditional verbal and iconic portrayals of the Theotokos that address her relevance to both females and males. In developing rather than summarizing

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Priesthood in the Trinitarian Theology of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2013).

[3] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "Mary and Women," in *Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Vision of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, ed. Michael Plekon and Sarah E. Hinlicky (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 33.

Behr-Sigel's argument, I hope to express my gratitude for her willingness to reconsider her own opinions, for courageously making public her deeper questions and reflections, and for graciously speaking a theology that allows a much younger feminist theologian like myself the space to breathe with the Spirit in my own church.

The Iconic Argument

To understand how Theodore the Studite's reasoning in defense of icons undermines an iconic exclusion of women, it is important to first define the modern "iconic argument." Despite its rather recent appearance, the iconic argument continues to hold sway among Orthodox theologians opposed to the ordination of women to the priesthood. It was quite convincing to Behr-Sigel herself for many years. In this argument, the priest stands before the church as an icon of Christ, and the success of his resemblance to Christ depends on their shared maleness. Despite the fact that this argument emphasizes only the male priestly metaphors of bridegroom, husband, and father, to the exclusion of the more frequent metaphors of shepherd, captain, teacher, leader, birth-giver, and midwife; despite the fact that this argument focuses on the singular, supposedly male, eucharistic function to the detriment of the many other functions of a Christian priest such as pastor, teacher, confessor, administrator; despite the argument's failure to account for the liturgical symbolism of the priest as *in persona Ecclesiae*, a body typically described by the feminine figures of a bride or the Theotokos herself but for which we have no living female symbol at the altar; despite the fact that according to Chrysostom (as consistently quoted by Behr-Sigel) the priest does not do the work but merely lends his hands to the Holy Spirit; despite all these problems with this theology, the underlying question remains: Can women be icons of Christ? The more fundamental issue, which cannot be put aside, is this: Can women's bodies incarnate the divine?

The very asking of this seems quite devastating for Orthodox women. Behr-Sigel, Nonna Harrison, and Valerie Karras, among others, repeatedly ponder: If, at the incarnation, Christ did not assume the nature of women, are women healed? After all, "what is not assumed is not healed" according to Gregory of Nazianzus, who states this in support of his contention that yes, indeed, Christ was fully

anthropos, human.[4] The very notion of *theosis* depends on the full humanity of Christ, a humanity into which each human being is growing. This is the fundamental understanding of salvation in an Orthodox mode.

Yet Jesus' body was, and is, male. Behr-Sigel did not extensively pursue the meaning of Christ's male body, with the exception of her exchange with the patristic scholar Nonna Harrison. As Wilson notes, her silence "reflects the wisdom of the church catholic before her."[5] By adopting the personalism of theologians such as Lossky, Behr-Sigel takes on a position in which quantifying and defining a human person by any single component denies the fullness of her or his humanity. From this perspective, there is little reason to examine the maleness of Christ. Yet Wilson also submits that questions about men and women in the church will remain unresolved "until the church reaches some kind of consensus about the meaning of the incarnate Word's male human body."[6] By beginning where Behr-Sigel only rarely ventured, I want to take up the difficult question of the maleness of Christ in a context where it is particularly important: icons in wood and paint, and icons in flesh and blood.

Particularity: The Maleness of Christ

The seemingly modern concern with bodily particularity was shared by the defenders of icons over a millennium and a half ago, though for very different reasons. Like modern materialists of every stripe, Theodore the Studite (759–826) could not imagine human beings without bodies. Concerned with the reality of Christ's body and its ability to be seen, touched, and therefore "written," he has laid a foundation for the crucial value of bodily difference as a constituent element of human uniqueness. Further, he offers us the insight that difference and variety increase the glory and honour offered to God.

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[4] The more accurate quote is, "The un-assumed is the unhealed, but what is united with God is also being saved." Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle* 101.5, in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 158. See, for example, Nonna Verna Harrison, "The Maleness of Christ," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 2 (1998), 111–51.

[5] Hinlicky Wilson, "Woman, Women, and the Priesthood," 284.

[6] Ibid., 285.

Theodore of Studios

Theodore wrote in response to the iconoclast Council of 815. These second-wave iconoclasts were no longer concerned purely with the question of idolatry, as they admitted the possibility of creating icons. Their objection was to the veneration of icons, concerned that the laity, through an ignorant act of veneration, might worship the wood and paint of icons as divine, thereby worshipping the creation rather than the Creator. In 815, icons were permitted in churches if they were out of reach, hung high enough on the walls that they could not be touched. Icons could be made but not "used."[7] At issue were the proper order of worship and the implied conflation of image and prototype, which for iconoclasts are *homoousios*, of the same substance or essence (*ousia*) with one another.[8]

Theodore was not content with treating icons as mere teaching tools.[9] He believed icons were essential to worship and wanted to bring icons back within reach of the people, recognizing in their persistent veneration a genuine honouring of the *person* depicted. Rather than summarize the entirety of Theodore's reasoning, I will focus on three threads within his larger argument. One thread argues that it is the uniqueness of individual persons that makes it possible to "write" icons at all. This thread is significant for its insight into what makes human beings distinct from one another. The second thread argues that an icon and its prototype do not share the same nature or material but that the image shares in the grace and honour of the person

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[7] Patrick Henry, "The Formulators of Icon Doctrine," *Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 78–79.

[8] Patrick Henry, "The Formulators of Icon Doctrine," 82; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 109. The problem, declares Theodore's literary opponent, is that "Christ's flesh is always venerated together with His divinity, because they are united inseparably; but the icon is not united inseparably with Him" (*Ref.* I.12). Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons,* trans. Catherine Roth (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 32. Theodore's work is a series of *Refutations*, thus the abbreviated use of "*Ref.*" followed by the number, section, and paragraph. Page numbers will always be given in the footnotes.

[9] This was the primary focus of Theodore's predecessor, the first-wave defender of icons, John of Damascus.

depicted. It is only through the sharing of grace and honour that we can say that divinity is present in an icon. The third and final thread is that icons are *necessary*, since an image that *could* be made, *should* be made, and, further, that the greater the diversity of materials used to portray the image, the greater the glory and honour offered to God.

Writing Humanity

The ability to "sense" the divine in icons starts with the incarnation. In accord with Gregory of Nazianzus' principle that "what is not assumed is not saved," Theodore argues that Christ assumes the entirety of our human nature (*Ref.* III.A.4). A human being is recognized "with the mind and thought" as that which is "animate, rational, mortal, and capable of thought and understanding" (*Ref.* III.A.16, 4).[10] Yet no human being is recognized in the mind without being seen by the eye as he or she exists as a particular, embodied individual (*Ref.* III.I.A.16). "For example," says Theodore,

> Peter is not portrayed insofar as he is animate, rational, mortal, and capable of thought and understanding; for this does not define Peter only but also Paul and John and all those of the same species. But insofar as he adds along with the common definition certain properties, such as a long or short nose, curly hair, a good complexion, bright eyes, he is distinguished from the other individuals of the same species (καὶ πάντας τοὺς ὑπὸ τὸ αὐτὸ εἶδος). (Ref. III.A.34).[11]

We can only speak of a general human nature because of what we see in particular, unique human beings (*Ref.* III.A.15).[12] Each

[10] Theodore the Studite, 83, 78.

[11] Ibid., 90–91.

[12] Theodore consistently refers to the ability to "see." However, I suspect that, had he been asked, he would have agreed that the blind are able to recognize a human person utilizing other senses. See the recent work of Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Bissera Pentcheva on the incorporation of the senses into Orthodox worship: Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); Bissera V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," *The Art Bulletin* 88:4 (2006), 631–55; Bissera V. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010). While Pentcheva notes a hierarchy of sense with sight reigning, I will refer to the "senses" rather than sight only.

bodily characteristic is shared among some but not all individuals, yet these common qualities converge in a single human being with a name, whom we understand to be like no other human being. Peter is utterly unique from Paul. For Theodore, the significance of this radical particularity is that it allows us to recognize and then write Christ as distinct from other human beings.[13]

It is here that we run directly into the "problem" of Jesus' maleness. Among these shared differences is biological sex. "Maleness and femaleness," says Theodore,

> are sought only in the forms of bodies, since none of the differences which characterize the sexes can be recognized in bodiless beings. Therefore, if Christ were un-circumscribable, as being without a body, He would also be without the difference of sex. But He was born male . . . therefore He is circumscribed" (*Ref.* III.A.4).[14]

Theodore's reference to biological sex is in keeping with his overarching goal: circumscribability. Christ had a sexed male body; sexed bodies can be circumscribed; therefore, Christ can be circumscribed. However, Theodore is quite clear that maleness and femaleness exist only in bodies. If there is no body, there is no sex. Biological sex is one of many essential hypostatic properties that enable us to recognize one another as distinct in our bodies. It is also one of many qualities through which we can see our common nature, a window into our humanity.

My point here is that the maleness of Jesus is important. But its importance is not as a *common* attribute that says something about the behaviour, qualities, or charisms of all who share in the attribute but rather as a marker of distinction, of difference, of uniqueness. For Theodore, there is no intermediate state between a common humanity shared by Peter, Paul, and Jesus, and the maleness of their bodies that serves to distinguish them from one another. At

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[13] Like all human beings, Christ "assumed human nature in general, yet He assumed it as contemplated in an individual manner; for this reason the possibility of circumscription exists" (*Ref.* III.A.17). Theodore the Studite, 84.

[14] Theodore the Studite, 94. Theodore is not the only theologian to refer to the maleness of Christ. Nonna Verna Harrison discusses other examples, among them Gregory the Theologian in *Or.* 45, 13, in the aforementioned "The Maleness of Christ," a careful and thorough discussion of the nuanced use of gendered language, imagery, and allegory in patristic sources.

no point does Theodore even hint at the idea that Peter, Paul, and Jesus have something in common that sets them apart from female human beings such as Mary or Martha. On the contrary, Theodore states quite clearly that Christ is identical to his Father in respect to his divinity but to his *mother* in respect to his humanity (*Ref.* III.B.2). Christ's humanity is identical to a "female humanity." For Theodore, the point is that there are only infinitely diverse individuals through whom we see general humanity.

Theodore gives us an anthropological thread that we must take seriously: human particularity is a diverse witness to a shared humanity. This thread undermines a facile attempt to describe human beings through the shared lens of a particular hypostatic quality. The moment human beings are defined through only one aspect of their uniqueness, in this case their sex, uniqueness itself drops away. If Theodore is right, an Orthodox theology of icons depends on both particularity and uniqueness. Without radical particularity, that is, uniqueness, there could be no icons of Christ. While I can hardly make a direct line of connection here, I think it is fair to say that the emphasis on uniqueness as constitutive of personhood in figures such as Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas reflect this aspect of the Orthodox tradition.

Resemblance and Homonymy

Before moving to the question of the theological significance of sex and its controversial partner, gender, I would like to briefly highlight two other threads in Theodore. These threads have nothing to do with the maleness of Christ, but they highlight important aspects of the analogy created between the wood and paint used to write icons, and the flesh and bones of human beings who are icons of the divine.

Theodore's iconoclast opponents apparently blurred the distinction between the flesh of Christ and his divinity but thought it quite obvious that the material of icons was distinct from the body of Christ and therefore not to be venerated (*Ref.* I.12). In response, Theodore contends that since Christ has both a human and divine nature, what is written is *not* the divine nature but Jesus' human qualities, which contain but do not limit the divine.[15] Divinity is present in

[15] Theodore the Studite, 82.

the icon not because the material is itself deified but "by a relative participation, because they share in the grace and the honour" (*Ref.* I.12).[16] The nature of sacred objects remains distinct from the nature of that which they represent, just as within Christ his human and divine natures remain distinct. What connect the nature of the image to the nature of its prototype are the shared resemblance and the name.[17]

The use of the word "resemblance" might seem to confirm arguments that human beings who symbolize Christ must resemble him by sharing his sex. Yet given that sex is only one of Jesus' many individuating qualities, arguments based on this understanding of resemblance must also account for other qualities such as hair, skin colour, height, and so forth. The following questions arise: What creates a resemblance? What allows for the sharing of a name, the sharing of which directs veneration from physical materials to the person depicted? For the moment, I will put these questions aside in order to pursue the third and final thread I am drawing from Theodore.

The Glory of Diversity

In a distinctly Aristotelian move, Theodore argues that an image that is not written, like a seal that is not impressed, is ineffective, idle, a failure.

> The seal shows its desire for honor when it makes itself available for impression in many different materials. In the same way, although we believe that Christ's own image is in Him as He has a human form, nevertheless when we see His image materially depicted in different ways, we praise His greatness more magnificently. For the

[16] Ibid., 33.

[17] "Insofar as the image resembles the prototype, it shares its whole veneration on the basis of resemblance, not bringing into veneration the material in which it appears; for this is the nature (*physis*) of the image, to be identified according to likeness with the prototype, but to differ according to the principle of its essence (*ousia*). For this reason the image has homonymy with the prototype. But if it were wholly similar, what we have said has collapsed, and the image is simply the prototype. However, it resembles the prototype in its whole likeness, but not in its nature" (*Ref.* III.D.6). Ibid., 111.

> failure to go forth into a material imprint eliminates His existence in human form (*Ref.* III.D.10).[18]

Note here that Christ without an image *fails* as a prototype (*Ref.* III.D.9).[19] Theodore is arguing for the *necessary* use of icons in worship. It is not enough to say that we are *able* to "write" Christ; we *must* do so. This is Theodore's affirmation of icons as objects of veneration, not simply teaching tools. If it is possible to portray Christ in material form, it is better to do so. Following from this, it is also better to portray Christ with diverse materials. This diversity of materials *enhances* the glory of the one portrayed.

Connections and Correlations

So how do these three threads serve to develop the insights of Behr-Sigel regarding the ordination of women?

One thread elevates the human body and its characteristics as indicators of human uniqueness. Bodiliness is essential; it is the only way we can be human. But this does not then justify some sort of sex or gender essentialism. The problem with arguments that group the characteristics, qualities, and roles of human beings based on shared bodily characteristics is not that they overestimate the significance of the body. Rather, it is that they underestimate the uniqueness of one body from another. Theodore's use of bodily particularity as the very means of distinguishing one person from another, as the means through which we can "write" Jesus and know that he is not Paul or Peter or John or Mary, places before us the option of acknowledging the importance of bodies as places of difference, of uniqueness.

Another thread establishes that God is not glorified by homogeneity but by difference. In this, Theodore stands in awe before a God who is glorified and honoured in wood and oil, stones, and bits of glass, as well as by diverse icons of Christ and the saints. The many ways of portraying God evoke greater worship in Theodore. As it

[18] Ibid., 112. Patrick Henry points out that Theodore's terminology is Aristotelian even as he retains the Neoplatonic commitments of both Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and John of Damascus. Patrick Henry, "What Was the Iconoclastic Controversy About?" *Church History* 45:1 (1976), 27.

[19] Theodore the Studite, 112.

should! What better way to be visually reminded that God is "everywhere and in all things"?[20]

Yet it is the thread of Theodore's argument in which he insists that the material of the image does not share a common nature with the person imaged that presses us to clarify precisely what it is that is being shared. Divinity is not present because of the material, but because of the honour and glory of the one the material resembles. It is this language of resemblance that seems to support the insistence that Jesus can only be represented by a body that "resembles" him, a male body. Yet it is one thing to state quite correctly that if Jesus were not uniquely male, we would have neither incarnation nor icons; it is quite another to infer from this that it is only through maleness that we can see Christ, and in Christ, God. This arbitrarily elevates one single characteristic – maleness – as the sole bodily criteria for "resemblance." The greater mistake, though, is in thinking that because males somehow "look like" Jesus they can represent Jesus in the same way that the figure within an icon indicates Jesus. Notice the visual analogy that is created here between the male body and an icon. Yet what aspect of the male body is analogous to the icon? Is it the material, the paint, wood, stone, or glass? Is it the visual form of the figure, a male human being that is necessary to point to Christ?

Both correlations fundamentally ignore what it is that makes a body worthy of honour and glory in such a way that the church recognizes that embodied person as a saint. A given image, made of the same materials and certainly similar colours, could be Jesus – or it could be Judas. Note that in both of these cases the image is a male. In an icon, what distinguishes one figure from the other may be as subtle as the whether the eyes are looking directly at us or are suspiciously averted. It could be indicated in the nimbus of light surrounding the head of one figure but missing from the other. It is most likely made obvious in the names inscribed next to the figure. Note that in each of these cases, the material and its form is not all that is "speaking" to us.

Rather, icons use a certain visual language that draws on a set of narratives in which the subject of the icon is always situated. We

[20] This is from a vesperal prayer to the Holy Spirit: "Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, who is everywhere and in all things, Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Live, come and abide in us . . . and save our souls, O Good One."

know that a nimbus is a visual symbol of holiness. We also know that the three men fallen on the ground, shoes thrown to the side, are the disciples witnessing the transfiguration. We know this because we see icons at the same time as we hear the stories of the people within them. Icons of saints visually refer to the life of the saint, whether the simple cross held by a martyr or the many panels of the busy Nicholas. Icons are never just about the material or the form but the virtuous *action* of the subject. We know saints are saints because of how they lived their lives. We know them through the loving, caring, just, and merciful relationships they formed. This is what is being honoured and glorified in images of saints, a life lived as virtuous participation in God, a life marked by *theosis*.

Theosis is, among other things, a life lived according to the virtues exemplified by Jesus in his own life. We see Christ not simply in the body but in what the body does, in how it relates. The icon is a sacrament, according to Evdokimov, a "vehicle for personal presence" and witness to the virtuous life of the saint.[21] Maleness in and of itself does not necessarily point to divinity. A male body only represents the divine when it is engaged in virtuous relationships. Yet this argument does not exclude the possibility that perhaps divinity is only visible through maleness.

Related Problems

Here is the real cluster of related problems. Are we only able to call to mind Christ when visually presented with a male body? Is there something of God, incarnated in Christ, that can only be revealed via a male body? What is this "something" that must be revealed by the priest to establish a connection to the divine and can only be done by a male body? While the first question keeps us comfortably in the realm of biological sex and the shared qualities of male bodies, it also implies that it is the shape of the body that we see rather than what the body does and how the body relates. This hardly constitutes an iconic vision of the body, which is meant to call to mind divinity. Instead, such a vision runs the danger of doing exactly what iconoclasts were so concerned to avoid: creating a magical association of power and divinity with the shape, symbol, image, or mate-

[21] Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty,* trans. Steven Bigham (Torrance, Calif.: Oakwood, 1990), 178, 179.

rial rather than the person encountered through the image.[22] The latter two questions however, move us into a much more complicated area: that of gender. While we cannot easily separate sex and gender, at root gender refers to those qualities, characteristics, and roles that we believe to be associated with particular sexed bodies. Are the virtuous relationships of Christ, or a saint, gendered?

While Theodore and his contemporaries make very few if any statements about gender, modern theologies regarding the priesthood are almost entirely about gender. These theologies, whether put forward tangentially by Evdokimov or explicitly by Hopko, clearly distinguish between masculine and feminine roles, characteristics, qualities, and even virtues.[23] From this, they then argue that there is something in the role of the priest that is essentially masculine. Because it deserves its own extended treatment, I will put aside the question of priestly metaphors and functions and their relationship to gender. Instead, I will take the threads offered to us by Theodore and turn, as Behr-Sigel did, to the Theotokos in order to question the very notion of gender essentialism in light of bodily particularity.

Feminine Virtues?

Behr-Sigel, speaking in 1996, rejected her previously held notion that the Theotokos represented "Woman." This rejection was

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[22] While Orthodoxy clearly rejected the iconoclast solution to the problem of both idolatry and magical associations of power with objects, their concerns were shared.

[23] Behr-Sigel repeatedly notes that Evdokimov's rejection of female priests was tangential to, though perhaps following from, his larger concern with gender. Thomas Hopko is well known for directly addressing the topic. His two major contributions, written over two decades apart, maintain the same conclusion, with substantially revised reasoning in the latter. In both cases, however, assertions about normative qualities of sex and gender provide the foundation for his arguments. His first contribution appeared in 1975 and can be found in two places: Thomas Hopko, "On the Male Character of Christian Priesthood," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 19:3 (1975), 147–73, and in *Women and the Priesthood*, 1st ed., ed. Thomas Hopko (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983). His significantly revised reasoning was published over 15 years later in "Presbyter/Bishop: A Masculine Ministry," in *Women and the Priesthood*, 2nd ed., ed. Thomas Hopko (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999).

part and parcel of her rejection of the idea of distinctly female charisms. Instead, she emphasized the unique vocation of Mary as the mother of God, a vocation that "precludes imitation of her."[24] By returning to biblical texts, and insisting on Mary's unique calling, Behr-Sigel objects both to gender complementarians who would read into Mary a model of submissiveness for all women and feminist essentialists who see in her a champion of womanhood. In order to make her argument, Behr-Sigel turns to the 14th-century work of Nicholas Cabasilas who sees in the Theotokos the free and faithful response required of any human being when called by God into new life. Behr-Sigel also advocated a return to biblical texts as a source for "seeing" Mary. This focus on scripture may be precisely because Evdokimov based his argument for female archetypes on icons, primarily the *eleousa* style, the most famous example of which is the "Virgin of Vladimir."

Certainly, biblical work on Mary must be done, though in this area we Orthodox have much to gain from our Protestant and Catholic sisters and brothers. A uniquely Orthodox argument, however, cannot ignore icons. So, in order to develop Behr-Sigel's argument further I, like Evdokimov, will turn to icons of the Virgin. My primary question is this: What exactly does the Orthodox iconic tradition regard as the "femininity" of the Mother of God? In order to answer this question, I will "read" three types of Marian icons in parallel to liturgical and theological texts of the Orthodox tradition. As will become very clear, the Theotokos does not easily conform to the romantic sensibilities that permeate 19th- and 20th-century expositions of the feminine.[25] My argument here is straightforward:

[24] Behr-Sigel, "Mary and Women," 37.

[25] I use the term "romantic" intentionally. Jaroslav Pelikan notes that Mary as the "eternal Feminine" has served as an archetype of womanhood in a way that Christ has never done for manhood. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 165–75. Pelikan's own exposition of this archetypical role is an extended exegesis of Goethe's *Faust*. It is no coincidence that the Russian theology of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, strongly influenced by German romanticism, should likewise construct archetypical descriptions of womanhood exemplified by the Theotokos. Evdokimov's anthropology and theology are heavily shaped by 19th- and early 20th-century Russian thinkers such as Soloviev, Bukharev, and Bulgakov, all of whom were strongly influ-

Throughout the tradition, the radical particularity of the female Theotokos uniquely reveals a full range of human virtue and relationships.

Types

Icons of the Virgin Mary generally portray her in the company of Christ, theologically stressing the incarnation, in which the fully divine Christ receives his full humanity from his mother, the Theotokos.[26] We can identify four main types of images that are easily distinguished from one another. The earliest Mother of God *orans* depicts the Virgin with arms upraised in an ancient gesture of prayer and supplication. As the *hodegetria*, a term meaning "she who leads the way," Mary gestures with one hand towards the Christ-child whom she holds with her other arm. The Virgin Enthroned seats her in a place of royal authority, the "Queen of Heaven." Finally, the most recently developed type is the Virgin *eleousa*, named for the Greek word "mercy."[27] Each type has associated versions, often distinguished by famous sanctuaries in which an image was housed, cities that they are reputed to have saved from devastation, the perceived role of the icon in a significant historical event, or by particularly important emotive or theological features of the icon itself. I will only address the first three types, though I will briefly comment on the *elousa* tradition in light of human virtues.

Hodegetria

The hodegetria type is linked to a prototype purportedly "written" by St Luke, who sent it to "Theophilus" along with his fa-

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enced by German romanticism and Faust's "eternal feminine." See also Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000).

[26] The exception to this is the very early *Orans* types, which will be discussed below, and the Virgin in her intercessory role, appearing in most *deesis* icons with John the Baptist (or St Nicholas) and Christ as judge.

[27] Ouspensky and Lossky add a fifth, the Mother of God of the Passion. This type appears in Serbia in the 14th century and is rarely included by other (especially Byzantine-oriented) scholars as a main type of marian iconography. Léonide Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, rev. ed., trans. G. E. H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 102.

mous text on the early church.[28] In this type, the Virgin carries in one arm (usually the left) her son; both figures are upright and gazing out at the beholder. Christ sits as if enthroned in her arms, positioned as *pantocrator*.[29] With her free hand the Virgin gestures toward Christ, leading or pointing the way. Mary's eyes draw the viewer in and her hand directs our gaze to her son, who offers a blessing. This is an icon of dynamic participation in which the beholder is drawn in by a gaze, pointed toward Christ-Emmanuel, and receives a blessing.[30] This style emphasizes, like its descendant the *eleousa*, the sacrificial nature of motherly love. It does so, however, in the context of war.

The rise of this style's popularity and connection to the Constantinopolitan Marian cult is, according to Bissera Pentcheva, a story of imperial power in the context of a perpetually warring Byzantine empire.[31] In war-torn Byzantium, virginal motherhood is framed as a

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[28] According to legend, it was later brought to Constantinople in the 5th century by the Empress Eudocia (422–462) as a gift for her sister-in-law Pulcheria (399–453).

[29] Like the Virgin, icons of Christ also have types, though fewer (as Maguire argues, there is significantly less theological freedom in portraying Christ than his mother). The *acheiropoietos* (ἀχειροποίητος), or "not made by hands," derives from legends in which Christ's face was impressed upon a piece of linen; these depict only Christ's head framed with his halo and a cloth. Christ *pantocrator* portrays the divine Christ, fully human, often though not always seated on a throne. In one hand he holds a scroll or book; with the other he offers a blessing. The *mandorla* that surrounds him indicates divine light and infinity. Depending on the size of the image, Christ may be surrounded by angelic figures and symbols of the four gospels.

[30] Ouspensky and Lossky call this a "a gesture of presentation" by a mother of her Son: see Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 81. Apparently not enamored with this style, Cavernos says only that it is "more hieratic," the "most austere form of the Holy Virgin" with a "passionless" expression. This is the sum total of his analysis. Fotis Kontoglou and Constantine Cavarnos, *Byzantine Sacred Art*: *Selected Writings of the Contemporary Greek icon painter Fotis Kontoglous on the sacred arts according to the Tradition of Eastern Orthodox Christianity,* 2nd ed. (Belmont: The Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1985), 110.

[31] The Byzantine empire saw virtually no peace in its effort to recover territory lost as a result of the disintegration of the Roman empire. Under Justinian I (reigned 527–565), the empire fought the Vandals and Ostrogoths to the west. Peace with the Sassanid Persians allowed his successors to defend

source of invincibility and sacrifice, "a model of selfless love indispensable for any state recruiting armies."[32] The *hodegetria* appears at the centre of the narratives of a crucial battle during the Avar siege, fought on August 7, 626. In these accounts, the Virgin "gave courage," won "uncontested victory" by "inflicting horror and fear," simultaneously protecting and destroying.[33] She "sank men and boats together," filling the water with dead bodies; she "alone fought this battle and won the victory."[34] As Pentcheva notes, it is the Theomater's virginal

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against the constant press of Bulgars, Slavs, and Avars. The brief respite under Maurice (reigned 582–602) ended with his murder, used as a pretext for Persian reclamation of Mesopotamia, Damascus, and Jerusalem. While Heraclius (reigned 610–641) fought the Persians to the east, the Avars and Slavs laid siege to Constantinople only to be repelled on August 7, 626, according to "eyewitness" accounts, by the Virgin herself, brandishing a sword. Both Heraclius in the East and his representative in the capitol, the Patriarch Servius, carried icons as battle standards. Heraclius carried an *acheiropoietos* ("not made by hands") image of Christ, and Sergius an icon of the Theotokos. Averil Cameron, "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," *Past and Present* 84:1 (1979), 24. Though victorious, the siege and ongoing wars with the Persians to the east left Byzantine territories vulnerable to Arab attack from the south for centuries to follow. The empire was (again briefly) stabilized only at end of the 9th century.

[32] Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 61.

[33] From Theodore Synkellos, "De obsidione Constantinopolitana," in *Traduction et commentaire*, ed. Makk, §XIX, 82, cited in Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 64. Among contemporary accounts are those of the Avars themselves. Averil Cameron refers to a text in which the khagan of the Avars saw a veiled lady walking the ramparts of the city. See *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L. Dindorf, 2 vols., Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae (Bonn, 1832), i, 725, line 9; Joannes Scylitzes, in *Georgius Cedrenus*, Compendium Historiarum, ed. I. Bekker, 2 vols., Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae (Bonn, 1838–39), i, 728, line 23ff, cited in Cameron, "Images of Authority," 5-6, n. 12.

[34] From Theodore Synkellos, "De obsidione Constantinopolitana," §XXXIII, 87, cited in Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 64. Among "eyewitness" accounts, which include Mary's active participation in battle, are a poem by George of Pisidia, a sermon attributed to Theodore Synkellos, and an excerpt in the *Chronicon Paschale*. Kristoffel Demoen, "The Philosopher, the Call Girl, and the Icon: Theodore the Studite's (Ab)Use of Gregory Nazianzen in the Iconoclastic Controversy," in *Spiritualité De L'Univers Byzantin Dans Le Verbe Et L'Image* (Ithaca: Brepols, 1997), 716–26; George of Pisidia, "Bellum Avaricum,"

motherhood, the ability to conquer nature by bearing a son without seed, that makes her an ideal source of her purity and power.[35] The Akathist to the Virgin, written in this time period, hymns Mary in the final two stanzas as, among other things, "Thunder, striking down the enemy," "precious Diadem of godly kings," "Tower of the Church," "impregnable fortress of the Kingdom," and the one through "whom enemies are cast down."[36] By the 10th century, the *blachernitissa*, an icon that when not carried by emperors on military campaigns was stored at the Blachernai monastery, was referred to as the "general," the "guardian of the army," and the "invincible weapon."[37]

These appellations hardly single out the supposedly "feminine" virtues emphasized a thousand years later. The context of war-torn Byzantium does not call for feminine passivity, intuition, or stillness. Byzantines needed a warrior queen. This association of the Theotokos with battle remains in our contemporary Orthodox liturgy. Scripture readings for the Feast of the Dormition from the Book of Judith (Jdt. 15–16) associate Mary with military victory. Judith not only used her sex appeal to infiltrate the tent of the enemy leader and re-

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in George of Pisidia and Agostino Pertusi, *Poemi*, vol. 7, Studia Patristica et Byzantina (Freisting: Buch-Kunstverlag Ettal, 1959), 176–224; Syncellus Theodorus, *Traduction Et Commentaire de l'Homélie Ecrite Probablement par Théodore le Syncelle sur le Siège de Constantinople en 626*, vol. 19, Opuscula Byzantina III (Szeged: Acta Universitatis de Attila Jósef Nominatae, 1975).

[35] George of Pisidia, *Poemi*, 176, vv. 1–9, cited in Petcheva, *Icons and Power*, 65.

[36] Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 66. Pentcheva adds other sources in addition to the Akathist hymn, specifically three middle Byzantine texts: a 10th-century prayer said before battle, a commemorative service for dead soldiers, and a *parakletikos kanon* of the early11th-century, 67–69 and 216–17, nn. 43–57.

[37] Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 63, citing Psellos, *Chronographia*, III.10-11, in *Imperatori di Bisanzo*, ed. Impellizzeri, I, 84; in English as *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, trans. Sewter, 69-70 (on Romanos III Argyros); Attaleiates, *Historia*, Bonn ed., 152–53 (on Romanos IV Diogenes). As a toponymic term, *Blachernitissa* identifies the site of an icon's storage. A number of styles are often identified by this term. For further discussion of the development of this novel image, which conflates the ancient *orans* image of the Theotokos with that of her holding a medallion of the Christ Child, see Pentcheva, *Icons and Power,* 76, 145ff.

turn with his head; she also gave battle instructions preceding and following her gory task. She, like the Theotokos, functioned as *Strategos*, "general."[38] Even the "Mother of Tenderness" rises to do battle when her children are in danger, inspiring the poet George of Pisidia to exclaim to her, "Hail, general of active vigilance!"[39]

This violent vision of Mary may be only slightly more palatable to modern feminists than subsequent narratives that emphasize her obedient receptivity. Further, its use in worship illustrates the dangerous marriage in Orthodox practice between political success and divine sanction. My point here, however, is that this vision meets the needs of an embattled society by unabashedly framing the virtuous qualities of the Virgin as the actions of a triumphant (and rather brutal) conqueror.

Virgin Enthroned

By pairing the Virgin Enthroned and the Virgin of the Sign with theological texts from the Orthodox tradition, we continue to see the ways in which the Theotokos defies reduction to a single set of ideal virtues, qualities, or roles. The majestic Virgin Enthroned seats the Theotokos on a jeweled throne, a place of royal authority as the "Queen of Heaven." Her "stern" gaze and upright posture underscore her central role as Mother of God, "austere and inflexible."[40] In the south vestibule of Hagia Sophia, she is flanked by the Emperor John Comnenus (1118–1143) and his consort Irene, who offer her donations. A 6th-century encaustic places two warrior saints dressed in civilian attire, Theodore and George, on either side, underscoring her imperial rather than military presence.[41]

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[38] In the Septuagint, this same word is used to describe Judith.

[39] George of Pisidia, *Poemi*, 182–83, vv. 130ff, cited in Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 65.

[40] "Stern" is used multiple times to describe this type by Lossky and Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 89. "Austere and inflexible" are the only two adjectives Cavarnos applies to this image, which he incorrectly labels as *Platytera*, an epithet more appropriate to the Virgin of the Sign. See Kontoglou and Cavarnos, *Byzantine Sacred Art*, 110.

[41] Tenth- and eleventh-century warrior saints appear in battle-dress, reflecting a shifting value regarding war and the Virgin's battle role. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, 85, 89.

Yet one of the earliest known texts of her "Life," the Life of the Virgin, bears no stamp of imperial influence. Its purported author, Maximus the Confessor, suffered horribly at imperial hands. In his work, the Virgin is the "queen and leader" over the children of her elderly husband Joseph, the "leader and teacher and ruler of all the members of his family."[42] As a "disciple" of her son, this early text portrays the faithful and steadfast Mary as the leader of the many women who followed Jesus, including the "zealous and outstanding" female "apostle," Mary Magdalene.[43] The text claims that after the resurrection the Virgin Mary accompanies John in his preaching. Yet, says the author, "so that her honour would be unique and not joined with the apostles, but so that she would send them forth and not be sent forth, and so that she would lead the believing people and direct the church in Jerusalem with James the brother of the Lord who was appointed as bishop there," Mary returned to Jerusalem.[44] There, she remained "at the center of the world" as "queen of all."[45] As a leader in the Jerusalem church, "she was not only an inspiration and a teacher of en-

[42] Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Life of the Virgin,* trans. Stephen J. Shoemaker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 18. I am especially grateful to Stephen Shoemaker who offered his unpublished translation of this amazing text, which unabashedly (though not without complications) portrays the Virgin Mary and other women as disciples and apostles who fully share in the ministry of the early church. The page numbers refer to section numbers of the text as translated by Shoemaker. Shoemaker has discussed the text and its implications in a number of articles. See Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The Virgin Mary in the Ministry of Jesus and the Early Church According to the Earliest Life of the Virgin," *Harvard Theological Review* 98:4 (2005), 441–67; *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); "The Georgian *Life of the Virgin* Attributed to Maximus the Confessor: Its Authenticity and Importance," in *Mémorial R.P. Michel Van Esbroeck, S.J.* (St. Petersburg: Byzantinorussica, 2006); "Death and the Maiden: The Early History of the Dormition and Assumption Apocrypha," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50:1-2 (2006), 59–97.

[43] She was, "to put it briefly, as the blessed apostle Peter was zealous and outstanding among the [male] disciples, so was Mary Magdalene among the myrrh-bearers and women." Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor*, 71.

[44] Ibid., 98.

[45] Ibid., 95.

durance and ministry to the blessed apostles and the other believers, but she was also a co-minister with the disciples of the Lord, and she helped with the preaching, and she shared mentally in their struggles and torments and imprisonments."[46] It was the Virgin who counselled and taught the apostles, who directed their preaching, and to whom they would return to report their success and their sufferings.[47]

What if this text, lost to public view until recently, shapes our "reading" of the Virgin Enthroned? The Queen of Heaven sits on her throne holding in her lap the Word of God. She is the woman to whom we in the church come for leadership. As one of the first followers of Christ, as the one who heard his questions as a child and his teaching as an adult, who accompanied him in his ministry, who directed the many women who followed him (to the scandal of his contemporaries), this queen is no figurative ruler. She teaches the Word as one who dandled him on her knee. As a capable and knowledgeable woman, she leads the people of God, in part by encouraging them to persevere through suffering and to exercise their God-given gifts as ministers. She directs the disciples of God to go forth and preach the good news of her Son. As queen and leader of the church, she continues to be surrounded by the saints whose lives reflect the transformation of the good news. She is a woman capable of leading, bearing authority, teaching, and exercising wisdom and pastoral compassion.

Virgin of the Sign

The perception of a capable and virtuous woman who stands at the centre of the community of the saints is both deepened and expanded in the Virgin of the Sign. This "most revered" type incorporates an *orans* image with the presence of Christ over her breast.[48] It is Christ's presence on her breast or in her womb that adds the epithet "the Sign," from Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." In this earliest type of icon, the Theotokos takes on a twofold role. First, as *homo adorans*, she stands before us as one who is engaged in the essential act of being human,

[46] Ibid., 98.

[47] Ibid., 99.

[48] Ouspensky and Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, 77.

worship.[49] Here, the Virgin models for us and invites us into an essential element of a more full humanity, delighting in God. Second, she stands before us as the church at prayer, a symbolic role emphasized in both Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

The presence of Jesus on the Virgin's breast emphasizes that both worship and prayer are an experience of "God-with-us," Immanuel. The Virgin of the Sign underscores that prayer is always shared between at least two "persons." Prayer, whether it is prayer of supplication, gratitude, contemplation, or transformation, includes the one praying and Christ via the Spirit who prays with, and *from within*, the person. Note that the prayers of both the individual and the corporate body are tied to the presence of Jesus by visually linking Jesus to the body of a woman. In this icon, we see in Mary ourselves, hands raised in prayer with Christ whom, like the Virgin, we bear in our bodies. The one within the church also prays *within us* as the church. This is not merely a reminder that prayer is never a solitary experience, but that Christ participates in the world *through* the prayer of the people of God. The famous Yaroslavl Virgin depicts Christ's hands raised in parallel to the Virgin's, visually underscoring the shared prayer between Mother and Son, church and Christ, individual and Christ. Christ, incarnate through the womb of this praying woman, is incarnated again and again as the one who prays within us. Like most icons of the Virgin, this image reminds us that the early arguments for the term *Theotokos* underscored not Mary's role but the full divinity of the one whom she bore. In the Virgin, the infinite dwells within the finite. Likewise, the church at prayer is the place where infinity dwells.

Yet the church here is not an abstract image or a concept, but a woman. It is typical to portray the relationship between humanity and God as a *receptive* woman who responds to the *initiative* of a male deity. This all too common view reifies outdated Aristotelian biology. Worse, it glosses over the significance of the "strange and new exchange" in which Christ takes his flesh from a young woman, by which, Symeon the New Theologian continues, Christ makes the

[49] According to Alexander Schmemann, making Christ present in prayer is *the* task of humanity as *homo adorans* and the church. See his *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2nd rev. and expanded ed. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988), 101.

saints "sharers of His own, deified flesh."[50] The flesh God "uses" to communicate divinity is not some special, divine flesh but the free-offering of a faithful young woman.[51] For Symeon, the flesh and blood of the Eucharist is the flesh of both mother and son:

> Just as we all receive of His fulness, so do we all partake of the immaculate flesh of His all-holy Mother which He assumed, and so, just as Christ our God, true God, became her son; even so we, too – O, the ineffable love for mankind! – become sons of His mother, the Theotokos, and brothers of Christ Himself, as through the all-immaculate and ineffable marriage which took place with and in her.[52]

The salvific effects of the eucharist are not simply initiated by a woman who agrees to bear the Son of God who then becomes our offering. The woman herself is present in the flesh of her son. The altar table bears a son *and* a mother, the "flesh of the Lord," says Symeon, "is the flesh of the Theotokos."[53]

Symeon pushes his imagery even further, undoubtedly discomfiting his all-male monastic audience, perhaps taking advantage of the veneration of the Virgin typical among monastics in order to press them to think more deeply about their life of faith lived through their bodies. According to Symeon, we not only take in the flesh of the mother through the flesh of the Son via the eucharist, but the Son becomes like his mother, giving birth to new children. While Mary ceases from conception and bearing children, "her son both engendered and continues to the present to engender those who believe in Him and keep His holy commandments."[54] Christ not only "engenders" but gives birth: "the immortal and incorruptible Word of the immortal and incorruptible God, however, begets and gives birth to immortal and incorruptible children, after having first been born of the virgin by the Holy Spirit."[55] Paradoxically, this birthing *by* Christ

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[50] Symeon the New Theologian, "First Ethical Discourse," IX, in *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses,* trans. Alexander Golitzin, vol. 1 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 58.

[51] Ibid., 59.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 60.

[54] Ibid., 59.

[55] Ibid., 60.

is simultaneously a birthing *of* Christ. The Word is a "kind of seed" that is conceived in the hearts of the faithful.[56] Addressing an all-male monastic community, Symeon declares, "Blessed is he who has seen the light of the world take form within himself, for he, having Christ as an embryo within, shall be reckoned His mother, as He Himself Who does not lie has promised, saying: 'Here are my mother and brothers and friends' [Luke 8:2]."[57] Faithful Christians, born of Christ their Mother, become women who receive the Spirit, women who bear and birth Christ, women who are his mother. Christ births the church from within, birthing each believer. And like the Virgin of the Sign, the believer "carries God consciously within himself as light, carries Him Who has brought all things into being and created them, including the One who carries Him now."[58]

Like all icons of the Theotokos, the Virgin of the Sign does not support a simple "one-way" reading. Male and female conceive and bear, male and female give flesh to one another, and in their shared flesh grow to the maturity of one who gives birth to God through spiritual effort and virtuous practice. Given this reading of the Virgin of the Sign, how is it possible to divide the Christian experience so neatly into appropriate male and female roles and modes of being? If the flesh of Christ is that of a woman, if it is a woman whose flesh we eat, if to see God incarnate is to see someone who is made of the flesh of a woman, if Christ himself is a woman who births the faithful, if the Christian life is to conceive and bear God precisely as this woman has already done, on what basis do we forbid the flesh of women in any space of the church, the body of women from imaging the body of Christ, the hands of a woman from distributing the flesh and blood of Christ?

Conclusion

More can be said about these icons, yet to conclude I would like to bring together my two sets of arguments. By starting with the

[56] Ibid., 56.

[57] Symeon the New Theologian, "Tenth Ethical Discourse," in *On the Mystical Life*, 168.

[58] Symeon the New Theologian, "Eleventh Ethical Discourse," in *On the Mystical Life*, 135.

radical particularity of Christ's maleness, I argue that Behr-Sigel's turn towards personalism and the radical uniqueness of each person has iconic roots. This is an area of personalist anthropology that simply has not been explored. Most personalist arguments derive from philosophy and a particular interpretation of patristic authors.[59] The iconic affirmation of the radical particularity of the saints, each man and woman exemplifying a common virtuous life in and through their distinct bodies, presents a distinctly Orthodox contribution to theological personalism.

Radical particularity also honours the insight of those like Evdokimov and Hopko: bodies do matter. We cannot simply dismiss our bodies as we become human in and through them. We come to know Christ because he has a body. We only know the Theotokos through her female body, and we know her as a mother (though this does not mean all female bodies must be mothers). Yet her motherhood, as experienced throughout the breadth of the Orthodox tradition, is immensely diverse in its expressions. It is present in her suffering love, her victorious striding, her pointing of the way, and her standing before us, bearing the church in prayer. She is more honoured than the Cherubim not only because she bore Christ, but also because she continues to bear Christ in the lives of her people. We honour and glorify not her body, for this would be idolatry, but through her body we glorify the God who entered and continues to enter the world through her.

Radical particularity also challenges the reduction of the human person to any single quality as inherently idolatrous. In other words, to become fixated on one characteristic, to define a person by a single quality, blinds us to the fullness of their humanity. The diverse roles of the Theotokos' female body expand our vision of what it is to be human rather than restricting it. Iconic readings whose purpose is to limit human uniqueness by assuming that a body can only exemplify certain gifts, roles, qualities, characteristics, and virtues fundamentally deny the uniqueness of each person.This is precisely how Behr-Sigel chose to respond to, and depart from, her friend Ev-

[59] See especially the work of John Zizioulas and the debate over whether he is a patristic interpreter or a modern existentialist, for example in Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Is John Zizioulas an Existentialist in Disguise? Response to Lucian Turcescu," *Modern Theology* 20:4 (2004), 600–608.

dokimov. To his fear that the ordination of women might result in the loss of distinctly feminine gifts, she responds: "Is this concern not grounded in a monolithic-masculine conception of the ecclesial office? Couldn't one hand the office over to women, to shape it in such a way that meant no loss, but rather a clarification of the feminine-motherly?"[60] Clarifying the feminine-motherly in light of the diverse images and interpretations of the Theotokos certainly expands what it means to be a mother, and perhaps a woman. It is possible that it expands it to such a degree that even using the phrase "feminine-motherly" is too restrictive. After all, not all women of faith have been mothers, and according to Symeon, all men and women of faith are called to be mothers.

Mary is, as the tradition constantly witnesses, the firstborn of humanity. As icons of Christ, it is the radical uniqueness of each person – seen in and shaped by their body – that is made visible as we pursue *theosis*. It is this uniqueness at the very root of each individual human being that prevents icons from being symbols that interfere with our vision of God; instead icons are the presence of persons who invite us into life in Christ. Likewise, arguments that obfuscate the uniqueness of individual persons only obscure the presence of God within them. It may be that other arguments prevent women from being ordained priests, though they are rapidly falling by the wayside. However, a properly iconic argument simply cannot do so, since bodily icons call for greater diversity, not less. They call for more expressions of the work of Christ in and through the bodies of the faithful. I think it is quite possible that, given the importance of the visible for our formation as Christians, a properly iconic argument actually *necessitates* female priests so that our liturgy is truly a place where we can see and celebrate the full range of God's incarnation in all of humanity. Behr-Sigel's question remains pertinent:

> Removing himself as individual, the priest – minister, meaning servant – turns his hands and his tongue over to Christ. Why could these hands and this tongue not be those of a Christian woman, baptized and chrismated, called by virtue of her personal gifts to a

[60] From Behr-Sigel, "Ordination von Frauen," 69, as cited in Hinlicky Wilson, "Woman, Women, and the Priesthood," 129.

ministry of pastoral guidance, which implies presiding over the Eucharist?[61]

[61] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "The Ordination of Women: A Point of Contention in Ecumenical Dialogue," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 48:1 (2004), 49–66.

Chapter Eight

The Living Faith: Behr-Sigel Reading the Signs of Our Times

AMAL DIBO

What from Elisabeth Behr-Sigel remains in us that can invigorate our faith? What did she entrust us with at the end of her long journey in this world?

Elisabeth was a tireless worker of the first hour, *première de cordée*, who set a high standard for women committed to faith, a tiny little woman whose life stretched over nearly the totality of the last century of the second millennium of our Christian era. She committed herself entirely – her being, her talents, and her life – working hard in order to be able genuinely to say, "thy kingdom come," and to say it with a transparency that had no equal but her courage and a vision that had no less strength and clarity than her words and sentences. Along with her solid theological and philosophical training, Elisabeth had a deep sense of and a real longing for the plenitude of the kingdom of the Lord, and she used her critical philosophical mind to investigate ways in which the church and the world reflected this kingdom. She had set her mind and her will to contribute fully and deeply to close the gap between the city of God and the city of humanity. She believed that this is what the incarnation is all about and went through her life bearing Christ in her soul, giving him birth each time she was invited to speak and write, take a position and act.

The work of her life can be seen as a ministry of reconciliation, leading into harmonious encounters between God and people, and among people themselves living in situations where difference could lead to antagonism, power, and injustice. Elisabeth herself, as well as the circumstances of her life, embodied many encounters between different identities resulting in a creative reconciliation: the Lutheran and the Orthodox, the French and the Russian, the theologian and the philosopher, the intellectual and the activist, the fully committed and the free spirit, the woman and the minister in church. In her life and witness, encounters often meant challenges. She took them with serious depth, devoted all her being to live up to their in-

tegration, proving that in true faith there is no divorce between what we believe and what we live. No gaps are allowed to separate us from God and from each other. Differences should be bridged, since that became possible when reconciliation was achieved in the blood of Christ, once and for all.

> For he himself is our peace, who made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. (Eph. 2:14-20)

Elisabeth lived this as a primary driving force in her life and mind. She believed it and committed her whole being to weaving human and spiritual links among men and women beyond boundaries and differences. This commitment was clearly embodied in her ecumenical activity, in the ACAT, and the spiritual revival among Russians of the 20th century.

At the turn of the millennium, Elisabeth and I spoke of a sort of assessment, an evaluation of the achievements and weaknesses of Christians' striving toward the kingdom of Christ. In our quick review of the two thousand years of Christian history, Elisabeth looked at our achievements as Christians with a great deal of compassion and understanding. Her love of humankind overcame her judgments, for she seemed to have internalized – not without pain and regrets – our shortcomings and laziness, which gave her a great deal of wisdom and multiplied the impact of her discourse on others. Nonetheless, she was pointedly critical of Christian infidelities. She thought that we did only as much as we allowed the Holy Spirit to operate in us and by us; the work that we do or do not do is in the hands of him who weighs heaven and earth and handles time and eternity.

Because of her solid knowledge and wisdom, Elisabeth was able to discern clearly the difference between what Orthodoxy is in its essence and what it is in its real presence in the world. She felt the gap as a real wound. One of the manifold facts of this gap is the distance between the contemplative richness of the church and its action in the world. She strongly believed that the eternal reality of God has penetrated our world in the incarnation and that we are called

and sent to make it concretely present today and every day until the fulfillment of the times.

This young Protestant woman, who was struck and enchanted one Easter morning by that group of passionate faithful Orthodox singers – almost as if they were drunk – repeating uninterruptedly "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling death by death," had no choice but to bring this drunkenness to the world, to capture the flame and build on it for another 70 years toward the coming of the saviour. "We who have seen the real light," as we sing in the liturgy after communion, to us falls the task of making that light shine in the world today. This sense of urgency is not to be imputed simply to Elisabeth's passionate nature. She heard it adamantly repeated in most of the Orthodox liturgical chants and prayers, a large number of which start with the word "Now"! It is a constant reminder of the reality of the God incarnate living among us. This is probably why Elisabeth at 98 years of age remained young in her spirit and in her person, active till the last day of her life. That is also why at the age of 81 she was entrusted with drawing up a vision of "Orthodox Theological Formation in the Twenty-First Century: The Tasks Involved." She presented her paper on the subject at a conference organized at the occasion of the opening of the Orthodox Theological Institute at Cambridge University in 1998.[1]

What did she lead us to see and become aware of, and what struggle did she entrust us with? First, she led us to reading the present reality of the terrestrial city, to diagnose the distance that separates us from the celestial city and consequently to identify our tasks in working toward the restoration of the resemblance between the two cities. Discernment starts with reading our reality in perspective with the eternal reality of God revealed to us, and made possible in our world, through the incarnation of his Son. With this sense of awareness, the reading is by no means judgmental; it is rather a reminder to answer the call of love that God offered the world. This way

[1] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Vision of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, eds. Michael Plekon and Sarah E. Hinlicky (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladmir's Seminary Press, 2001), 11; subsequently published in French as *Discerner les Signes du Temps* (Paris: Cerf, 2002), 101. All sub-sequent citations are taken from this book; the first number will indicate the page in the English edition, the second the page in the French edition.

of looking at our reality with as much a sense of criticism as with a deep commitment to the love revealed in Christ is the Orthodox way in which the mind and the heart are reconciled and work in harmony.

Elisabeth shared this way of thinking with a number of her contemporaries who were strongly rooted in the great spiritual Orthodox Tradition and were at the same time liberal thinkers. The liberty within which they operated was necessary to respond to the new forms of challenges addressed to the traditional redundant ways faith was handled in most churches and in particular in the Orthodox church, often with the good intention of protecting the faith of the fathers. She was concerned that "[f]idelity to the Church's Tradition, a return to the great theologians of the first centuries of the church, has never been identified with ossified traditionalism."[2] Joining the authors of the patristic renewal in the church, namely Vladimir Lossky, Georges Florovsky, and later John Meyendorff, she voices her concern, quoting the last of the three:

> It is an essential characteristic of patristic theology that it was able to face the challenges of its own time while remaining consistent with the original apostolic Orthodox faith. Thus simply to *repeat* what the fathers said is to be unfaithful to their spirit and to the intention embodied in their theology. . . . True Tradition is always a *living* Tradition. It changes while remaining always the same. It changes because it faces different situations, not because its essential content is modified. This content is not an abstract proposition; it is the living Christ himself, who said, "I am the Truth."[3]

But while the great Tradition, which is permanently faithful to the revelation, remains the criterion and the critical eye for renewal in the church, discernment in the spirit of liberty, humility, and brotherly love remains indispensible for the Orthodox theologians in order to avoid a reductionist approach to the divine mystery given to the church "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). Discerning the signs of times is the utmost difficult task that the church is faced with today. Pursuing the great Tradition of the church amidst worldly traditions and actualities while listening attentively to what the Spirit

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[2] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Discerning the Signs of the Times,* 15; id., *Discerner les Signes du Temps,* 105.

[3] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 15; id., *Discerner...,* 105–106.

has to say to the churches in the freedom of the children of God is the major task that the church has to undertake.

The 20th century was but one of the turning points in the history of humankind, yet it was certainly a culmination inasmuch as it saw highly sophisticated conflicts both in minds and nations that have imprisoned the world in the game of power. Big events, trends of thoughts, revolutions, and wars have shaken the geographical and historical roots of traditional society as well as its ethics and culture. Empires have fragmented, nations have risen from under colonization, and two world wars have left the world in a state of absurdity, wrestling with a number of fundamentally existential questions and problems that neither materialism nor any other form of the classical traditional spiritual discourse could answer or solve. The absurd and nihilism, for example, were widespread expressions of the despair of men facing death without God, a God that had been declared dead already by Nietzsche. The century's ills were labelled by the existentialist Jean Paul Sartre, whose "nausea" and atheism became major trends in Europe.

In the cruel reality of a dehumanized society, those who were carrying the "Good News "of a God loving of mankind, partaking in the human condition unto death, needed to find a new language or even forge new expressions in order to deliver the spiritual message of salvation. It was in the misery of this world that the love triumphing over death in the resurrection of the Lord is needed. Liberal philosophers such as Nicolas Berdiaev, the economist Marxist Sergius Bulgakov, and the Christian existentialist Jacques Maritain, to name only a few, professed with brilliant intellectual qualities the presence of God in a world where people are living out a drama that, without God, has no end but a tragic one, a totally absurd death. Those philosopher-believers chose to perceive the world through the words of the book of Revelation: "Behold, I am making everything new" (21:5).

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel was among those who engaged in spreading "newness" where "oldness" was an obstacle to life, to hope, and to love. To put the right questions, or rather to put the questions right there where it mattered in implementing those words of Revelation, it was imperative to bring the subject home and look into the church, the intermediary city between heaven and earth, for what we can and, more so, what we have to do to contribute to the coming of the Kingdom of God *here* and *now*.

Major issues in our times are questioning our faith and challenging our commitment to the coming of God's kingdom. The challenge implies two partners in opposition to each other: the church and its newness on one side and the issues of today's world at large on the other. Since *liberty* is a major feature among the many components of modern times, and since *authority* is the major channel of communication in the church, then what constitutes the challenge is the opposition between *authority* and *liberty*. This challenge has always existed but has never reached before the possibility of a total divorce.

The role and value of the church in the present times are increasingly challenged to fulfill the promise and the mission that it stands for. The gap between worldly matters and matters of the spirit has grown to the extent where it seems that it is becoming increasingly difficult to bring the two ends into any possible synergy. Though similar crises have happened through history, yet never before these modern times has the dramatic divorce between the material and spiritual poles been so detrimental to the life of the people. It was expected from those who believed that Christ had come so that people "may have life and have it abundantly" to look into the church, and more precisely into its essence, in search for the promise of salvation.

"What is the true Church?" asked Elisabeth in a paper she gave at the Bossey Seminar on "Authority and the Community of Women and Men in the Church" in 1997. The question aimed at elucidating the gift of life that Christ entrusted his church with in the present. "What is the relationship between that which I would call the spiritual essence of the church, the church in the mind and eternal intention of God, and the Church on earth, the people of God called to live within the movement of history?"[4] As long as history unfolds, this timeless question stands as the measurement reference for the fidelity of the church to the will of the Father. It is in the work of one of her contemporaries, Sergius Bulgakov, that Elisabeth Behr-Sigel looks for the answer. In his book *Orthodoxy*, he wrote: "Orthodoxy is the Church of Christ on earth. The Church of Christ is not an institution; it is a new life with Christ and in Christ, guided by the Spirit. . . . [I]t is the unity of the transcendent and the immanent, a

[4] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 86; id., *Discerner...,* 111.

bridge thrown across between heaven and earth."[5] In this dialogue between Elisabeth and Bulgakov, we could identify several signs of our time, but I will only mention one here, namely the responsibility of the church in carrying the life of Christ into the world with the flow of the Spirit.

In today's world, where ideologies have faded, philosophy is decomposing, and power is imprisoned in matter, if the church does not move and act, how will the world believe that God has become flesh and still is living among us? Spiritualities from the Far East are speaking to the world the language of various techniques to restore serenity and peace in the human individual, a healthy mind in a healthy body, to face the challenges and tensions of modern times and rhythms.

Does the Orthodox Church have a vision to offer the world today addressing the main issues and ailments that humanity is suffering from? There is no doubt that the challenge manifests itself at the level of the communication of this mission of the church as the living body of Christ. The establishment of the church often immobilizes its spirituality. It is in her chapter on "A Monk in the City," referring to Alexander Bukharev's thought and action, that Elisabeth expands on the vision that the church needs to offer the world today. She strove to strike a balance between the theological depth of the elaborate contemplative and intellectual Orthodox way and the living faith. Her critical outlook on matters of the mind cross-examined the validity of the vision in its relation to the real life of the world. She believed beyond any obstacle, no matter how enormous, in Christ's words: "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly."

The style and mission of Elisabeth, which are the first part of her legacy, consisted in making the two partners meet: in other words working toward unity. This unity was impossible without a sense of balance, justice, and a great depth of love and compassion – something she, as a philosopher, knew full well. It followed that she was committed to dialogue, bringing churches together, the advancement of the city of God, bringing women and men together, and bringing worldly matters to their fullness in the light of the eschaton, adding divine compassion and righteousness to the world's sense of justice. It would be appropriate to say that her ways lead to the Orthodoxy of

[5] Ibid.

faith: a universal, uniting belief in God's love for the world. In unity, all differences will be absorbed, oppositions resolved, with a sense of balance among all specific components. However, this sense of balance did not come from the components themselves, for unity is a gift from God conditional upon surrendering to Him Who makes all one. Elisabeth's sense of unity and reconciliation is a God-given intuition, an in-depth belief, and a grace that we humans could not receive let alone deserve unless we strive and commit to it too in our hearts and minds. She focused on the incarnation of the Word of God and an active presence in our world today amidst the confrontation between the "old man" and the newness of the promise of God.

Salvation from death, from "oldness," happened once and for all. Our response to the great offering of the slain lamb is to sprinkle his blood into our world, to inject his eternal life *here* and *now*. Elisabeth was not alone in her watchful pursuit of the living faith. There were many who committed themselves to this task, among them Lev Gillet, known as "A Monk of the Eastern Church," and Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, whose contribution to the living church is widely recognized in Europe, especially in England and Russia. Elisabeth especially discerned in the life and works of Alexander Bukharev and Mother Maria Skobtsova some of the signs of the kingdom of God that our times need to see in the church.

"The fact is that in the life and work of this Archimandrite," Elisabeth wrote of Bukharev, "the vocation of *starets* was the incarnate taking form in reality: the spiritual came down from the realm of the angelic dwellings of contemplation toward the temporal existence of mankind, taking on their burdens and their work in an effort to enlighten and save."[6] It is not surprising he entitled his major work of 1860 "On Orthodoxy and the Modern World," and that the newness he brought to reading the reality of the church – calling on the clergy to quit a disincarnated idealism and embrace the totality of human destiny today – led to a confrontation with the establishment, eventually leading to his departure as chair of theology and status as priest-monk to rejoin the ranks of the laity. His tragic destiny still raises questions for church practice today. "The protagonists of the spiritual renaissance of the early twentieth century, including Razanov, Florensky, Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and Paul Evdokimov, the last

[6] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 39; id., *Discerner...,* 46.

great theologian of the Russian emigration, all of whom were distinguished intellectuals, saw in Archimandrite Feodor (the monastic name and title of Bukharev) a prophetic figure, a messenger, whose message still needed to be understood."[7]

Elisabeth interpreted him as

> a monk in spirit while sharing the ordinary life in the world, attempting to transfigure *eros* in Christian marriage, going to the depths of hell in the secular world separated from God, discerning the light which shines in the darkness, and there showing the path to union with the compassionate God: such was the unusual vocation of Archimandrite Feodor. Discerning in the 'signs of the times' the call of the living God from whom it was impossible to hide, Bukharev accepted the risk of radical obedience to the end, even to complete disenfranchisement.[8]

In a time when Hegelian philosophy and Nietzchean atheism attracted his mind, his heart remained attached to the faith, causing a painful feeling of having a split personality. The challenges of our times have not only caused a split between the mind and the heart; indeed, they enforce the dichotomy between the body and the soul and oppose spirituality to reality. "The spirituality of our life and our actions is not a flight that distances us from our human condition, from the concrete reality of our bonds with family, country, or city. These realities have been assumed by the Son of God himself, and have been united to God in the fullness of his person, of his soul, thoughts, feelings, human will, and desires."[9]

Elisabeth found in the work of Bukharev a call for the unity and integrality of the human being, threatened by the overriding challenges of modern times. Her concern for reconciliation recalls the hope for a "reconciliation of two great Russian spiritual traditions . . . the Christian tradition of old Russia, whose darkened paths were illuminated by the light of Christ, the divine Logos, together with the Russia of the Enlightenment, born in the eighteenth century and attracted to, even fascinated by western rational thought."[10] Further-

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[7] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 55; id., *Discerner...,* 66.

[8] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 56-57; id., *Discerner...,* 67.

[9] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 61; id., *Discerner...,* 72–73.

[10] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 63; id., *Discerner...,* 74.

more, Elisabeth investigated another pair of opposing poles, "Slavophiles and Westernizers brandish[ing] their opposing ideologies."[11] Elisabeth underlines here Bukharev's capacity for discernment, who read this new generation's aspiration to serve the people but warned against the danger of a total divorce from their spiritual roots. His prophetic voice could not prevent the tragic destruction of the divine resemblance in humankind, leading to a dehumanized, inhuman culture. Reading the signs of time, Bukharev "envisioned the ascent of a terrifying bestial humanity. . . . Christian spiritual warfare is not of flesh and blood. Rather it is the warfare of the last days when the humanity of man is at stake."[12]

Mother Maria Skobtsova is the other person Elisabeth chose to illustrate her concern for the salvation of the human community through reading the signs of the times. Married at 14, Maria Skobtsova belonged to the nobility and to the intelligentsia; she was also a poet. This fortunate young lady of the Great Russia wrote in 1913, "I am for the earth, for the simple people of Russia. . . . I reject the culture of the uprooted, soulless elite. . . . The people are in need of Christ."[13] She was a true reader of the "signs of time," reconciling the contemplation with action, devoted to the great universal Tradition of the Orthodoxy implanted in the land and people of the *here* and *now*.

> Under the influence of Fr. Lev Gillet, Mother Maria rediscovered the dynamic eschatological quality of early Christianity. Mother Maria dreamed of a creatively renewed monasticism that would be a response to the vocation discerned in the "signs of the times": monasticism not lived out behind protective walls but 'in the world,' metaphorically speaking: fires and coals lit in the middle of the city as the great, largely unrecognized, Russian theologian Alexander Bukharev wanted.[14]

What moves Elisabeth about Mother Maria is how she joined a deep, overwhelming feeling of awe and joy for the eschaton with a

[11] Ibid.

[12] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 66; id., *Discerner...,* 77.

[13] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 42; id., *Discerner...,* 52–53.

[14] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 47; id., *Discerner...,* 58.

limitless, compassionate love calling her to witness here and now.[15] "Deaconess without actually having the title," wrote Elisabeth, "Mother Maria was none the less a typical intellectual Russian." Elisabeth could identify this combination of the totally transcendent with the philanthropic action, reconciling the opposite poles: "Although she was an authentic social worker, she loved engaging in theological or philosophical discussions well into the night." She could appreciate the humour in reporting that "[i]n her monastic habit, she would occasionally smoke in public." Elisabeth was truly fascinated by this woman who succeeded in bringing together what was considered classically or traditionally incompatible.[16]

New winds were blowing among the Russian students emigrating across Europe, reconciling the intelligentsia with the Orthodox Church, after the long-interrupted dialogue of the 18th century. This reconciliation so dear to Elisabeth the philosopher and believer is neither a kind of syncretism nor a subjugation of the mind to the religious dictate of the rigid church practices. It is a new formula revealed at this particular conjunction in time and place. Elisabeth recalled how

> [w]ell-known intellectuals such as the Marxist economist Sergius Bulgakov and the libertarian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev experienced a true conversion. These "great converts" whose faith had been tested in doubt became the inspiration for the young people in exile who aspired, according to their own expression, to "create an ecclesial way of life," that is to say, to penetrate life fully in all its social and personal dimensions with the light of Christ so as to render the works of culture a religion "in spirit and in truth."[17]

Elisabeth admired in Mother Maria the living encounter of the intellect, the gift of the word with the passionate praxis. The nun would not only give brilliant conferences and had the authorization of her bishop to preach after the liturgy; she would equally spend long hours listening to numerous confidences and confessions. When in 1932 she professed her monastic vows, some of her companions – namely Berdiaev and Gillet – feared that her monastic habit would

[15] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 44; id., *Discerner...,* 54.

[16] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 49; id., *Discerner...,* 60.

[17] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 45; id., *Discerner...,* 55.

stand in her way and prevent her from going all the way to the other. On the contrary, her monastic style inhibited neither her intellectual capacities nor her service to others. She published a new magazine called *The New City*, addressing political and social problems in an open spirit along with religious themes.

The reconciliation between intellect and praxis, monastic vows with service to others, ushers in a renewed form of witnessing for the transforming love of Christ. It was the opposite of the choice preferred by Mother Maria Skobtsova's contemporary, Mother Maria Eudoxia, who opted to lead a traditional religious style of monastic life focused on official liturgical celebration. The conflict opposed traditional practices to creative ways flowing out of a living faith.[18] This conflict is still alive in the church of Christ, but not only in the church, as the liberty of the human being is becoming more and more the victim of rigid dogmatic ideologies on the one hand and sheer slavery to materialism on the other.

Moved by the living faith deeply rooted in the divine truth that transcends time, aware of the warning of St Paul to the Ephesians 4:14, Elisabeth was not less profoundly concerned with the tragic fate of humanity. Facing the realities of the 21st century, she held up the truth of the living Christ, the Word of God made flesh, to whom we are united by the Spirit, the breath of the Father's love, and points toward the hope of a time when "God will be all in all" (Rom. 8:22). Animated by this hope that gives its meaning to humanity and to the life of every human being, Elisabeth scrutinized "the signs of times," as the Lord commands (Matt. 16:2-3).

To the question of what is to be done, Elisabeth deduces from the life of two people who lived in Christ one single answer: deliver Christ's newness from the "old man" in us, so that he who has reconciled us with the Father can trample down the walls of our limitations and sets us free to go toward the Father with the freedom of true children. How would that happen? Elisabeth draws a roadmap under the one sign of the philanthropies of reconciliation. Dissolving the oppositions between dichotomies, Elisabeth recognized the greatness of God and the limited creativity of humans, and she committed herself to the patient construction of our worldly cities with a more just and human face while hopefully awaiting the coming of the

[18] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 49-50; id., *Discerner...,* 61.

heavenly kingdom. So that the spiritually inclined descend from Mount Tabor into the turmoil of the world, Christians are invited to make the mystery of the incarnation a living experience, to commit themselves to the right causes defending freedom and human dignity. At the heart of this commitment were the various churches to which Elisabeth was linked, Christian dialogue with Judaism to which the great Orthodox theologian Lev Gillet was committed, and Christian dialogue with Islam to which Metropolitan Georges Khodr of Mount Lebanon has devoted a lifetime.

Likewise Christian dialogue is expected to embrace modernity. Olivier Clément, an eminent Orthodox theologian who came to faith from atheism and a good friend of Elisabeth's, considered that the greatest task of the churches today and in the foreseeable future was to "overcome modernity from the inside" and answer the fundamental question of atheism about evil with an authentic commitment to the love of humankind, the kenotic love of God. New forms of this love will be revealed by the Holy Spirit in the contexts of epochs and situations. Witnessing to this love has led in some cases to martyrdom and resulted in a clearer vision and a stronger commitment of the church at large. Bukharev had wondered what new confessors of the faith our time demands in the present crisis.

The Orthodox Church in the 20th century has creatively elaborated a number of initiatives that have illuminated its path. L'Action Orthodoxe (ACAT) in the first generation of the Russian immigration brought together a number of theologians endowed with discernment and courage who reconciled local tradition with the great spirituality of the patristic Orthodox tradition. Free from dead traditionalism, they interiorized the sayings of the fathers. For them, simply repeating what the fathers said would have been a betrayal of their thinking and the intentions embodied in their theology.[19] The Orthodox need to be sensitive and present in the world today. With serious efforts in their thinking and awareness carried by their faith as the good news for all times and ages, the church must offer answers to the problems of here and now. Historical Orthodoxy has overshadowed its own greatest insights and made of nationalism and worldly power as an obstacle to the freedom and creativity of the spiritual Orthodox tradition.

[19] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning...,* 15; id., *Discerner...,* 106.

To invigorate the life of the church is to listen to the needs of the people, to interiorize these needs with love and prayers, and to read them in the light of the great spiritual Tradition of the fathers – and then to find appropriate forms with which to answer them. Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh stands tall in this process. Endowed with divine gifts and charisma, he carved a personal message to each member of his English flock and could address English listeners on BBC as well as people in Soviet Russia. Metropolitan Georges Khodr at the age of 18, together with a limited number of young Orthodox, were moved by the Holy Spirit to discern the need of the Antiochian church for a renewed expression of the great Tradition of the fathers in the 1940s. The *Mouvement de la Jeunesse Orthodoxe* invigorated the life of a dormant church, dusting off the weight of local tradition and witnessing to the love of Christ by spreading a new vocabulary of love and compassion. By so doing it created a new breath of hope in the Arabic language of Islam, which is also the language of Christianity in the Levant, giving a new dimension to justice and peace in the Arab world today.

Why should the church be reluctant to address the signs of time? Did Christ change as he entered the history of humanity and became the son of a woman named Mary, part of the city of Nazareth, the leader of his people? Christianity is not a set of ideas fixed in heaven; it is the flow of the blood of Christ for the life of the world, and his life is fulfilled in each man and woman. In this 21st century, the Orthodox should feel the urge to obey the Lord as in Matthew and scrutinize "the signs of times," continuously searching for more intelligent answers to the call of love that God has offered to the world, that "we may have life and have it more abundantly" (Matt. 16:2-3).

It is the life and love of the living Christ that the church – clergy and believers alike – are called to translate, interpret, and inject into the world. As Elisabeth Behr-Sigel solicits the church to remember this task, it becomes clear to her reader that two conditions are omnipresent in her mind. The one is freedom, according to the Lord's words, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall free you" (John 8:32); the other is the love by which the Father has so much "loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son" (John 3:16).

Chapter Nine

Risk-Takers in a World That Cries for Salvation: Behr-Sigel on Suffering and *Kenosis*

HELEEN ZORGDRAGER

On November 9, 1989, the then-82-year-old theologian Elisabeth Behr-Sigel wrote in her notebook:

> Profound emotion: the Berlin Wall – the wall of shame – has symbolically crumbled. On television the touching faces of the East Berliners clearing the frontier guard posts. Freedom, freedom. . . .
>
> For myself, this represents the end of this long nightmare I've been living since my stay in Berlin in the winter of 1931–32, with the appearance of the Vile Beast [Satan], the assassination of the Germany of philosophers and poets, the assassination of Europe, my native land.
>
> Perhaps this will be a new beginning: a Europe extending from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains. . . . I can't keep from crying when I think of everything that has happened, of so many victims . . . and now, hope![1]

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, living in France, felt herself connected to the people in Eastern Europe by strong personal, familial, and ecclesial ties. Her engagement was genuine and intense, and so was her joy at the crumbling of the Berlin Wall. She committed herself to ecumenical assistance in building up new spiritual and social structures in these newly post-communist countries.

In this article I will explore the theological views of Behr-Sigel, the "grande dame of Western Orthodox theology," on suffering and *kenosis*. How did she understand the meaning of suffering in relation to our salvation, to our destiny of becoming full human beings, in the image and likeness of God? To begin with, I will briefly introduce the story of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's life. Second, I will present her

[1] Olga Lossky, *Towards the Endless Day: A Life of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre-Dame Press, 2010), 279.

theology of incarnation and *kenosis*, developed in creative dialogue with Orthodox traditions of spirituality and contemporary fellow theologians. Finally, I will evaluate her views and address the question how her approach can be helpful for evaluating women's experiences of suffering and hope under the communist system and the first decades after its collapse.

Biography

Elisabeth Charlotte Sigel was born in 1907 in Strasbourg. She died at the blessed age of 98 in her apartment in Paris in 2005. In her exceptionally long life she confronted all the tragedies of Europe in the 20th century. As the daughter of a French Lutheran father and a Jewish Austrian mother, born in the contested region of the Alsace, the fate of history made her German first and then French. Additionally, through friendships, church affiliation, and her marriage to the Russian émigré André Behr, she united herself with the Russian people. Above all, however, she felt European.

She was baptized in the Lutheran church. As a teenager, she chose to make her profession of faith as a Protestant and committed herself to an active life of faith. She studied at the Protestant Faculty of Theology in Strasbourg. Personal encounters with students emigrating from Russia and Romania, first in Strasbourg and later in Paris, served as a bridge to get acquainted with the Orthodox tradition. Deeply touched by the Easter liturgy at the St. Sergius Theological Institute, led by Fr Sergius Bulgakov, Elisabeth chose to enter the Orthodox Church at the age of 22. Clearly, ecumenical motives played a role in her decision: "I went toward the Orthodox Church because I saw in it the Mother Church, where everyone could come together in mutual recognition, without losing their own charisma. There I discovered an evangelical Catholicism where the freedom of each person was respected."[2]

Behr-Sigel became a prominent mediator of Orthodox theology in the Western context. Without ever occupying a formal academic position in theology – she earned the family's living as a teacher of philosophy and literature in secondary schools – Behr-Sigel was a prolific writer of many articles, books, and book reviews, and was

[2] Ibid., 29.

co-editor of the French Orthodox journal *Contacts*. She published studies on Russian spirituality, hagiography, and modern Orthodox theology, as well as an extensive biography on her spiritual father and friend Lev Gillet (1893–1980), better known under his pseudonym "a Monk of the Eastern Church." In the last quarter of her life, she gained fame among a wider audience for her outstanding contributions, largely within circles of the WCC, to the question of women's ordination in the Orthodox Church.[3] She taught courses at the St. Sergius Theological Institute, the Catholic Institute of Paris, the Dominican College of Ottawa, the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, and the Ecumenical Institute of Tantur near Jerusalem.

The life of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel was enriched by countless unequivocal blessings; however, suffering and pain crossed her path as well. Her husband André Behr suffered from severe psychological health problems from which he sought to escape through alcohol. The Second World War imposed upon her anxiety and feelings of powerlessness in the face of the persecution of the Jews,[4] as did the struggle to protect her own family, which included three small children, Nadine, Mariane, and the youngest, Nicolas, who was born in October 1944 during a bombing raid.

A fragment from Behr-Sigel's notebook illustrates how the afflictions of war affected her spiritual life. In Nancy, on September 23, 1942, after a terrifying night in which a bomb exploded in the garden of the house next door, she writes:

> To look death in the face. I now know what that is, thanks be to God. Amid the collapse of everything, faith endures. What is terrible is that the children also felt the brush with death. And how touch-

[3] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Ministry of Women in the Church* (Redondo Beach, Calif.: Oakwood, 1990). Two of her important essays are published in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000), namely "Women in the Orthodox Church," 1–10, and "The Ordination of Women: Also a Question for the Orthodox Churches," 11–48. See further her various articles on the issue of women and ordination in the Orthodox Church, published in the journals *Contacts* and *Irénikon*.

[4] Long after the war, in 1988, Behr-Sigel found confirmation of what had happened to the relatives on her mother's side in Bohemia. The only survivor was her cousin Gertrude; all the others had been deported and died in concentration camps. Lossky, *Towards the Endless Day*, 98.

> ing was their courage in the face of death, their confident abandonment to their destiny . . . as long as their mother was there for them.
>
> Today, André has a nervous crisis. This is a natural consequence of what we went through but it is very painful for the children . . . "worse than a bombing," they say.[5]

Behr-Sigel joined an ecumenical resistance group in Nancy. Looking back in her older age, she confessed: "During these years, I began to know the Jesus Prayer."[6]

Later as part of the francophone Russian Orthodox parish in Paris, she was well aware of the suffering and resistance of people under the communist regime. She knew about the significant role that women had fulfilled in the Orthodox churches during Soviet times.[7] They had taken on considerable responsibilities and were prepared for self-sacrificing suffering. She recalls that often elderly women, the babushkas, were the ones who saved the parish structures by having their grandchildren secretly baptized or by forming the required group of 20 to make a request under the Khrushchev government to legalize the parish church into a state-owned place of worship. Many Christian women were found among the ranks of dissidents. Behr-Sigel also observed with a sharp eye how in the years after communism young women took over their grandmothers' tasks. They acted as bookkeepers and organizers to build up the parish structures and were among the first to take on the basic social-diaconal work of the church. They were "effectively deaconesses but without title." They courageously responded to the signs of the times.

Theology of Incarnation and *Kenosis*

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel can be called a theologian of the incarnation. Her theology centres on the possibility that we might encounter Christ in the midst of our fallen lives.[8] Her entire vision is charac-

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[5] Ibid., 86.

[6] Behr-Sigel, *Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Vision of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, eds. Michael Plekon and Sarah E. Hinlicky (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 132.

[7] Behr-Sigel, "Women in the Orthodox Church," 5–7.

[8] Lossky, *Towards the Endless* Day, 278.

terized by the permeability of the human being to Christ in order to present him to others.[9]

Her theological method corresponds with this focus on incarnation. The method is historical and inductive.[10] She wrote in-depth studies on the spirituality of Russian saints, on monasticism, and on modern Orthodox theology, always starting from an empirical basis. In particular, she was fascinated by the first modern Russian theologian, Alexander Bukharev, and by Mother Maria Skobtsova and Fr Lev Gillet, as radical witnesses of the gospel in the 19th and 20th centuries. In their lives she detected the radiant light of the kenotic Christ.

The theme of *kenosis* or self-emptying of Christ (Phil. 2:7) is a leading motif in Behr-Sigel's theology. She corrects the misconception that Orthodoxy is only preoccupied with the majestic Christ *pantocrator*. She explores how the image of Christ in his self-sacrificing humanity was always prominent in Russian spirituality. We encounter it in the hagiographic types of Russian saints: the *strastoterpets* or suffering one, the *iurodivyi* or fool for Christ, and the *starets* or holy monk.[11] Behr-Sigel observes that the piety of the Russian people is marked, on the one hand, by the experience of the actual participation in the resurrection of Jesus, and, on the other hand, by the suffering of Jesus which extends to the suffering of all humanity. "The suffering and humiliated humanity of the Russian people became mysteriously radiant in Christ Jesus."[12]

She shares the fascination with the theme of *kenosis* with her good friend Nadejda Gorodetzky, an expert on Russian religious philosophy, spirituality, and literature. It was Gorodetzky who first analyzed the theme of *kenosis* as an essential part of Russian spirituali-

[9] Michael Plekon, "To Become Permeable to Christ: Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's Theological Vision," *Ecumenical Review* 61:2 (2009), 167, 171, and *Hidden Holiness* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 76–87.

[10] Lossky, Towards the Endless Day, 278.

[11] Behr-Sigel, "The Kenotic, the Humble Christ," in *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, 29–40. See also her master's thesis, published as "Études d'hagiographie russe," *Irénikon* 12-15 (1935–1939).

[12] Behr-Sigel, "The Kenotic," 30.

ty.[13] She published her doctoral thesis in 1938 on the theme of the humiliated Christ in modern Russian thought. Actually, both women greatly contributed to a rediscovery and re-appropriation of forgotten strands of Orthodox Christology and spirituality, in which *kenosis* functions as a key-concept.

Alexander Bukharev: "A Monk in the City"

Behr-Sigel discovered a modern form of kenotic holiness in the life of Alexander Bukharev (1822–1871).[14] As Archimandrite Feodor and professor at the Theological Academy of Moscow, Bukharev had a brilliant career ahead of him. However, his call for Orthodox faith and theology to be open to modern culture brought him into bitter conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities. The central motif of Bukharev's theology was "the whole earthly and material area . . . should not fall outside Christ's grace and truth."[15] The harsh opposition of the church authorities, resulting in the confiscation of his life's work, *A Commentary on Revelation*, finally forced him to request a deposition to lay estate. He felt that it was his kenotic path, as he was following Christ in his descent into the world. Shortly after being deposed, he shocked everybody when he decided to marry Anna Rodychevskaia, the daughter of a noble landowner who was inspired by progressive ideas. Bukharev and his wife experienced public disgrace and humiliation and suffered the loss of their only child. Journals refused to publish his articles and publishing houses stopped printing his books. He accepted this also as his kenotic path, taking up the cross with Christ, the Lamb of God, in his descent to the world. But up to the end of his life, common people and simple peasants kept on visiting him in Pereslavl to dwell in the radiance of his faith.

Interestingly, in his kenotic theology, Bukharev was inspired by the image of the Lord sitting at the table of sinners and by the figure of the Shulamite girl from the Song of Songs. The Shulamite is

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[13] Nadejda Gorodetzky, *The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought*, (London: SPCK, 1938).

[14] Behr-Sigel, *Alexandre Boukharev, un Théologien de l'Eglise Orthodoxe Russe en Dialogue avec le Monde Moderne* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977). This was her doctoral thesis.

[15] Cited in Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology, Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 46.

passionately searching for her Beloved in the streets and markets of the town, risking being beaten by the watchmen.[16] In this female figure he found a new interpretation of his monastic vocation. Like the young woman searching for her Beloved, he set out searching for Christ in the dangerous and sinful world, risking being wounded by the keepers of the ecclesial walls.

Behr-Sigel characterizes Bukharev as "a monk in the city."[17] She embraces his worldly interpretation of asceticism. Far from the monastic practices of "fearful mortification" or "scorn for the body," ascetic life is meant to bring about the *integration* of human beings. True asceticism is the dedication of the whole human being to the life of the Spirit, and this entails suffering. We suffer with Christ and the Spirit in the process of the birth of a new humanity. To conquer sin, the spirit of separation, Christians must be in solidarity with all human beings, in a sinful coexistence. Behr-Sigel fully agrees with Bukharev that the mission of the church should be to preserve and restore in modern people the source of authentic humanity, which is to be found in humble communion with Jesus Christ, the God-Human (*bogochelovek* in Russian). Kenotic engagement of the church stretches out toward all social responsibilities and dimensions: "an effort must be made to *Christify*, that is truly to humanize this culture, not from outside, by constraint, but from within, by the energies of the Spirit."[18] Such is the spiritual way of incarnating Christ in the secularized city. It is plunging into the depths of the inhuman city where God seems absent, to discover there the seeds of life and resurrection.

Maria Skobtsova: "A Nun in the City"

To Behr-Sigel, a 20th-century follower of Bukharev's ideal of the "monk in the city" was Mother Maria Skobtsova (1891–1945).[19]

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[16] Bukharev makes this analogy of the modern faithful Christian with the Shulamite in "On Orthodoxy in Relation to the Modern World"; Behr-Sigel, *Alexandre Boukharev,* 71, 76.

[17] Behr-Sigel, "A Monk in the City: Alexander Bukharev, 1822–1871," in *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, 55–79.

[18] Behr-Sigel, *Alexandre Boukharev*, 71.

[19] Behr-Sigel, "Mother Maria Skobtsova, 1891–1945," in *Discerning the Signs of the Times*, 41–53.

Skobtsova, born Elizaveta Pilenko, was a bright theologian, gifted artist, iconographer, poet, and above all a radical Christian. She was a socialist revolutionary from Russia and was one of the first women enrolled in the St. Petersburg Institute of Theology. She was married and divorced two times, and mother of three children. After the Russian Revolution she fled to France.

In 1924, the death of her three-year-old daughter Anastasia, whose name means "resurrection," was an existential catastrophe for Elizaveta. She wrote in her memoirs that it had made her a different person. Before that, her soul was "wandering blind." But

> while I walked in the cemetery behind the coffin, it all suddenly opened to me. I became a part of the universal all-encompassing motherhood. . . . I saw another way and a new meaning of life, which was being the mother of all who needed protection.[20]

That was when Elizaveta decided to take the veil. The ceremony of her monastic profession took place only in 1932, in the church of the Orthodox Theological Institute of Saint Sergius in a liturgy led by Metropolitan Evlogii (Georgievski). He gave her the monastic name Mary, after the desert mother St Mary of Egypt, and expressed the hope that she would speak and act in the desert of human hearts. While she was a nun, people continued calling her "mother" without using her monastic name. It is significant for the theology of Maria Skobtsova that there is a profound continuity between her physical or natural and her spiritual motherhood. The pain and co-suffering of the mother becomes the birthplace of Christ, of the "Spirit of fire" in one's life. For her, the abyss of the "divine visitation" of the death of her child was simultaneously the experience of the anticipation of the Last Judgment. In the crisis, God revealed himself and the true nature of things.

Later she wrote about Anastasia's death, "The death of a loved one is the door that opens suddenly upon eternity. In visiting us, the Lord reveals the true nature of things: on the one hand a dead skeleton of a human being and of all creation that is mortal as he is,

[20] See the memories of Igor Krivoshein, К 25-летию со дня кончины Матери Марии (Скобцовой) [Mother Maria (Skobtsova): on the 25th anniversary of her death], at www.mere-marie.com/105.htm. I am grateful to Marina Shishova for this reference and her thoughtful reflections on Skobtsova's theology.

and on the other hand, simultaneously, the Spirit of fire, giver of life, consoler who consumes and fills all."[21] In 1936 Mother Maria was "visited" again, this time by the death due to illness of her eldest daughter Gayana in the Soviet Union. In a poem, she wrote, "This summer I touched upon the mysteries of Your world."

Behr-Sigel admired Mother Maria for her radical obedience to the commandment: "'Love one another.' Go to the far reaches of love; love without making any exception."[22] In Skobtsova's vision of religious life, "true maternal love" and "*kenosis*" are the two pillars, and she considers them to be almost synonymous:

> Only that maternal love is truly Christian which sees in her child a real image of God inherent not only in him but in all people, given to her in trust, as her responsibility, which she must develop and strengthen in him in preparation for the unavoidable life of sacrifice along the Christian path, for that cross-bearing challenge facing all Christians . . .
>
> Here we are speaking about a genuine *kenosis*, in a partial imitation of how Christ emptied himself by becoming, so to speak, incarnate in another human soul, offering to it the full measure of God's image which is contained within ourselves.[23]

Mother Mary dreamt of a "monasticism in the world" and practised it in her hostel in Rue de Lourmel in Paris, where she lived with a few other nuns and provided shelter for homeless immigrants, prostitutes, and ex-prisoners, and gathered an exciting circle of intellectuals, priests, and artists. For Behr-Sigel, Maria Skobtsova was ex-

[21] Behr-Sigel, "Mother Maria Skobtsova," 44.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Both quotations are from the essay "Types of Religious Lives," written in 1937 in Russian and discovered in 1996 by Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine in the archive of Maria Skobtsova's mother, S. B. Pilenko. It was subsequently published in French in the volume *Mère Marie Skobtsov. Le sacrement du frère*, ed. Hélène Arjakovsky-Klépinine (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 73–122, and in English in *Mother Maria Skobtsova: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003). Behr-Sigel refers to this significant essay, which at that time was only published in *Sourozh* and in *Le Messager orthodoxe*, in her article "Mother Maria Skobtsova," 53, fn. 1.

ercising the ministry of a deaconess or "spiritual mother," without actually having the title.[24]

She depicts her lovingly as "the Russian nun with the big smile, hair unkempt and habit stained with the traces of her work in the kitchen or in the studio."[25] Like Alexander Bukharev, Maria Skobtsova desired nothing else than to dedicate her life "as fire and coals lit in the middle of the city." Christ calls us to the streets and the cafés where the homeless spent the night. "Being in Christ" meant for Mother Maria going all the kenotic way. "Open your doors to homeless thieves . . . let the world enter. Let them destroy your magnificent liturgical edifices. Humble yourselves . . . empty yourselves – humility having no comparison to that of our God."[26]

During the Second World War, Mother Maria's house at Rue de Lourmel became a refuge and escape route for Jews. She and her helpers were betrayed and sent to concentration camps. Mother Maria died in April 1945 in the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Her last words scratched on a piece of paper were, "I fully accept suffering . . . and I want to welcome death, if it comes, as a grace from on high."[27]

Behr-Sigel felt attracted to these atypical, prophetic figures of Alexander Bukharev and Maria Skobtsova. Their spiritual examples taught her that deification – becoming godlike – means going the kenotic way, like Jesus; like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, in her co-suffering; and like the Shulamite girl in her passionate search for the Beloved. Suffering makes up an essential part of it. The divine glory remains hidden behind the scorned and scandalizing appearance of the Crucified. With her friend Lev Gillet – who served as role of chaplain in Mother Maria's monastery – Behr-Sigel shared the vision of the suffering God, a God victorious through suffering.

> Agape demands the suffering of the Father, his co-crucifixion with his Son and his participation in all evils of mankind. The Father constantly overwhelmed and injured by the law of this world. The cross standing in the Father's heart: the cross of Golgotha was only a

[24] Behr-Sigel, "Mother Maria Skobtsova," 46.

[25] Ibid., 48.

[26] Ibid., 47.

[27] These words were addressed to Metropolitan Evlogii (Georgievski) of Paris and her spiritual father Sergei Bulgakov. Ibid., 51.

> reflection of it. Yet the Father is not lessened by it. He is victorious *durch Leiden* [through suffering], but suffering is the very thing he must overcome and change into his triumph and his joy.[28]

To respond to the call of agape is to open oneself to divine compassion, to let oneself be taken over by that love which descends to humankind without restraint.

Evaluation of Behr-Sigel's View of Suffering and *Kenosis*

Might this view of suffering be helpful for evaluating the historic experiences of women in Eastern Europe under communist totalitarian systems and in the decades after?

Let me start by quoting my Ukrainian friend and colleague Halyna Teschlyuk: "Women in the West want to cut off suffering, women in Eastern Europe know that suffering belongs to human life." This truth is drawn from spiritual sources as much as from everyday lived reality. It is not a fatalistic statement, though it perhaps may seem so. Perhaps her meaning comes close to what Behr-Sigel intends to express.

Turning to the gender dimension in Behr-Sigel's theology of suffering and *kenosis*, it is important to note that she rejects any notion of suffering as the fate of women or as their punishment because of Eve's eating of the fruit. This is illustrated by the following anecdote from the birth of her first child Nadine, which Olga Lossky recalls in her biography: "[Nadine] came into the world after a difficult labor during which the physician recommended that Elisabeth offer her suffering to God. The rebellious patient fired back, 'No way!' She was against any form of dolorism that saw the suffering of childbirth as a punishment especially reserved for the descendants of Eve."[29] Behr-Sigel also rejected all essentialist theories of ontological differences between men and women, which would assign to them differ-

[28] From a letter of Lev Gillet to Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 27 February 1937, in which he expressed his excitement at Anders Nygren's book, *Agape and Eros* (1939). Behr-Sigel, *Lev Gillet, "A Monk of the Eastern Church,"* trans. Helen Wright (Oxford: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1999), 216.

[29] Lossky, *Towards the Endless Day*, 58.

ent paths of suffering and holiness.[30] Women, she argued, are created in the image of God, are fully human and share equally in the divine life, which transcends gendered patterns of femininity and masculinity. This grants a "pentecostal," eschatological freedom to the spiritual and social development of the person.

I agree with her critical stance toward traditional ideologies that connect women and suffering; yet I would like to point out that concrete, historic women's experiences form a major source of information and creative potential for Behr-Sigel's theological understanding of suffering. They shape it in a positive and constructive way. Her congenial reading of Mary Skobtsova's life and spirituality, as well as her own lived reflections on suffering and love – based on varied and ambiguous experiences of motherhood, marriage, friendship, war, social engagement, the ups and downs of the ecumenical movement, and being a woman theologian in the Orthodox Church[31] – testify to this. What are the main features of this theological view of suffering?

In the first place, suffering and pain *may* be perceived as a blessing, for through it we may touch upon the mysteries of God's world. Second, suffering can be understood as an active response to the brokenness of the world, even if the suffering is not the consequence of one's own choices (as in the case of the illness of Behr-Sigel's husband and their subsequent marital troubles). Patience, hope, faith, endurance, and the will to live are very active virtues in response to a broken reality. Third, (co-)suffering is redemptive because of love. Those who really love will suffer. This corresponds to a quotation from Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, inspired by Fr Lev Gil-

[30] Behr-Sigel, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church*; Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, "Tradition, Priesthood, and Personhood in the Trinitarian Theology of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel," *Pro Ecclesia* 19:2 (2010), 129–50.

[31] I hear pain between the lines of her confession: "This Church into whose communion I felt myself, in conscience, called to enter, in which I discerned the sacramental fullness of the life of Christ through the Holy Spirit, this same Church, it seemed to me, would not know what to do with a woman theologian. After excluding women from any form of public ministry, the Church offered them, as a means of sanctification, either the monastic life or marriage, but it did not foresee that women could be entrusted with any official responsibilities" (Lossky, *Towards the Endless Day*, 28). It should be remembered that Behr-Sigel had already served, with great joy, as an auxiliary pastor in the Reformed Church in Villé-Climont in 1932.

let: "We have got a tragic God because this God is the God of love."[32] Fourth, suffering is to be understood from the mystery of Easter. The resurrection of Christ empowers our eschatological imagination and feeds us with hope. The Beloved is already knocking on our door. Finally, plunging into the depths of the inhuman city implies that we cannot keep our hands clean. Part of the suffering is guilt and shame. It is a part of all post-traumatic suffering. We know that survivors – whether from the Holocaust, the Gulag, the Soviet system, incest, or domestic abuse – often feel guilty. They are tortured by questions like: Why have I survived while the others did not? What was the price of my survival? The image of the broken body of Christ gives space to acknowledge the brokenness in our lives and communities. The re-enactment of the broken Body in the liturgy inflames the eschatological imagination and helps to discover ways of reconciliation and healing. The followers of Jesus, as I understand Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's message, are encouraged to become risk-takers in a world that cries for salvation. We may do so, here and now, in the illuminating presence of a limitless Love.[33] With full approval she cites Lev Gillet: "Wherever a soul lets itself be set alight by the Lord Love, everywhere, in streets, in squares, along hedges, among the poor and the infirm, prisoners, refugees and the homeless, wherever an upsurge of sacrifice makes men and women turn on distress and rise up against injustice, the sacred flame spreads."[34] And in one voice with her friend, Behr-Sigel urges people to enter into the communion of limitless love and to push open the door of limitless hope.

[32] From the last talks of Anthony Bloom, Metropolitan of Sourozh, 20 December 2001, in *On the Light that Shineth in the Darkness*, ed. Avril Pyman (Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh Foundation, 2014), 38.

[33] "Limitless love" or "Amour sans limites" is the title of a poem by Lev Gillet.

[34] Behr-Sigel, *Lev Gillet*, 410.

Chapter Ten

Behr-Sigel's New Hagiography and Its Ecumenical Significance

SARAH HINLICKY WILSON

Elisabeth Parmentier's study looked at the theological milieu in which Elisabeth Behr-Sigel grew up and was educated. As is well known to all of us, Behr-Sigel was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran church in Alsace, her mentors in adolescence were Reformed church leaders, and her formal university education was at the Protestant theological faculties of Strasbourg and Paris, before her love of Orthodoxy took her into the arms of the Eastern Church. We began with how Lutheranism, in a sense, gave Elisabeth Behr-Sigel to Orthodoxy; I'd like to conclude with some thoughts on what the Orthodox theologian Elisabeth Behr-Sigel might give back to Lutheranism.

My reasons for taking up this topic are probably best explained autobiographically. I was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran church, and I remain a Lutheran to this day. I did my undergraduate training at a Lutheran college in the US but had significant encounters afterward with Roman Catholics and Reformed Protestants as well as an important and long-lasting friendship with the Orthodox priest and theologian, Fr Michael Plekon. It was he who introduced me to Behr-Sigel's writings. As a college student, I'd decided that I was opposed to the ordination of women, but my reasons for this were not very honest: it was because I suspected that *I* might have a call to ordination myself, and being the daughter and granddaughter of pastors, I was pretty sure I didn't want anything to do with that line of work. Well, we all know how easy it is to run away from God's call, and I lost that battle in the end. But, interestingly enough, it was reading the pages of Behr-Sigel's book that reconciled me to the idea of female clergy. She was not working within the intra-Western conflicts of Catholics versus Protestants; she looked to the scriptures and church fathers for answers; she knew and appreciated

feminism as an analytical tool but believed it could not be a conclusive source for the church's decisions. Her approaches made me trust her, and I found her results to be sound and faithful.

Of course, it wasn't lost on me that this theologian, whom I'd come to value so much that I wrote my dissertation on her, had been a Lutheran and then made her exit from Lutheranism to Orthodoxy. But over time I made a rather startling discovery: What Behr-Sigel describes as Lutheranism, or Protestantism generally, is almost completely unrecognizable to me. Across her corpus, whenever she identifies the centre or heart of Protestantism, she will inevitably say it is "liberty of conscience" or "freedom." I won't deny that these are important matters for Lutherans and Protestants on the whole. But I take them to be much *more* the emphases of a certain kind of Enlightenment rationalism, most fully exploited in the liberal Protestantism of Schleiermacher and his heirs, which certainly is to be found in and among Protestants today (and, I suspect, untold numbers of Catholics, and perhaps even growing numbers of Orthodox).

The kind of Lutheranism I was taught, by contrast, was doctrinal, church-centred Lutheranism. It was a Lutheranism that starts with the three creeds of the ancient church, refers constantly in its confessional documents to the church fathers, interprets the scriptures as its normative source, exalts the sacraments, and makes absolutely no sense apart from the conciliar decisions of the early church about the Trinity and Christology. The most significant break from what I take to be the Orthodox approach is that we Lutherans have a much profounder suspicion of divine authority placed in human hands, and I'm sure you can imagine how our history has given rise to this suspicion and with good reason. My kind of Lutheranism, then, is a 16th-century Lutheranism reclaimed for the 20th and 21st centuries. But the kind Behr-Sigel left was a 19th-century Lutheranism, stripped of all its content until all that was left was the individual's naked conscience. I can't honestly blame her for walking out on it.

And yet it is precisely here that I find a good point of entry into Behr-Sigel's work in hagiography and what it might offer the Protestantism she left behind. Soon after her conversion to Orthodoxy, Behr-Sigel undertook master's level studies in theology in Berlin under the direction of Georges Fedotov. Her topic was, as her book would eventually be entitled, *Prayer and Holiness in the Russian Church*. As her biographer Olga Lossky points out, "Choosing a thesis

topic relative to hagiography was significant for a Lutheran who had just embraced Orthodoxy. It showed Elisabeth's determination to immerse herself in this new tradition, which she had made her own, notably in the cult of the saints, which was foreign to her Protestant [sensibilities]."[1] Indeed, hagiography has not been a notable interest among Lutherans, even the most doctrinally committed of them!

But the matter of hagiography is very closely connected to the new sense of the church that Behr-Sigel gained on becoming Orthodox – in fact, it was this approach to the church that drew her to Orthodoxy in the first place. According to her own testimony, as a Protestant she had always thought of the church as an institution. For the first time, through the writings of the Orthodox theologian Alexis Khomiakov, she heard of it as "a communion lived in faith and love." The individualism that distressed her in Protestantism was transcended: according to Khomiakov, "No one is saved alone. The person who is saved is saved in the church, in union with all its other members. If a person believes, it is within a community of faith; if a person loves, it is within a community of love; if a person prays, it is within a community of prayer."[2]

This is why the saints are such an important part of the full, rich ecclesiology that Behr-Sigel so desired. As she wrote to her fiancé André Behr in a letter on this topic,

> [W]e need guides if we are to arrive at a greater fullness of spiritual life, and it cannot be a question of each of us inventing his own particular way. It would take a lot of arrogance to believe ourselves capable of that. In this field, religion is not something purely personal but rather an ecclesial reality, because it is within the communion of the Church, in the communion of our brothers, and, above all, in the communion of the saints who are our older brothers, that we should try to go to God. And the goal is not our solitary communion with Him, but the union of everyone in the love of God, through the Holy Spirit. This is the Church in its mystical reality.[3]

For Behr-Sigel, the contrast with Protestantism was very stark. As she wrote in same letter to André:

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[1] Olga Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day: The Life of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel,* trans. Jerry Ryan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2010), 36.

[2] Ibid., 16.

[3] Ibid., 37–38.

> Protestantism, which makes religion something entirely free (and I like this about it), does not, on the other hand, recognize this principle of love in the spiritual life. It is individualistic. Every Protestant is ready to break with the whole ecclesiastical tradition because he thinks that he can come to God all by himself, without the communion of saints and that of his brothers. That, in my mind, is its heresy. The *Eastern* and *Roman* Catholic Church, on the other hand, affirm that each one of us is only pardoned and transfigured through the intercession of all and in the communion of the whole Church. You understand I'm not reproaching Protestantism for a purely intellectual error but for something false in its fundamental attitude, an attitude of the heart. The intellectual and practical manifestations of this error of the heart are the reformers' rejection of prayers addressed to the saints, of prayers for the dead, of veneration for the Mother of God as she who, above all, intercedes for us. Each individual Protestant, of course, is not responsible for these errors, and, fortunately, there are many humble and loving souls among them. But it is the Protestant-type attitude that I see as vitiated by individualism; and, as a theologian, I believe that I should openly position myself on the side where I think and feel there is more *spiritual* truth; . . . even though I have chosen the spiritual path of Orthodoxy, nothing prevents me from loving what I find good in Protestantism.[4]

You will note here Behr-Sigel's characteristically gracious attitude: she always insists on validating what she finds good and worthy in other communities, even in the one she has chosen to leave. As a Lutheran I would disagree with some aspects of her analysis and some of her theological judgments, but I will take those up later. The point I wish to emphasize here is that, for Behr-Sigel, a lively sense of the communion of saints is essential for the flourishing of the whole life of the church. Ecclesiology cannot function without hagiography. I think *that* is a powerful insight well worth the ecumenical exploration.

But what makes Behr-Sigel such a wonderful figure to study is that she never does things in a straightforward or traditional way, even as she is committed to the Orthodox faith of the church. From the beginning, her approach to hagiography was unique and challenging. She not only invested herself in this traditional church practice, but she retooled it and reclaimed it for the "here and now" – one

[4] Ibid., 38–39.

of her favorite phrases – discerning the signs of the times in her application of the deposit of the faith. I will now trace out the contours of her "new hagiography" by looking at her studies of five Orthodox saints, not all of whom have been canonized, which is proof enough of her non-traditional approach to the subject!

I'll start with the 16th-century Juliana Lazarevskaya, the only woman to be considered in Behr-Sigel's first, aforementioned study of saints, *Prayer and Holiness in the Russian Church*. The chapter is only five pages long in the French edition, shorter than any of the others. This wasn't for lack of interest in Juliana or in female saints generally. As Behr-Sigel takes care to point out in the very first paragraph of this chapter, "For the majority of these holy women, precise information about them is lacking. We know but little about their spiritual 'exploits' and their interior lives remain ignored. The Russian nuns have neither a Catherine of Siena nor a Theresa of Avila, not even their own St Basil to write a panegyric as he did for his sister Macrina."[5] Behr-Sigel herself was hampered by the tradition's lack of interest in women saints.

But that is what makes Juliana such an important figure. For Juliana was not only a woman, but a married woman, furthermore a mother, who attended worship infrequently enough that it scandalized the local clergy, and ultimately a person who was spontaneously canonized by the *vox populi*, though her sanctity was recognized officially only in the 19th century. Behr-Sigel further values the fact that the hagiographical account of Juliana's life, written by her own son, never "drowns her in a fog of golden legend," "notably diverging from the stylistic standard of the traditional 'lives of the saints.'" She approves of how the son's narrative anticipates "the art and the technique of the modern biography."[6] In this rare case of a detailed, accurate story of female saint, Behr-Sigel finds "incarnated – carried to their highest point – the virtues of thousands of Russian Christian

[5] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel,"Juliana Lazarevskaïa: Une sainte laïque à l'aube des temps modernes" [Juliana Lazarevskaya: A lay saint at the dawn of modern times], in *Prière et Sainteté dans l'Eglise Russe*, new and augmented ed., Spiritualité Orientale 33 (Paris: Cerf, 1950; reissued Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1982), 109. All citations from this article are my translation. See also the complete translation in this volume.

[6] Ibid., 109–10.

women that history has ignored."[7] You can already see here the delicate balance that Behr-Sigel would spend the next 70 years of her life trying to establish, honouring the distinctive qualities of women while emphasizing the common humanity in Christ shared by men and women alike. Thus, there *is* something distinctive about Juliana as a representative of "thousands of Russian Christian women," and yet, Behr-Sigel writes, "one finds in her all the traits that characterize the traditional Russian evangelical spirit: humility, gentleness, compassion, aspirations toward personal asceticism pushed to extreme limits," as well as "an acute sense . . . of the dignity of all that is human,"[8] traits that are not specific either to men or to women but are the common Russian form of holiness. But even that common form is stretched: Behr-Sigel theorizes that "[i]n Juliana Lazarevskaya, as she is presented in the hagiography, a new synthesis is taking form: that of the ascetic and mystical ideal of Eastern monasticism represented in Russia by Sergius of Radonezh and Nils Sorsky, along with the call to an active, compassionate, and diaconal presence in the world. It is not irrelevant that this synthesis was represented by a woman."[9] There are essential continuities with the tradition even as the boundaries are being broken.

It is easy to see how Juliana captivated the imagination of a young Elisabeth, a lay theologian in the making who was engaged to be married and hoped to become a mother herself someday: sanctity was not out of the question for a Christian of this sort. As she put it,

> Juliana displays very distinctly – and her biography seems to want to underline this fact – the plenitude of the Christian life carried out in the ordinary conditions of a married woman, a mother of many children, in a milieu where violence both individual and social reigned. She was subjected to the weight of the misfortunes and catastrophes that buffeted the entire society. In living according to the Gospel in the world, did she not need as much or even more heroism than if she had been able to follow her desire to take refuge in a convent?[10]

[7] Ibid., 109.

[8] Ibid., 111.

[9] Ibid., 113.

[10] Ibid., 112.

We can well imagine this to be a profoundly existential question for Behr-Sigel: having already survived the First World War, little knowing what yet lay before her: a great depression, another world war that would annihilate most of her Jewish mother's side of the family, marriage and three children, further studies and a public role in settings reserved largely to men, activism against torture, and fame for a minority opinion about the place of women in the church. St Juliana was exactly the kind of inspiration that a woman like Elisabeth Behr-Sigel needed but could rarely find in the tradition.

Another holy woman to whom Behr-Sigel devoted more space and attention was Mother Maria Skobtsova.[11] Although Mother Maria was officially canonized in 2004, Behr-Sigel was writing about her as a saint long before that, even though Mother Maria was, in many ways, an even more unlikely candidate than Juliana. She was twice divorced, though the second, following a mutually agreed-upon separation, was an ecclesiastical divorce to permit her to take holy orders. She enjoyed both smoking and drinking and openly admitted to her boredom at long Byzantine liturgies. Mother Maria was constitutionally uncomfortable with rules, regulations, and institutions, and after a tour of convents in Latvia and Estonia she became openly critical of traditional monasticism. In Behr-Sigel's words, Mother Maria found the traditional way to be

> antiquated and contaminated by a bourgeois spirit, something that was for her antithetical to the true radical monastic vocation. For many women, Mother Maria believed, monasticism was a means of founding a spiritual family that offered refuge, security, and "high walls of protection against the ugliness and misery of the world." . . . [But] Mother Maria dreamt of a creatively renewed monasticism that would be a response to the vocation discerned in the "signs of the times."

[11] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, review of *Pearl of Great Price: The Life of Mother Maria Skobtsova*, by Serge Hackel, *Contacts* 17 (1965), 260–1; "Mother Maria Skobtsova, 1891–1945" in Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Vision of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, ed. Michael Plekon and Sarah E. Hinlicky (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 41–53; "Marie Skobtsova 1891–1945," in *Ecumenical Pilgrims: Profiles of Pioneers in Christian Reconciliation*, ed. Ion Bria and Dagmar Heller (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), 216–20. The latter two essays were abridged and/or reprinted in various forms many times.

Again, in Behr-Sigel's words, Mother Maria believed in the arrival of "a 'kairos' that would demand not only the renewal of old ecclesial structures but the renunciation, maybe temporary, of all structure, or at least of all identification of the Christian faith with an exterior order, indeed with a culture." While Mother Maria did, in the end, take monastic vows – in order to empower her ministry to the destitute of Paris, a ministry that eventually took her to the Ravensbrück concentration camp and her death – Behr-Sigel gently suggests that a creatively renewed diaconate for women would have been the more appropriate office for this free-spirited saint. And again, it is likely that Behr-Sigel found in Mother Maria something of a template for her own calling. Here also was a married woman with children; in fact, Mother Maria's son was canonized along with her. Mother Maria was also one of the first if not the very first of women to pursue theological studies in St. Petersburg, as Behr-Sigel had been among the first in Strasbourg. And above all Mother Maria's passion was to engage the "here and now" with all the resources of the Christian tradition at hand in a life of radical discipleship. The young Elisabeth seems to have been faintly scandalized at the outspoken nun, whom she'd known in Paris; but the retrospective glance of maturity confirmed that Mother Maria was a sign and practitioner of a renewed Orthodoxy open to the needs and desires of the world.

Juliana and Mother Maria were two women who practised a radical, self-sacrificial Christianity even as wives, mothers, and dwellers in the city rather than the cloister. Behr-Sigel also turned her hagiographical attention to men. The three in particular we will look at here are interesting because of their ecumenical significance, which sometimes earned them the disapproval of their fellow Orthodox. That Behr-Sigel should have been drawn to them is not surprising: long before she started writing about women, she was a committed ecumenist, determinedly upholding whatever she found of value across the Christian spectrum, even in the places she'd left behind.

One of these figures is the Russian theologian Alexander Bukharev, about whom Behr-Sigel wrote her dissertation. Though a prolific writer, Bukharev was and remains most famous for his decision to renounce his monastic vows, return to "the city," and in due course marry. He had come to the conclusion that followers of Christ were not meant to live in the isolation of a monastery but to carry their monasticism with them into the city, into the thick of life, even – par-

adoxically – into marriage. The social price he paid for his choice was heavy: at the time, in Russia, it resulted in a loss of civil rights. Practically, it meant poverty. And ecclesiastically it gained him no friends. The superficial resemblance to Luther is obvious enough; Behr-Sigel notes that the hierarchy "slanderously treated [Bukharev] as a Lutheran" – and "Lutheran" was certainly intended as a pejorative term. Behr-Sigel makes some effort to distinguish Bukharev's hopes for a renewal of the church from Luther's hopes for reformation, but one way or another the taint of his guilt by association with Luther does not deter Behr-Sigel from her interest in this figure, who, again, was married and believed in the life of holiness within marriage and worldly vocations. Bukharev has not been canonized – it seems unlikely that he will be anytime soon – but Behr-Sigel's judgment on his person is plain enough.

The ecumenical flavour is even more prominent in Behr-Sigel's study of St Tikhon of Zadonsk. This Russian saint was a reader of and commentator on the writings of St Augustine – most unusual for an Eastern Christian. He admired both the Anglican bishop Joseph Hall and the German Lutheran theologian Johann Arndt.[12] Tikhon even took the title of his most famous book, *True Christianity*, from Arndt's of the same name, which Tikhon "particularly enjoyed reading and re-reading."[13] The Russian saint emphasized pious and intelligent scripture reading as an "instrument of spiritual and theological renewal," certainly a typical Protestant emphasis.[14] "The *lectio divina* is for Tikhon an encounter with God, with the Living God, here and now,"[15] Behr-Sigel wrote; and she was certainly fond of anything addressing the here and now. She judged that Tikhon's spirituality, though grounded in Orthodox trinitarianism with its emphasis on the

[12] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *The Place of the Heart: An Introduction to Orthodox Spirituality*, trans. Steven Bigham (Torrance, Calif.: Oakwood, 1992), 5.

[13] Lewis Shaw, "John Meyendorff and the Heritage of the Russian Theological Tradition," in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 24.

[14] Behr-Sigel, *The Place of the Heart*, 11–12.

[15] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "Tikhon de Zadonsk," *Contacts* 26:1 (1974), 60. All citations from this article are my translation.

indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the human heart, is "essentially christocentric."[16]

If anything, Behr-Sigel makes bold to emphasize the Western, Roman Catholic, and Protestant currents in Tikhon's thought, rather than downplaying them. There is a particular reason she does so. Tikhon had acquired something less than a pristinely Orthodox reputation under the inspection of Georges Florovsky in his massive study *Ways of Russian Theology*. According to Florovsky, Tikhon, though in many ways a laudable figure in the reawakening of Russian monasticism, was still marked by the "pseudomorphosis" of Orthodoxy into a Latinized, Westernized, Thomistic imitation of its former Eastern glory. During Tikhon's time, schools of Orthodox theology and the "manuals" that came out of them looked more scholastic than anything else and therefore were not faithful to Orthodox tradition.[17] Tikhon himself had read and taught in Latin.[18]

Behr-Sigel, unabashedly an ecumenical Westerner even while Orthodox, set out to reinterpret the data. As she wrote:

> For if on the one hand servile imitation and lack of discernment led to a real alienation, above all in the realm of theology as taught in the Orthodox schools and manuals, on the other it must be said that Orthodoxy's encounter with Western spirituality was not without some stimulating effects. . . . Those who were strong spiritually, rooted in the bedrock of the tradition of the church, and free (precisely because of this rootedness) from a fear of 'the other,' were able to transform this encounter into an opportunity for a fruitful integration of traditions.[19]

It was precisely Tikhon's ability to synthesize the true treasures of the Catholic Church, as preserved in the West, with his own Eastern faith and spirituality that Behr-Sigel praises and even com-

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Behr-Sigel, "Hesychasm and the Western Impact in Russia: St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724–1783)," in *Christian Spirituality Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers, World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest 18 (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 432, 437.

[18] See Georges Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology: Part One*, trans. Robert L. Nichols, Collected Works of Georges Florovsky, vol. 6 (Vaduz, Liechtenstein: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 157–59.

[19] Behr-Sigel, "Hesychasm and the Western Impact in Russia," 432.

mends as "the historic task of the Orthodox church again today."[20] Behr-Sigel concludes that "[t]he spiritual path of Tikhon is of a sort of Orthodox Augustinianism where sometimes the accents of a Pascal, indeed of a Luther and of a Kierkegaard, but above all of Dostoevsky break through."[21] "In this," Behr-Sigel declares, "resides his Orthodoxy. . . . [T]he 'fear' and the 'trembling' are always surmounted by a confident hope and desire for the ultimate transfiguration of humanity and the entire cosmos, characteristic of Eastern spirituality."[22] In other words, Tikhon did not perceive Western and Eastern spirituality as fundamentally at odds with one another. "His interior liberty and his spiritual tact permitted him to recognize and accept, to the extent he was allowed to encounter them, the authentic values of western Christianity, of Roman Catholicism as well as evangelical Protestantism."[23] Behr-Sigel herself prized the same liberty and tact.

Behr-Sigel's writings on Juliana, Mother Maria, Bukharev, and Tikhon were fairly short: essay-length at most. Not so with Lev Gillet, the subject of her longest book and most exhaustive research. Published in the early 1990s, this book is not only a biography of a great spiritual light but also displays Behr-Sigel's mastery of her own gifts. What she had admired decades before in Juliana's son's ability to unite hagiography with "the art and the technique of the modern biography," Behr-Sigel was at last able to employ herself. Her comments in the introduction are illuminating. "Increasingly," she writes,

> I have felt an obligation to document the journey taken by "the monk of the Eastern Church" and to try to come to an understanding of its direction. Encouragement from friends confirmed me in this vocation. "Father Lev Gillet gave us all a great deal. It should be made known," a Benedictine monk wrote to me, echoing eminent Orthodox theologians. For all that, it was not a question of producing a hagiography, a "saint's life" in the banal sense of the term. For many of us, men and women alike, Father Lev was a sure spiritual guide, "the instrument of God," as the Benedictine monk expressed it. But he was also a man with rich intellectual and spiritual gifts and human frailty, "ups and downs," moments of illumination and

[20] Ibid., 433.

[21] Behr-Sigel, "Tikhon de Zadonsk," 61.

[22] Behr-Sigel, "Hesychasm and the Western Impact in Russia," 442.

[23] Behr-Sigel, "Tikhon de Zadonsk," 65.

> hours of darkness. The strength of God was made perfect in his weakness.[24]

Nobody knew better than Behr-Sigel herself the human frailty of this man she loved so dearly. But probably also nobody benefited more deeply or over a longer period of time than she did from his wisdom and, indeed, his sanctity. Such faithful, sober, realistic love enabled Behr-Sigel to be the ideal hagiographer for Gillet, putting to the test the "new hagiography" that she had in many senses pioneered.

Here at last is where we begin to make some really significant ecumenical connections. A similar process had been taking place among the Bollandists, a group of Jesuits dedicated to hagiographical studies. In the 19th century they began to apply the historical-critical method (developed first for the Bible) to the legends of the saints. The best-known Bollandist, Hippolyte Delehaye's, most famous work, *The Legends of the Saints*, presents a careful and occasionally hilarious account of the problems of hagiography. Hagiography is not simply history, Delehaye insisted, though history is generally concealed somewhere beneath it. Since hagiography aims at the edification of contemporary readers, it often ignores the actual details of the saint's own time and place; it tends to conflate saints and reduce their sanctity to a humdrum monotony; it favours the bold and concrete over the inward and mystical; and it almost always wants to erase the sins of the saints.

This is one of the most serious issues, at heart a theological one. Delehaye explains:

> [T]he eulogy of a saint admits of no blameworthiness; and as saints are subject to human infirmities, the hagiographer who wishes to respect the truth is faced with a task of considerable delicacy. His faithfulness in this matter depends largely on his state of mind. His concern is to edify: and if, for example, he can persuade himself that the saint's failings, before *or even after* his conversion, so far from tarnishing his glory *actually enhance the triumph of God's grace*, why, then, the hagiographer will not leave his subject's human side in the shade, and will avoid putting him on so high a peak that others are discouraged from emulating him. But there is a school of

[24] Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, *Lev Gillet: A Monk of the Eastern Church*, trans. Helen Wright (Oxford: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1999), 15.

> hagiographers who would gladly expunge St. Peter's denial from the gospels, in order not to tarnish the halo of the leader of the apostles.[25]

Delehaye's sympathies, as both Christian and historian, are evident: tell the truth, and the failings that appear will only give greater glory to God. The resonances to Behr-Sigel's work are clear enough. And more recent Catholics share similar concerns. Lawrence Cunningham and Robert Ellsberg both call for a gradual shift in the meaning of sainthood for today, no longer focusing so much on miracles as on solidarity, service, and unspectacular faithfulness.[26] Michael Plekon carries on Behr-Sigel's work within Orthodoxy through his books *Living Icons*, *Hidden Holiness*, and *Saints As They Really Are*, arguing that saints for our time and place will not look like those of the past. New models must be developed, new kinds of saints recognized.[27]

But now what are we to do about the Protestants? Is there any way to break out of the deadlock? I think there is, though I should say up front that, for the time being, we will have to bracket out the question of the *invocation* of the saints,[28] which remains

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[25] Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. Donald Attwater (Portland, Ore.: Four Courts, 1998), 54. My italics.

[26] Lawrence Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980). Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (Chestnut Ridge, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1997).

[27] Michael Plekon, *Living Icons: Persons of Faith in the Eastern Church* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2004); *Hidden Holiness* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2009); *Saints As They Really Are: Voices of Holiness in Our Time* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2012).

[28] See Philip Melanchthon's discussion of invocation in the "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Article XXI, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) [hereafter cited as BC], 237–45. This is definitely a point of ecumenical tension; some years ago, an otherwise progressive dialogue between Lutherans and Orthodox nearly broke down over this very issue. See Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness: Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959–1994* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 126, on the dialogue between the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland and the Moscow Patriarchate: ". . . Felmy [a Lutheran participant] finds that honouring saints is rather un-problematical for Lutherans, whereas a direct

problematic for the vast majority of Lutherans[29] – though it is worth noting that both Luther and Melanchthon allowed for the possibility that the saints pray for us. Their principal concern was not, as Behr-Sigel assumed, the individual's right to pursue her own spiritual course, but rather the danger that Christians would invest their hopes and confidence in the saints at the expense of Christ. They certainly had ample evidence that that's exactly what can happen. But there are other ways and means of reclaiming the veneration of the saints that are open even to the most hardcore of Lutherans, and these are areas I'd like to explore.

The long-forgotten truth is that the Lutheran Confessions – the baseline documents[30] by which Lutherans judge theology and practice in the church, after of course the scripture and the creeds – actually contain a positive program for the veneration of the saints. Article XXI of the Augsburg Confession (which, in 1530, inadvertently became the charter document of the Lutheran church) states: "Concerning the cult of the saints our people teach that the saints are to be remembered so that we may strengthen our faith when we see how they experienced grace and how they were helped by faith."[31] Shortly after the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to the Roman party, its author, Philip Melanchthon, felt it necessary to compose an "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," since he found that it was being misunderstood and distorted in the violent and polemical

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invocation to the saints causes theological problems. Following this, the invocation to the saints was critically debated. According to the discussion notes by Klaus Schwarz [another Lutheran], this debate almost ended the dialogue completely. The common theses only state that no common understanding on this point was achieved. . . . Both churches agree, however, that the 'cloud of witnesses' mentioned in Hebrews 12:1 refers to the holy people who are gathered to an eternal worship in the sanctifying nearness of God. It is further mentioned that martyrs and other strong witnesses of the church are remembered in both churches."

[29] I have to restrict my discussion here to Lutherans. There is enormous variety across the various Protestant confessions, so it is impossible to generalize for all. But it is probably safe to say that veneration of the saints is easier for Anglicans than for Lutherans, but harder for the Reformed – yet in each case the reasons for this are quite different.

[30] All of which are collected in *The Book of Concord* (see above).

[31] Philip Melanchthon, "Augsburg Confession," Article XXI, BC, p. 58.

environment of the time. There he dedicates quite a bit more space to the evangelical form of saint veneration. He writes:

> Our confession approves giving honor to the saints. This honor is threefold. The first is thanksgiving: we ought to give thanks to God because he has given examples of his mercy, because he has shown that he wants to save humankind, and because he has given teachers and other gifts to the church. Since these are the greatest gifts, they ought to be extolled very highly, and we ought to praise the saints themselves for faithfully using these gifts just as Christ praises faithful managers [Matt. 25:21, 23]. The second kind of veneration is the strengthening of our faith. When we see Peter forgiven after his denial, we, too, are encouraged to believe that grace truly super abounds much more over sin [Rom. 5:20]. The third honor is imitation: first of their faith, then of their other virtues, which people should imitate according to their callings.[32]

This is definitely not the lonely, individualistic view of the church and the saints that Behr-Sigel deplored in the Protestantism she left behind. But the truth of the matter is that Lutherans have largely ignored this important piece of their own theological heritage. It's fair to say that certain figures have been venerated – Martin Luther and his wife Katharina von Bora above all, a fact that I suspect Behr-Sigel would have approved of – but not openly or honestly.

Perhaps an even more surprising discovery for contemporary Lutherans is that Luther himself made use of the hagiographical and martyrological tradition. In July of 1523, two of Luther's fellow Augustinian friars up in Flanders were burned at the stake for preaching the gospel according to Luther's teaching. These young men, Johannes van den Esschen and Henricus Vos, were the first martyrs of the Reformation. Luther was deeply grieved when he heard the news. He responded by composing his first-ever hymn, commemorating and honouring the faith and faithfulness of the martyrs. (Interestingly, this hymn may have been the inspiration for the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition of martyr hymns.) Luther also wrote a letter of pastoral consolation to the Christians of Flanders regarding this terrible event. The text of both the hymn and the letter reveal Luther's knowledge of the martyrological tradition of the church – as well as

[32] Melanchthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Article XXI, BC, p. 238.

his willingness still to use them even in his renewed preaching of the gospel.

His knowledge of and willingness to use the martyrological tradition appear again after the death of the third martyr of the Reformation, another Flemish Augustinian named Henry van Zütphen, who was beaten to death by a drunken mob at the instigation of local clerics. Four months after this took place, Luther released a work called "The Burning of Brother Henry,"[33] which included another letter of consolation, a commentary on Psalm 9 "concerning Christ's martyrs," and Henry's life story, again following the classical format for martyr narratives and describing Henry as a true martyr of Christ, weaving together facts gathered in journalistic fashion with theology. It is a shame that martyrology and hagiography disappeared from the Lutheran movement, in an overstated reaction to the abuses of the medieval church, not least of all because the Reformers themselves didn't intend the total abandonment of giving due honour to great Christian witnesses: quite the contrary.[34]

There has been significant change on this front in the past sixty years or so. My guess is that the main cause of the change is the person of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This pastor and theologian, deeply rooted in the theology and piety of Lutheranism at its best, followed the call of discipleship to dangerous extremes, which eventually cost him his life in a Nazi prison, a man so holy that even some Catholics have called for his canonization and have written icons of his image. In Bonhoeffer we Lutherans were faced with the unmistakable figure of a martyr in our midst. He is the most famous of them, but he is certainly not alone: there were countless courageous witnesses against the Nazi regime within the Lutheran family as well as many equally courageous ones from other Christian families. More holy figures have come to our attention since then, from similar martyrs and confessors under communist regimes to missionary evangelists to diaconal servants and activists. Furthermore, our need to find new

[33] Martin Luther, "The Burning of Brother Henry," in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.), 32:261–286.

[34] The details and analysis here are drawn from and indebted to Hans Wiersma, "Sts. Johann, Hendrik, and Henry, the First Martyrs of the Reformation," *Lutheran Forum* 45:3 (2011), 27–31.

and creative ways of being Christian in a much-changed world has finally taught us to look at the lives of those who came before us: a concern very close to Elisabeth Behr-Sigel's heart.

So now there is a small but growing number of books with profiles of martyrs under the Nazi and other regimes[35]; certain of the Scandinavian Lutheran churches have reintroduced a calendar of saints; and commemorations of such persons are increasingly common in the U.S. as well. A recent conference sponsored by the Faith and Order Commission gathered Christians from Catholic, Orthodox, and especially Protestant churches at the Monastery of Bose in Italy to consider the role that commemoration of the saints might play in their worship; Lutherans numbered among the speakers there.[36] I must confess to my own role in this process, which is admittedly pretty presumptuous: in the journal that I edit, *Lutheran Forum*, I have introduced a "hagiography" department, which presents the life and witness of exceptional Lutherans over the past five centuries who have been, in some way, the object of *vox populi* veneration among various groups of Lutherans. At this point in time, Lutherans have no other option for recognizing saints than *vox populi* acclaim. But it is worth noting that Behr-Sigel was quite interested in this practice, which was the way of the early church; her book on Russian holiness discussed "the nature and meaning of the process of canonization in the Orthodox Church, a process based on the spontaneous veneration of the people."[37]

There is another connection here. At the heart of the Lutheran critique of medieval monastic practice was the implicit assumption that consecrated religious life was automatically holier and always

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[35] *Zeugen einer besseren Welt: Christliche Märtyrer des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Karl-Joseph Hummel and Christoph Strohm (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagansталt, 2000). *"Ihr Ende schaut an…" Evangelische Märtyrer des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Harald Schultze and Andreas Kurschat, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 2006). *Zeugen für Christus: Das deutsche Martyrologium des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Helmut Moll, 2 vols., 5th ed. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999).

[36] *A Cloud of Witnesses: Opportunities for Ecumenical Commemoration*, ed. Tamara Grdzelidze and Guido Dotti, Faith and Order Paper No. 209 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2009).

[37] Lossky, *Toward the Endless Day*, 36.

superior to life lived "in the world." Saints were thus disproportionately drawn from the clergy and the religious. Luther's passion was to say that it's precisely in the complicated, messy realms of marriage, commerce, and government that Christians are to strive to be holy, and that they actually *can* be holy in just such settings. This was a recurring theme of Behr-Sigel's work, too – laywoman, wife, and mother as she was. Any conception of sainthood that almost automatically bars persons who have to discipline a willful infant son, or reach out to a moody teenage daughter, or spend a lifetime exploring the tricky terrain of personal intimacy with a spouse, or own a business, or work in the government, needs serious revision. Behr-Sigel's theology challenges the churches accustomed to hagiography and saint veneration to reconsider their notions of holiness – just as her work challenges Protestants who have abandoned the whole matter of hagiography to try again. Through the ecumenical friendships that she pioneered for us, I hope we all have the courage and faith to follow her lead, surrounded as we are by so great a cloud of witnesses.

Chapter Eleven

Juliana Lazarevskaya: A Lay Saint at the Dawn of Modern Times*

ELISABETH BEHR-SIGEL

Among the persons venerated as saints by the people of Muscovite Russia, there are also about ten women, the majority of whom are princesses or religious, sometimes both at the same time. This is the case with the princess Anna Kachinskaya, whose strong personality shows through in the hagiographical narrative of her life. For the majority of these holy women, precise information about them is lacking. We know but little about their spiritual "exploits," and their interior lives remain ignored. The Russian nuns have neither a Catherine of Siena nor a Theresa of Avila, not even their own St Basil to write a panegyric as he did for his sister Macrina. This lacuna could be explained by the generally low level of the literary culture, which affected women rather more than men; to which one might add, like George Fedotov suggested, "the humiliating condition of woman" in old Russia.

One figure nevertheless emerges from this general obscurity: an exceptional person, animated by a heroic charity, Juliana Lazarevskaya incarnated – carried to their highest point – the virtues of thousands of Russian Christian women that history has ignored. Juliana's place in Muscovite hagiography is unique. Neither a princess nor a founder of a convent, she is the only saintly figure who is a married woman and mother of numerous children; she is also the only one of whom the biography, written by her own son, gives a clear and detailed picture, never drowning her in a fog of golden legend. Composed in Old Church Slavonic, two versions of the text – one longer,

* From Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, "Juliana Lazarevskaïa: Une sainte laïque à l'aube des temps modernes," in *Prière et Sainteté dans l'Eglise Russe*, new and augmented ed., Spiritualité Orientale 3 (Paris: Cerf, 1950; reissued by Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1982), 109–113. Translated by Sarah Hinlicky Wilson.

the other abridged – have reached us, notably diverging from the stylistic standard of the traditional "lives of the saints." A monument of filial piety, the work of Druzhina Ossorguine inaugurates the art and the technique of the modern biography.

Born under the reign of Czar Ivan the Terrible, whom her father, who died in 1604, served during the time of Boris Godunov, Juliana belonged to a family of the lesser nobility, those who served the Czar in return for being given land. Her life, like that of many Russian women in that era, was punctuated by ordeals. Having lost her mother at the age of six, she was raised in the family of an aunt, where the precocious piety and ascetic tendencies of the adolescent were the object of scorn if not outright criticism. When she was 16, she was married to George Ossorguine, a well-off nobleman from the region of Murom. She had 13 children, of whom seven died at an early age. Two other sons died violent deaths, one at war, the other in the course of a brawl in which he was killed by one of his serfs. Occupied in the service of the Czar, her husband was almost always absent. Juliana ran the house and the agricultural undertakings, first under the tutelage of her in-laws, to whom she humbly submitted, then alone after their deaths.

The times and the people were hard. Juliana had to deal with disputes that erupted between her children and the domestic help at the same time as famine and epidemics ravaged Russia. While her neighbours, the nobles, stockpiled their harvests to benefit from the increase in prices due to scarcity, the young woman opened her granaries and fed the starving. She would go so far as to sell her own clothes to buy food for the poor. Braving the risk of infection, she cared for the sick and buried the dead herself. On becoming a widow, she distributed among her children the familial domain of Lazarevo and went to live in another village. Then another famine descended upon them. Having given away everything she possessed, Juliana fell into the greatest destitution. She made then the decision to liberate her serfs by giving them the choice to look elsewhere for their subsistence or to remain near her. Those who remained she fed with a bread made from an herb called *lebeda*[1] and the finely ground bark of a tree. Miraculously (and maybe also thanks to her talent) the bread had an excellent flavour.

[1] [Called "garden orache" in English. – SHW]

Having fallen ill in December 1605, Juliana died the following January. She was buried in the church of Saint Lazarus in the village of Lazarevo. Ten days later, when her son Druzhina (author of her biography) died, Juliana already had the odor of sainthood among the people of the countryside of Murom. This spontaneous local veneration would be made official in the 19th century without there having been an actual canonization. An icon that has been called "miraculous" depicts Juliana standing before Christ, who has one hand raised in benediction while the other holds the book of the gospels.[2]

The most important thing is the message that emanates from this life, which the biography very conscientiously (so it seems) endeavours to transmit.

According to her son, a man more cultured than average for his time, Juliana did not receive any formal education, either religious or literary. Like many women in her milieu, she was almost illiterate. During her childhood and adolescence, she was not even regularly brought to church. But, as her biography underlines, "her interior intuition taught her everything without any need of reading books." In reality, in her are found all the traits that characterize the traditional Russian evangelical spirit: humility, gentleness, compassion, and aspirations toward personal asceticism pushed to extreme limits. Toward the end of her life, having given everything away, she was so poor that she could not or dared not attend anymore the distant church some *versts*[3] from her house. To this was added an acute sense – new and exceptional in her milieu – of the dignity of all that is human. Her son notes that she always addressed herself to her servants by the surname followed by the patronym (which is the polite form in Russian, equivalent to Monsieur or Madame in French). Never reprimanding them severely or rudely, she saw in them the ability to make free decisions: for example, of leaving her or remaining with her in the time of famine.

Soviet historians who have paid attention to the *Life* of Juliana believe they can discern there the traits of anti-clericalism and a critical attitude toward monasticism.

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[2] These details are taken from Eugene, Monk of Murom, *On the Subject of the Glorification and the Ecclesiastical Veneration of St. Juliana*, St. Petersburg, 1910, a book cited by T. A. Greenan in a study as yet unpublished.

[3] [Russian unit of measure about equivalent to a kilometre. – SHW].

It is correct that during many periods of her life Juliana seems to have frequented public worship but little: a fact that astonished, indeed scandalized the parish clergy and that Druzhina believed necessary to account for with plausible explanations and supernatural justification. Thus, a priest who had posed questions about Juliana's absence hears a voice while praying before the icon of St Nicholas that commands him to go to her, prostrate himself before her, and ask for pardon. Maybe a subtle critique of a formalistic and ritualistic piety is being expressed in this anecdote? Nevertheless, nothing indicates an opposition in principle toward monasticism. At the point of her death, Juliana expressed her regret at not having been judged worthy to follow the "angelic" path – which is to say monasticism – as she had wished.

Juliana displays very distinctly – and her biography seems to want to underline this fact – the plenitude of the Christian life carried out in the ordinary conditions of a married woman, a mother of many children, in a milieu where violence both individual and social reigned. She was subjected to the weight of the misfortunes and catastrophes that buffeted the entire society. In living according to the gospel in the world, did she not need as much or even more heroism than if she had been able to follow her desire to take refuge in a convent?

Such is the question posed implicitly by Druzhina Ossorguine in reporting a moving scene in the life of his mother. Mad with despair after the violent death of two of her sons, adding to the seven other dead ones, Juliana asked her husband to let her take the monastic habit. At his refusal, she insisted: "If you do not let me go, I will run away from home." But her husband begged her "in the name of God" not to abandon him: he was growing old and the remaining children were still young. To convince her, he read her a passage from the writings of the "holy fathers": "The black habit,[4] he says, does not save us if we do not live according to the monastic rule. And the white habit does not lose us if we do what pleases God." Juliana then replied simply, "God's will be done," and decided to remain with her family.

[4] The black habit of a monk is a counterpoint in the Orthodox Church to the white or coloured garment of secular clergy or laity.

In Juliana Lazarevskaya, as she is presented by the hagiographer, a new synthesis is taking form: that of the ascetic and mystical ideal of Eastern monasticism represented in Russia by Sergius of Radonezh and Nils Sorsky, along with the call to an active, compassionate, and diaconal presence in the world. It is not irrelevant that this synthesis was represented by a woman.

Recent investigations about Juliana Lazarevskaya indicate that she knew and practised hesychastic prayer, the "Jesus prayer." Such was the spiritual eucharist by which the one who distributed her daily bread to the poor nourished herself.[5]

[5] We must thank M. Greenan, senior lecturer of Russian language and literature at the University of Liverpool, author of a doctoral thesis currently underway on Juliana Lazarevskaya, for the valuable hints that he was good enough to communicate to us.