

If you are looking for another commentary on John that will help you to think of a sermon during Eastertide, this may not be the book for you. Undergraduates with an essay to write may also find that there are easier places to look for the details they need. But Christians hoping to deepen, or perhaps to re-ignite, their love of St John's Gospel could not find a better place to start. This is a labour of love, and it truly merits a response of love.

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WISDOM IN CHRISTIAN TRADITION: THE PATRISTIC ROOTS OF MODERN RUSSIAN SOPHIOLOGY by Marcus Plested, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, pp.288, £75.00, hbk*

Wisdom is marked by her general absence from political, economic, and cultural leadership, according to Marcus Plested, but she is enjoying a remarkable revival in theology. Also, one might add, among those across the belief spectrum who are tired of tribalism and religious fundamentalism but are also seeing the inadequacy of secular liberalism and its associate, religious liberalism. Wisdom is a human quality universally admired. Wisdom is sought, received, and lived more than deduced and grasped. As such Wisdom may be seen as a bridge between unknowing and knowing, between spirituality and dogma, between arts and sciences, between thought and life, and, in one rather beautiful Christian conception noted by Plested, Wisdom is 'the "and" in God and the world'.

But that immediately raises the problem of Wisdom within Christian theology. Exactly who or what is Wisdom? God, a created spirit, a virtue, a metaphor...? The Russian Sophiologists – Vladimir Solov'ev, Pavel Florensky, and above all Sergei Bulgakov, retrieved wisdom in order to construct religious philosophies which were intended radically to challenge secular modernity – but immediately posed profound theological problems. The Sophiologists' Sophia was far too redolent of the Sophia of the Gnostics and their endless cosmic layers, who are drawn on quite openly by Solov'ev, it seems, to make sense of his visions (rather like the Lutheran sophiologist Jakob Boehme using Paracelsus). Also, as Aidan Nichols has recognised, German Idealism, especially Friedrich Schelling's heavily Sophianic attempt at a Christian philosophy, was especially influential during Solov'ev's student years in 1860s Moscow. So for the anti-Western Vladimir Lossky, Sophiology is really just a western import, thus foreign to Orthodoxy.

But the main problem, according to Plested, is that Bulgakov (holy man though his sternest critics recognised him to be) gives a shifting and ontologically unclear presentation of Wisdom because he fails to distinguish between four types of Biblical wisdom. Plested helpfully categorises these numerically: S0, 'worldly' wisdom; S1, knowledge based on experience and observation, emerging as a way of speaking of S2, the divine gift of knowledge, and the formation process which gives rise to insight and intuitive understanding; and S3, wisdom as a divine subject or hypostasis. Using this schema, Plested proposes a proper recovery of Sophiology from the patristic tradition, as the latter is understood as the proper context for the reading of Scripture in the Orthodox Church, of which Plested is himself a member. His projects brings admirably clear results, without falling into reductionism.

Plested begins, though, with an overview of Wisdom in Scripture. He notes that the New Testament represents a meeting point between the worlds of the Old Testament and the Greek thought world with which the former was already in contact, though with the emphasis also on the former. His snapshot of pagan Greek Sophiology refreshingly recognises 'theological, even mystical content' in such thinkers as Parmenides. His strong emphasis, though, is on *paideia*, education/formation (S2), which he sees as a Greek theme effectively baptised into much patristic Sophiology.

In his patristic chapters there are the familiar figures of the Greek East: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Maximus the Confessor and of course Gregory Palamas on the Divine Energies. In all of them Christ as Wisdom Incarnate emerges firmly as the mainstream tradition, though Plested is careful to include the minority report of Wisdom as the Holy Spirit (Irenaeus and Theophilus especially). Unlike Bulgakov and Lossky, Plested is receptive towards the Western tradition, recovering much from Augustine and Aquinas. In the latter he demonstrates a unity of rational and mystical theology which otherwise, he notes with regret, have tended to go their separate ways in the West. It is hard to disagree.

More would have been helpful, though, on the early Syrian tradition, in which, as the Greek Catholic scholar István Cselényi notes, the Holy Spirit is sometimes the 'second' in the Trinity and, at least by implication, a figure of Mother Wisdom.

But what emerges from Plested's careful *ressourcement* is that Bulgakov picked up on the main themes (Wisdom as the essence of God, Wisdom as Christ or the Holy Spirit, Wisdom as divine energy) but that his retrieval was partial and thus skewed. In conclusion, Plested sketches a 're-oriented' Sophiology which has *God* as mediator between the divine and the world, and thus dispenses with the need for the mysterious 'in between' figure of 'Sophia'. He sees more work to be done, notably on the feminine aspect of Wisdom, under-represented in Christian tradition, and

on Wisdom and Mary, more represented in the liturgical tradition than in theology.

He admits early on, though, that many of the woes of Sophiology come from attempting to translate visionary experience into dogmatic theology. Those visions of a mysterious feminine figure: and although Plested presents Hildegard of Bingen's visions of Sophia very sympathetically, he admits that her Sophia is 'free floating'. For Stratford Caldecott, the bizarre imagery of Jakob Boehme (Hans Urs von Balthasar gave up on him) is not to be construed as theology, but as an example of 'the active imagination turned wholly towards God'. The Catholic visionary Anne Catherine Emmerich herself admitted that she was not sure whether some of her visions were of the actual lives of Christ and Mary, or only symbolic.

Do we then accord the Sophiology of the visionaries the same status as art – not unimportant, but secondary to the theological tradition – or does 'visionary Sophiology' offer deeper insights *into* the theological tradition? For example, Christ *is* Wisdom, but he came not just to reveal himself but the Father, the Spirit and the mystery of the Trinity. And Margaret Barker's work on Wisdom as the 'Lost Lady' of the Temple, a pneumatological *and* pre-Marian figure, is controversial but massively well sourced. These are deep waters, but working from the solid ground to which Plested has brought Sophiology, we can move forward with more confidence than hitherto.

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CHRISTOPHER DAWSON: A CULTURAL MIND IN THE AGE OF THE GREAT WAR by Joseph T. Stuart, *The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.*, 2022, pp. xv + 454, £ 31.50, pbk

Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) was enormously influential in the decades between the two World Wars and beyond. When T. S. Eliot, during a lecture tour of the United States in the 1930s, was asked whom he considered the most powerful intellectual influence in Europe, he replied 'Christopher Dawson' without hesitation. Strangely, Dawson's reputation was almost completely eclipsed in the years after the Second Vatican Council. Those who knew his work often stated that it was 'dated' and therefore out of tune with the spirit of the Council. Yet, barring the deep dismay expressed by Dawson about the liturgical changes, there is nothing in his work in the least inimical to the Council. Indeed, Pope Paul VI