



Barbara Hallensleben,
Regula M. Zwahlen,
Aristotle Papanikolaou,
Pantelis Kalaitzidis (eds.)

BUILDING THE HOUSE OF WISDOM

Sergii Bulgakov and Contemporary Theology:
New Approaches and Interpretations

 **Aschendorff**
Verlag

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Abstract

Sergii Bulgakov (1871–1944) is one of the preeminent theologians of the 20th century whose work is still being discovered and explored in and for the 21st century. The famous rival of Lenin in the field of economics, was, according to Wassily Kandinsky, “one of the deepest experts on religious life” in early twentieth-century Russian art and culture. As economist, publicist, politician, and later Orthodox theologian and priest, he became a significant “global player” in both the Orthodox diaspora and the Ecumenical movement in the interwar period.

This anthology gathers the papers delivered at the international conference on the occasion of Bulgakov’s 150th birthday at the University of Fribourg in September 2021. The chapters, written by established Bulgakov specialists, including Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury (2002–2012), as well as young researchers from different theological disciplines and ecclesial traditions, explore Bulgakov’s way of meeting the challenges in the modern world and of building bridges between East and West. The authors bring forth a wide range of new creative ways to constructively engage with Bulgakov’s theological worldview and cover topics such as personhood, ecology, political theology and Trinitarian ontology.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Building the House of Wisdom. Editors' Introduction	11
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12520-5	

PERSONHOOD AND ANTHROPOLOGY

Sergii Bulgakov's Christology and Beyond	25
Rowan Williams	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12172-6	

Masks, Chimaeras, and Portmanteaux: Sergii Bulgakov and the Metaphysics of the Person	43
David Bentley Hart	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12173-3	

Bulgakov and Lot-Borodine as Shapers of Deification in the West	63
Mark McInroy	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12174-0	

" <i>Transcende te ipsum</i> ": Faith, Prayer and Name-Worship in Bulgakov's <i>Unfading Light</i>	77
Ivan Ilin	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12175-7	

The Kenotic Iconicity of Sergii Bulgakov's Divine-Humanity: Doctrinal, Anthropological, and Feminist Considerations	91
Sarah Elizabeth Livick-Moses	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12176-4	

Sergii Bulgakov's Fragile Absolute: Kenosis, Difference, and Positive Disassociation	107
Jack Louis Pappas	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12177-1	

The Authenticity of Creativity: The Philosophical and Theological Anthropologies of Nikolai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov	123
Deborah Casewell	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12178-8	
Bulgakov on Mangodhood—or, Satan after Schelling	137
Justin Shaun Coyle	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12179-5	

POLITICS, ECONOMY, AND ECOLOGY

Seven Days of <i>Narod</i> : Sergei Bulgakov’s Christian Socialist Newspaper	153
Catherine Evtuhov and Regula M. Zwahlen	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12180-1	
Is It All the Greeks’ Fault? Reconsidering the Byzantine Legacy in Sergius Bulgakov’s <i>By the Walls of Cherson</i>	177
Nikos Kouremenos	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12181-8	
“The Sophia Dispute” in the Context of Political Ontology	193
Alexei P. Kozyrev	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12182-5	
Sophiology and Personalism, Foundations of the New Political Science in the Twenty-First Century	209
Antoine Arjakovsky	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12183-2	
Sergii Bulgakov’s Chalcedonian Politics of Personhood	221
Nathaniel Wood	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12184-9	
The World as the Household of Wisdom: Political Theology and Philosophy of Economy	235
Dionysios Skliris	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12185-6	

Rethinking the Language of Economics as a Systematic Christian Response to Economic and Ecological Crises in the Thought of Sergii Bulgakov	247
Tikhon Vasilyev	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12186-3	
Bulgakov's Ecology	259
Austin Foley Holmes	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12187-0	

SOPHIOLOGY

The Reception of Palamite Theology in the Sophiology of Sergii Bulgakov	275
Liubov A. Petrova	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12188-7	
An Unfinished Dispute. How is it Possible to Criticize Bulgakov's Sophiology at the Present Time?	289
Natalia Vaganova	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12189-4	
Sophiology, Ascesis and Prophecy	301
Joshua Heath	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12190-0	
Mariology as Personalized Sophiology. Sergii Bulgakov's Chalcedonian Theology	317
Dario Colombo	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12191-7	
The Training for Dying and Death: A New Reading of Bulgakov's Sophiology	331
Paul L. Gavrilyuk	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12192-4	

 CREATION AND ONTOLOGY

Sergii Bulgakov's Early Marxism: A Narrative of Development	351
Caleb Henry	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12193-1	
<i>Creatio ex sapientia</i> in Bulgakov's <i>Unfading Light</i> :	
The Influence of F. W. J. Schelling	365
Taylor Ross	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12194-8	
Sergii Bulgakov's Chalcedonian Ontology and the Problem of	
Human Freedom	381
Brandon Gallaher	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12195-5	
Sergii Bulgakov: Between Kenotic Theology of the Event and	
Trinitarian Ontology	409
Antonio Bergamo	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12196-2	
From Social Trinity to "Linguistic Trinity": Sergii Bulgakov's	
Contribution to Analytic Theology	419
Nikolaos Asproulis	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12197-9	
Sergii Bulgakov: From Grammar to Wisdom	435
John Milbank	
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12198-6	

ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVES

Father Sergii Bulgakov’s “Karamazov’s excursus” 463
Pavel Khondzinsky
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12199-3

Ships in the Theological Night? Sergius Bulgakov and
Liberation Theology 475
Graham McGeoch
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12200-6

“Your Labor Is Not in Vain.” Sergii Bulgakov’s Sophiology as
a Key to a (Protestant) Theology of the Kingdom of God 489
Oliver Dürr
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12201-3

Sergius Bulgakov and Modern Theology 501
Paul Ladouceur
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12202-0

The Vision of Unity. The Ecumenical Thought of
Fr. Sergii Bulgakov 521
Adalberto Mainardi
DOI 10.17438/978-3-402-12203-7

List of Contributors 535

“The Sophia Dispute” in the Context of Political Ontology

Alexei P. Kozyrev

The political context of the sophiological argument is both very simple and very confusing. We propose analysing it using the concept of “political ontology” which was employed by Pierre Bourdieu to analyze Heidegger’s thought.¹ Thought always takes place in time, is immersed in processes which have temporal reality, even when aligned with eternal entities such as God, Sophia and being. Theological disputes—no less than philosophical and political disputes—are a product of the *Zeitgeist* (“spirit of the age”). To a significant degree, Archpriest Sergius Bulgakov recommends himself as a “hero of the age” in which he lived; the *Zeitgeist* necessarily gives birth to heroes, in whom the spirit of the age is most successfully embodied. Oswald Spengler characterizes the interwar “Zeitgeist” in this way, which is distinguished by an emphasized desire to create complex intellectual theories:

Strong and creative talents [...] are turning away from practical problems and sciences and towards pure speculation. Occultism and Spiritualism, Hindu philosophies, metaphysical inquisitiveness under Christian or pagan colouring, all of which were despised in the Darwinian period, are coming up again. It is the spirit of Rome in the Age of Augustus. Out of satiety of life, men take refuge from civilization [...].²

Was Bulgakov’s embrace of the priesthood and return to the church a flight from history? After all, Bulgakov had formerly been a political economist and member of the 2nd State Duma. It is unlikely that we will be able to fully de-

1 Pierre Bourdieu, *L’ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Minuit, 1988).

2 Oswald Spengler, *Man and Technics. A Contribution to a Philosophy of Life* (1932), trans. Charles F. Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), 97.

cipher Bulgakov's personality here, though we can say that it generated a very unique and remarkable life trajectory and made it possible for him to refrain from betraying himself, whilst retaining a certain integrity and a rare personal dignity, not to mention the breadth of his intellectual, and then spiritual quests. Mikhail M. Prishvin sees in Bulgakov "a sort of 'ideologue of the gaps' who learned theory in the library from Marxism to idealism, from idealism to realism, and from realism to theurgy."³

Bulgakov's Changing Ideas on Power

In his autobiographical text on "My Godlessness" Bulgakov speaks of "the idea of sacred power, which has acquired [...] the character of a political apocalypse, the ultimate metahistorical manifestation of the Kingdom of Christ on earth."⁴ "Freedom-loving" and "royal-loving" ideas grow together in his mind to form a complicated antinomic complex. Recalling the meeting with the tsar in Yalta in 1914, he writes:

I then fell in love with the image of the Sovereign and since then I have carried it in my heart, but it was—Alas!—a tragic love: the 'white king' was in the blackest environment, through which he could not break through until the very end of his reign.⁵

In exile, Bulgakov will be tormented by the thought of who should erect a cross on the Hagia Sophia. It seems to him that the gates of Constantinople will open to the "White Tsar,"⁶ and not to the "political conqueror and all-Slavic Tsar," and that the cross should be erected "not by Rasputin's protégé, but by the Ecumenical patriarch, the Pope,"⁷ and, after Bulgakov's estrangement from Catholicism, by "the universal hierarch in his consciousness."⁸

3 Mikhail M. Prishvin, *Dnevnik. 1926–1927* (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 2003), 257 (on April 20, 1927).

4 Sergii Bulgakov, "Moe bezbozhie," in *ibid.*, *Avtobiograficheskie zametki: Posmertnoe izdanie* (Paris: Put', 1946), 25–33: 28–29.

5 *Ibid.*, 29.

6 According to Russian folk legends, the White Tsar outshines all tsars not with regard to power or wealth, but to true faith and justice. Aleksandr L. Dobrokhoto, "Belyi Car' ili metafizika vlasti v russkoi mysli," in *Izbrannoe*, ed. Aleksandr L. Dobrokhoto (Moscow: 2008), 126.

7 Sergii Bulgakov, "Iz 'Dnevnik,'" *Vestnik RKhD* 129 (1979) 237–68; 130 (1979) 256–74, reprint in: *Tikhie dumy* (Moscow: Respublica, 1996), 351–88: 360.

8 Sergii Bulgakov, "V Aia-Sofii: Iz zapisnoi knizhki," *Russkai mys'* 6/8 (1923), 229–37: 233, reprint in *Avtobiograficheskie zametki: Posmertnoe izdanie* (Paris: Put', 1946), 94–102: 99.

Bulgakov's political orientation in exile can hardly be called monarchist. In a 1927 course on "Christian Sociology," he says:

The church should not impose certain tasks on the people or the state. The political form of government cannot be the subject of church teaching. It is necessary to separate what is God's and what is Caesar's [...]. The monarchist state has the advantage from the Christian point of view that it is single-handed, like a spiritual principle in general. But one should not lay the unbearable burden on one person.⁹

Belief in the church people, ruled by the Providence of God—this is how Bulgakov's political creed could be described. It is no coincidence that after February 1917, Bulgakov was obsessed with thoughts of reforming the church parish, which could become the basis of church democracy. Distrust of the monarchy is caused by anthropological pessimism:

Each person, to the extent of his weakness, can bear only a small share of responsibility, and he must bear responsibility with the help of others. Power is a common task of the Christian people, everybody is responsible. It is not right to overestimate the charismatic character of royal power.¹⁰

Fundamentally different in respect to monarchy was the position of the representatives of the Sremski Karlovtsi jurisdiction, whose separation from the "Eulogians,"¹¹ to whom Bulgakov belonged, was due not so much to their attitude to monarchy as to the essential form of Orthodox authority. Archbishop Serafim (Sobolev), who condemned Bulgakov in his book entitled *The New Doctrine of Sophia* (1936), believed that

the 'holy of holies' of the Russian people has nothing in common with constitutional and/or republican forms of government, in which the human personality cannot find the support it requires for the achievement of its highest religious and moral demands.¹²

9 S. N. Bulgakov, "Khristianskaia sotsiologiia," in id. *Trudy po sotsiologii i teologii*, t. 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 1999), 542.

10 Ibid.

11 Metropolitan Evlogii (Georgievskii) (1868–1946), from 1931 on head of the Patriarchal Exarchate for Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe.

12 Seraphim (Sobolev), *Russkaia ideologiia* (first ed.—1939) (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo imeni A. S. Suvorina, 1992), 66.

The bishop's conviction with regard to monarchy as *the* Russian form of government was intertwined with his cherished dream of the ratification of a law introducing the death penalty for atheistic propaganda and blasphemy.

Defending the Freedom of the Church in Paris

We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that Bulgakov was an active participant in the Ecumenical movement and political issues were high on the agenda at Ecumenical meetings and conventions. In June 1937, both he and Georgii P. Fedotov, another professor at the St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, attended the Second World Christian Congress on *Life and Work* in Oxford; the same year, the English translation of Bulgakov's *The Wisdom of God* was published. Fedotov published a report on the work of the Congress in *Sovremennye zapiski* (Notes of the Fatherland): Fascism had already taken root at the centre of Europe and was leading the European ship headlong toward a wreck. The hope remained that Christians of different confessions, by rallying together, would be able to stop the catastrophe from coming to fruition. Stating that there was not a single absolute monarchy left in the world, that capitalism was a chaotic wreck, that democracy was facing a formidable crisis, and that socialism—which had “won in one country”—had nevertheless revealed deep contradictions at its core, Fedotov concludes:

the secular, totalitarian state is a completely new fact within world history, [and] theological theories created by the ‘German Christians’ in some respects suspiciously resemble Russian Slavophilism and Messianism. Not surprisingly, Oxford's response to these theories in places resembles Vladimir Soloviev.¹³

For this reason, in Fedotov's view, it was improper for the Church to remain in its atmosphere of rarefied prayerful spirituality: “Never before in her heroic past has the Church been so bound up with dominant groups and forms of social life as in this age of spiritual individualism.”¹⁴

However, during the 1939 controversy surrounding Fedotov's journalistic activities in support of the Spanish Republicans, the professor's employer, the St. Sergius Institute (Paris), openly declared its *apolitical* stance. Fedotov had been accused of pro-Soviet agitation by the right-wing daily newspaper *Voz-*

13 Georgii P. Fedotov, “Posle Oksforda,” in *ibid.*, *Sobranie sochinenii v 12 t.*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Sam, 2014), 156, 159.

14 *Ibid.*, 151.

rozhdenie (Renaissance),¹⁵ and Vasilii V. Zen'kovskii and Georgii V. Florovskii wrote to him:

If we all, as members of the Institute, defend freedom for ourselves in church and public work, then it is precisely in the sphere of politics that we believe that it is very difficult for active and especially 'fighting' political work to be compatible with the responsible service of the Church through participation in the Theological Institute. This is especially harmful for the Russian emigration, in which the task of the Church is to free the consciousness of the Russian people clouded by passions from everything that spiritually lowers and weakens them in the political struggle.¹⁶

Metropolitan Evlogii called a meeting of the board of directors: it demanded "that Fedotov sign a written promise not to publish any more political articles," and, in a private letter by Evlogii, "socialist declarations."¹⁷ Bulgakov did not object to the board's decision. In February 1939, he turned to Fedotov with an appeal to stop newspaper journalism for the benefit of the Institute. After surgery for throat cancer, six months later, he asked Fedotov for a "mutual amnesty."¹⁸ Although disappointed that Bulgakov "did not dare to open his mouth" in his defense, Fedotov still considered him "a like-minded friend."¹⁹

A few years earlier, responding directly to the condemnation of Bulgakov's teaching, Fedotov wrote that Bulgakov's "sophianic cosmology" was an example of "a clogged Orthodox inspiration in the Russian church."²⁰ In his book *Spiritual Verses* of 1935, Fedotov positively evaluated sophiology: "In modern theological sophiology the prophetic premonitions and millennial dreams of

15 Antoine Arjakovsky, *The Way. Religious Thinkers of the Russian Emigration in Paris and their Journal* (Notre Dame 2013), 409. For more on the affair see pp. 405–15.

16 D. Bon, "K 110-letiiu Georgiia Fedotova. Dokumenty i pis'ma po povodu raznoglasiia, voznikshego mezhdu profesorom G.P. Fedotovym i Pravleniem Pravoslavnogo bogoslovskogo instituta v Parizhe," *Zvezda* 10 (1996), 135.

17 Arjakovsky, *The Way*, 409.

18 Bon, "K 110-letiiu Georgiia Fedotova," 151.

19 Anton A. Voytenko, "'Napisahu, chto ia otnyne ne uvazhaiu svoikh kolleg.' Deistvuiushchie litsa konflikta G. P. Fedotova s pravleniem bogoslovskogo instituta v Parizhe (1939)," *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Seriya 4* 22, 4 (2017), 56–65: 61, 63 (in Russian). Voytenko concludes that Bulgakov "probably remained neutral."

20 Georgii P. Fedotov, "K sovremennym bogoslovskim sporam" in *Vestnik RSKhD*. Dec. 1935 – Feb. 1936, 19–24: 24.

a slumbering people's soul await expression."²¹ In his personal diary of the war years, in an entry dated February 14, 1941, Fedotov returned to events six years earlier ("Six years have passed, and the world is still the same") and asserted the "collapse of humanism" in the world and the breakdown of his own ideas about God and traditional church Christianity. In this context, Fedotov once again returned to an assessment of Bulgakov:

When one is aware of the power and gravity of tradition, one begins to respect Fr. Sergius more. Confront it with your own thought, your own position! And at the same time be aware that you are not destroying tradition, but developing it. Yes, you have to be strong for that. And what did he pay for his impudence? With shaggy hair and an ugliness of speech [because of the throat cancer surgery—A. K.]. A truly cheap price for great inner freedom.²²

The Political Aspects of the Condemnation of Sophiology

The political aspect of the Moscow Patriarchate's condemnation of sophiology via Deputy Patriarchal Locum Tenens, Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodskii) (1867–1944) is a topic in its own. Metropolitan Sergii was Chairman of the Religious-Philosophical Assemblies in St. Petersburg (1901–1903), and well acquainted with the Russian philosophical and literary milieu. In 1904 he blessed Fr. Gapon's labor movement, and in 1905, as bishop of Finland, he welcomed the Tsarist manifesto of October 17, which legalized freedom of conscience in the Russian Empire. As an author of the 1927 Declaration who had publicly declared the church's loyalty to Soviet power, he gave an interview to foreign correspondents in 1930, in which he stated that in the USSR believers were not persecuted for their religious beliefs and that any persecution of priests was a result of their illegal activities. Two decrees about Bulgakov's doctrine of Sophia, dating from September 7 (No. 1651) and December 27, 1935 (No.

21 Georgii P. Fedotov, *Stikhi dukhovnye. Russkaia narodnaia vera po dukhovnym stikham* (Moscow: Gnozis, 1991), 123. However, Georges Florovsky, a staunch opponent of sophiology and appointed to the commission "on Bulgakov's case" by Metropolitan Evlogii, claimed many years later in a letter of 1966 to his brother that among Bulgakov's "friends" "others had a very negative attitude toward sophianism, such as the deceased G. P. Fedotov and especially Kartashev, who considered sophianism to be mere nonsense and fantasy." Prot. Georgii Florovskii, *Pis'ma k bratu Antoniiu* (Moscow: PSTGU, 2021), 182.

22 A. V. Antoshchenko "Neopublikovannyye stranitsy dnevnika G. P. Fedotova," *Vestnik Omskogo universiteta. Seriya "Istoricheskiye nauki,"* 283–89: 286.

2267) and addressed to Metropolitan Eleutherius of the Moscow Patriarchate in Western Europe, are sometimes seen as part of the metropolitan's conciliatory, pro-Soviet activity; at the end of his life, Metropolitan Sergii received his patriarchal ministry directly from Stalin's hand. This is how the first decree was perceived in the milieu of the Russian exile which was close to Father Sergii. A parishioner of the Moscow church, Maria Kallash, who wrote under the pseudonym "M. Kurdyumov," wrote to Father Sergius: "It has come to the point where the decree is attributed to the GPU, and the consideration of your theological works is given over to the KGB, headed by Yagoda."²³

However, the decrees were not the expression of the sole opinion of Metropolitan Sergius; they were based on definitions signed by eleven bishops, and were a conciliar judgment of a small ("incomplete") council of "arrived bishops." On June 22, 1934, Metropolitan Sergius and the Synod, which had not yet been dissolved, fulfilled the demand of the Soviet government and declared the Karlovites schismatics, with the ensuing ban on serving all those who found themselves in a different jurisdiction. Since the final division between the "Karlovites" and the "Eulogians" had not yet taken place, this prohibition can be considered extended to Parisian parishes as well. The first condemnation of Bulgakov's sophiology occurred in 1927 in the Epistle of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. About the upcoming new, now conciliar, definition of the Karlovites of October 17/30, 1935, Metropolitan Sergius and his staff in Paris most likely knew. It can be assumed that the Decree of September 7 should have pre-empted it.

A special role in the preparation of these decrees was played by the Brotherhood of St. Photius, which was created in Paris around 1924 and had as its goal spreading Orthodoxy in France. Its members hoped that France would become the center of the rebirth of the Christian spirit in the West. Characteristically, they chose Photius I, the ninth-century Byzantine patriarch, as their patron, under whom the split between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the See of Rome in 863–867 had occurred. The first head of the Brotherhood (1925–1931) was Alexei V. Stavrovskii (1905–1972), who was educated at the philosophical and theological faculties in Sofia and Berlin, at the philological faculty at the Sorbonne and at the Sergius Theological Institute. As Lidiia Berdyaeva testifies in her diary entry of October 26, 1935, "it was certainly not for him, of course, to denounce the heresies of Father Bulgakov, from whom, by

23 Aleksei P. Kozyrev, Aleksei E. Klimov (eds.), "Materialy k 'Sporu o Sofii,'" *Transactions of the Association of Russian-American Scholars in the USA* 39 (2014–2016), 27.

the way, he failed his exam as a student of the Theological Institute.”²⁴ Vl. Lossky became his deputy in the Brotherhood of St. Photius. The decree was issued on the basis of a “Report” sent from Lithuania by Stavrovskii which contained a critical analysis of Bulgakov’s book *The Lamb of God* (1933), which the metropolitan had not seen by the time the decree was issued. Hence, the “Report” was initiated not by Metropolitan Eleutherius, but by the “Photievites.” Maria Kallash wrote to Bulgakov:

Metr<opolitan> Eleutherius not so much ordered as agreed to Stavrovskii’s proposal to send extracts from your work to Moscow. The simplest thing would be to send your book ‘The Lamb of God’ to Metropolitan Sergius, who did not know that sending was possible. It is obvious to me that Stavrovskii did not limit himself to rigged excerpts, but composed his own ‘review’ and not only of your teaching, but likely of the ‘fact’ that the teaching is persistently preached by you everywhere, that all Orthodox abroad and even part of the heterodox, attracted to Orthodoxy, ‘are infected with Sophianism.’²⁵

Stavrovskii had been forced to leave Paris for Kovno (Kaunas) after embezzling money, Metropolitan Eleutherius took him in as a church reader, and Kallash wrote that he was “not loved by the clergy in Kovno,” mentioning his “self-righteous criticism of everyone and everything” and a “spirit of gendarmerie in the Church of Christ.” Vladimir Lossky, who needed to explain himself to Bulgakov in writing after the scandal broke out, also bore witness to Stavrovskii’s authorship:

We took the task of systematically criticizing your teachings upon ourselves, though this could never have been accomplished in full in less than several months, after which we had intended to deliver our main theses. The decree of Metropolitan Sergius, however, appeared before we could finish our work. It was based on extensive quotations from ‘The Lamb of God’, which were collected under the direction of Metropolitan Eleutherius by A. Stavrovskii. To see here any ill will on the part of Stavrovskii would be unwarranted: he was acting, in this case, as Vladyka’s secretary.²⁶

24 Lidia Berdiaeva, *Professia: zhena filosofa* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 2002), 119.

25 Kozyrev, Klimov (eds.), “Materialy k ‘Sporu o Sofii,’” 28.

26 *Ibid.*, 35.

The figure of Lossky is assessed by Maria Kallash in equally vivid terms: “a man deeply honest, undoubtedly scholarly, but of that absolutely conservative disposition which is defined not only politically, but also by a kind of religious ‘fascism,’ prone to exaggerate church discipline even to the extreme.”²⁷ His letter to Bulgakov, the pamphlet entitled *Dispute on Sophia and Explanations by the Brotherhood*, Lossky signed with the initials B. F., which were short for “Brotherhood of Photius,” thus imitating the cryptonyms common in Catholic orders. The Brotherhood existed until the early 1950s.

Let us recall Bulgakov’s criticism of “spiritual pedocracy”—the intellectual cult of student youth in *Vekhi* (Landmarks) from 1909²⁸—or the words of Nikolai A. Berdiaev that “fascism is the dictatorship of the youth.” Nikolai M. Zernov characterizes Alexei Stavrovskii as “a man of imperious and fighting temperament.”²⁹ Being in Lithuania, he survived the occupation there, served as Chargé d’Affaires for the Russian population of the Lithuanian General District, collaborated with the Nazi administration, fled to Italy after the liberation of Lithuania, and took refuge in Rome, in a Catholic monastery with Father Philippe de Régis, the founder of the *Collegium Russicum* in Rome. Many Russian refugees were hiding there; for converting to Catholicism, they received a sum of USD 220, sufficient to obtain a visa to the American continent. In 1948, among the thousands of Russian refugees boarded by Fr. Philippe, Stavrovskii emigrated to Argentina. In Buenos Aires he joined the *Committee of the Russian Colony*, published brochures and collaborated on the newspaper for Russian emigrants *Za Pravdu!* (For the Truth), published by Fr. Philippe.³⁰ Articles written by him in support of the papal dogma of infallibility³¹ testify to Stavrovskii’s Catholic denomination after his emigration to Argentina. V. Lossky, on the contrary, played an active part in the Resistance Movement, remaining in France during the occupation.

Metropolitan Sergius had confidence in the Brotherhood of Photius. In his correspondence with the Serbian Patriarch Barnabas, he calls the Russian

27 Kozyrev, Klimov (eds.), “Materialy k ‘Sporu o Sofii,’” 29.

28 See Sergei Bulgakov, “Heroism and Asceticism. Reflections on the religious nature of the Russian intelligentsia,” in *Vekhi: Landmarks: a collection of articles about the Russian intelligentsia*, ed. Marshall S. Shatz, Judith E. Zimmermann (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 17–49: 31.

29 N. M. and M. V. Zernov (eds.), *Za rubezhom: Belgrad-Parizh-Oksford (Khronika sem'i Zernovykh: 1921–1972)* (Paris: YMCX-Press, 1973), 161–62.

30 See: M. A. Kublitskaia, “Russkaia periodicheskaia pechat' v Argentine v XX veke,” <http://emigrantika.imli.ru/publications/840-kublickaja> (access 2024/01/26).

31 See in *Simvol* 14 (1985).

emigration not political, but spiritual; for him, the revolution was a spiritual cataclysm and communism a secular religion:

He writes that the God-ordained task of the emigration is to reveal to Western Christianity all the richness of the Orthodox faith, and reproaches the emigration for instead being carried away with senseless discord and endless condemnation and harassment both in print and from the pulpit.³²

A book entitled *Patriarkh Sergii i ego dukhovnoe nasledstvo* (Patriarch Sergii and his Spiritual Legacy), published by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1947 (M. Kallash-Kurdyumov was actively involved in its preparation), includes three letters from Metropolitan Sergius to V.N. Lossky without any indication of the addressee. One of them is entirely about Bulgakov, but from the perspective of the political context, the letter in which the metropolitan shares with Lossky his views on the nature of the Orthodox mission in Europe is more interesting. In a letter dated October 23, 1935, Metropolitan Sergius thanks Lossky: “for sending your pamphlet” (*Spor o Sofii* [The Dispute about Sophia]). The Metropolitan writes in this same letter: “You may safely say that I do not judge this book by its excerpts: I have received it and read attentively.”³³ This coincides with M. Kallash’s report to Bulgakov that she sent *The Lamb of God* to the metropolitan around the middle of October. “The brethren themselves simply didn’t think of doing so.” The copy was received fairly quickly.

Hence, it can be assumed that the appearance of the decrees was caused not by pressure from the Soviet authorities, but by a bet placed on young zealots of the faith who came up with the ambitious program of an Orthodox mission among the heterodox. Bulgakov had the experience of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia who had come to Orthodoxy, and the members of the St. Photius Brotherhood were prepared for liturgical and linguistic innovations to expand the Orthodox mission to the territory of the Latin West. T. Manukhina writes to V. Bunina:

The Photius boys are young, arrogant people, they believe in their youth that having read the fathers of the Church, one can judge everything, supported by their

32 Dmitrii Pospelovskii, *Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov' v XX veke* (Moscow: Respublika, 1995), 181.

33 *Patriarkh Sergii i ego dukhovnoe nasledstvo* (Moscow: Moscow Patriarchate, 1947), 75.

authority. But here there is a completely different layout, and therefore other ways of knowing the truth.³⁴

Moreover, the style and behavior of the "Photius boys," make it difficult to take the side of the accusers: Mother Maria (Skobtsova) would return Vl. Lossky's book to its author with the words: "I don't read books written by denunciators," even though, in fact, many of their arguments may have been valid.

Political Implications of Sophiology?

The philosopher Vladimir Bibikhin (1938–2004) linked the failure of the dispute over Sophia to the absence of an imperial authority which could have legitimized its results, and sees in the whole situation a parallel with the fourteenth-century Palamite disputes: i. e., Bulgakov lacked his Kantakouzenos: John VI Kantakouzenos was a Byzantine emperor who patronized Gregory Palamas at the Council of Constantinople in 1351, which approved a cathedral tomos in favor of the Orthodoxy of Palamism and had Palamas occupy the episcopal chair in Thessaloniki, the city controlled by his political rival, John V Palaiologos. Bibikhin unequivocally sees sophiology as a development of the Palamite problematic:

The sophiology of Rev. Sergius Bulgakov, which continues the Palamite dogma, was condemned by the Metropolis of Moscow to a large extent or perhaps solely out of its desire to be politically correct. Because of the Orthodox Church's attachment to power, the dogma of essence and energies extended only into the regions subject to John Kantakouzenos. Similarly, the condemnation of Bulgakov's sophiology did not extend to territories in which autocephaly already actually existed.³⁵

In the Byzantine model of royal power, one of its most important functions is the "dogmatic alliance" (Fr. A. Schmemmann) with spiritual authority, which makes it possible for the church to be protected from heresies. The decrees of the Moscow Patriarchate did not directly accuse Bulgakov of heresy, and the Decision of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

34 *Vestnik RSKhD* 175 (1997), 173.

35 Vladimir V. Bibikhin, "Sofiologija o. Sergiia Bulgakova," *S. N. Bulgakov: religiozno-filozofskii put'*, ed. Alexei P. Kozyrev (Moscow: Russkii Put', 2003), 85.

of October 17/30, 1935 decided “to recognize the teaching of Archpriest Sergei Bulgakov on the Sophia of the Wisdom of God as heretical.”³⁶

In the diary of Archim. Cyprian Kern, we find extracts from the report of Archim. Cassian (Bezobrazov) to the Archbishop’s Council, which quotes the opinion of Anton V. Kartashev, one of the members of the commission appointed by Metropolitan Eulogius to examine the justice of charges of heresy against Bulgakov:

Calling the works of Fr. Sergii [...] “ultra-academic volumes inaccessible to anyone due to their academic complexity,” and recognizing that *heresy* is a *tragic* illness and real delirium of *the entire Church*, rather than a typographical fact somewhere in the academic wilds, Anton V. Kartashev has expressed his conviction that all this “business has been contrived by scribes and Pharisaical hypocrites” not out of pure striving for the glory of God, but inspired by the tactical malice and petty vindictive passions of petty demagogues, who make use of the morbid irritability of the unfortunate masses of immigrants.³⁷

An authoritative historian of the church under Metropolitan Eulogius, Kartashev contrasts the theological judgment of the Archbishop’s Council of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad with a sociological judgment: the modern world is far from Christianity, hence heresies cannot be of concern to the broad masses of people:

With the deadening of sobornost in the Church, it is now possible only to stylize our academic arguments, which are alien to the people of the Church, under the concept of ‘heresy.’ There are no living heresies. And it is fruitless and pastorally unpedagogical to stir up people artificially with them.³⁸

Does sophiology have any political implications for today? Can sophiology correlate with any political regime? One often encounters references to the philosophy of all-unity as almost a prolegomenon to Stalinist totalitarianism, the Gulag, or at least to authoritarian economic systems built on a model of communality and economic coercion. The Russian ethnographer Oleg Kirichenko sees in Russian philosophy an intellectual parallel to Russian sectarianism and a source that feeds Bolshevism: “The Bolshevik Leninists were clearly carried

36 N. T. Eneeva, *Spor o sofologii v russkom zarubezh'e* (Moscow: IVI RAN, 2001), 111.

37 Diary of Archim. Cyprian Kern, in Archive of St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris.

38 Ibid.

away to a certain extent by the sectarian ideas not only of Lev N. Tolstoy, as Lenin wrote about, but also by the sophiology of Vl. Soloviev, and the 'common deed' philosophy of Nikolai F. Fedorov."³⁹ Sophia was personified in the leader, "the leader became the source of tradition, its energy and a special person, pouring this light on his subordinates [...] In short, he was the real 'Sophianic being,' dreamed of by Vl. Soloviev, A. Blok, S. Bulgakov and Fr. Pavel Florenskii, who died in Lenin's camps."⁴⁰ Vasilii Shchipkov sees in sophiology a discourse of modernity by which "Radical Orthodoxy" (Milbank) seeks to re-Christianize the Western world. Speaking of sophiologists, the author writes:

Their goal was to combine two discourses, Orthodox theology and secular philosophy/science, *to theologially fill and enlighten materialism, positivism and secular science in general* without abandoning its achievements, to reopen Christianity to secularized society, to explain the idea of being as a whole and to connect it with the Church and God in rational philosophical language.⁴¹

However, let us return to the context in which Bulgakov's sophiology was developed—the time between the two world wars. Martin Heidegger, in a speech delivered on June 27, 1945 to a small circle of listeners in the hunting lodge of Wildenstein Castle in Hausen, refers to the sophiological problems of Russian philosophy:

The Spirit is the active force of enlightenment and of wisdom—σοφία (sophia) in Greek. This substantial essence of the spirit was thought through in the theological-philosophical speculation of the Christian Church about the [dogma] of the trinity of God; for the Western Roman Church, the work of Augustine *De Trinitate* became fundamental; in the Eastern Church another development took place; thus in Russianness (Russentum), the doctrine of Sacred Sophia became widespread. Even today it still lives in Russian mysticism, taking on forms that we can hardly even imagine. The action of the spirit as an all-pervading force of enlightenment and wisdom (Sophia) is "magical." The essence of the magical is as obscure as the essence of the pneumatic. But we know that the theosophist and philosopher Jakob Boehme—the Goerlitz shoemaker, the quietest of all shoemakers, as he was called—recognized the magical in the light of his shoemaker's lamp and conceived

39 O. V. Kirichenko, *Obshchie problemy etnografii russkogo Naroda. Traditsiia. Etnos. Religiiia* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2020), 372–73.

40 Ibid., 393.

41 Ibid., 177.

it as primordial will. Boehme's doctrine of the divine Sophia (Theosophy) became known in Russia as early as the seventeenth century; the Russians then spoke of the holy father of the Church, Jacob Boehme; the renewal of this influence by Jacob Boehme took place in Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century, coinciding [then] with the powerful influence of Hegel and Schelling (Vladimir Soloviev). Therefore, it will not be an exaggeration if I say: what today is short-sighted and insufficiently thought out is considered only to be something 'political,' crudely political even and is called Russian communism, came from a spiritual world about which we know almost nothing, quite apart from the fact that we forget to think in what sense even crude materialism, the façade of communism, is not something material, but spiritual: we do not think that it is some kind of spiritual world, and experiencing it and determining its truth or untruth is possible only in the spirit and proceeding from the spirit.⁴²

At the end of this text, Heidegger says that the outcome of wars is based on spiritual decisions and strengthens them. Understanding what lies in the spiritual

42 "Das bedeutet: der Geist ist die wirkende Kraft der Erleuchtung und der Weisheit, griechisch der σοφία. Dieses substanzielle Wesen des Geistes wurde in der theologisch-philosophischen Spekulation der christlichen Kirche über die Dreieinigkeit Gottes durchdacht; maßgebend für die westlich römische Kirche wurde das Werk Augustinus' de trinitate; in der Ostkirche vollzog sich eine andere Entwicklung; zumal im Russentum entfaltete sich die Lehre von der heiligen Sophia. Sie ist noch heute in der russischen Mystik in einer Weise lebendig, die wir uns kaum vorstellen können. Das Wirken des Geistes als der alles durchwirkenden Kraft der Erleuchtung und der Weisheit (Sophia) ist ‚magisch‘. Das Wesen des Magischen ist so dunkel wie das Wesen des Pneumatischen. Aber wir wissen, daß der Theosoph und Philosoph Jacob Böhme—der Görlitzer Schuster, der stillste aller Schuster, wie man ihn genannt hat,—am Licht der Schusterkugel das Magische erkannte und es als den Urwillen dachte. Böhmes Lehre von der göttlichen Sophia (Theosophia) wurde bereits im 17. Jahrhundert in Rußland bekannt; die Russen sprachen damals vom heiligen Kirchenvater Jacob Böhme; eine Erneuerung dieses Einflusses von Jacob Böhme vollzog sich in Rußland zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts, gleichzeitig mit dem starken Wirken von Hegel und Schelling (Wladimir Solowjoff). Es ist daher weit entfernt von einer Übertreibung, wenn ich sage, daß das, was man heute kurzsichtig und halbgedacht nur ‚politisch‘ und gar grob-politisch nimmt und russischen Kommunismus nennt, aus einer geistigen Welt kommt, von der wir kaum etwas wissen, ganz abgesehen davon, daß wir schon vergessen, dies zu denken, wie selbst noch der grobe Materialismus, die Vorderfläche des Kommunismus, selbst nichts Materielles, sondern etwas Spirituelles ist und eine geistige Welt, die nur im Geist und aus dem Geist erfahren und zum Austrag seiner Wahrheit und Unwahrheit gebracht werden kann." Martin Heidegger, "Die Armut," ed. Friedrich Wilhelm von Hermann, *Heidegger Studies* 10 (1994), 5–11.

essence of the people is required in order to enter into a dialogue. Heidegger’s awareness cannot be underestimated: indeed, as early as the seventeenth century, the poet and mystic Pietist Quirinus Kuhlmann came to Russia to preach the teachings of Jacob Böhme to his countrymen in the German Sloboda in Moscow. He was denounced and burned in Red Square in 1689. However, Heidegger’s observation that the doctrine of Sophia “even today still lives in Russian mysticism” was made about a year after the death of Father Sergius. The German philosopher’s attempt to connect the presence of this doctrine among Russian philosophers and theologians with actual history and political implications suggests that it is legitimate to present Russian sophiology not as an abstract metaphysical doctrine, but as a doctrine that responds to the sharp challenges of its time and thereby has its own political ontology.

Translation by Anna Makarova.