



Barbara Hallensleben,  
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# BUILDING THE HOUSE OF WISDOM

Sergii Bulgakov and Contemporary Theology:  
New Approaches and Interpretations

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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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in Zusammenarbeit mit  
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## The Reception of Palamite Theology in the Sophiology of Sergii Bulgakov

*Liubov A. Petrova*<sup>1</sup>

The primary concern of the sophiological theme in philosophy is the inter-relationship between God and the world, and the Sophiology of Sergii Bulgakov is no exception. The problem of the connection between God and the world is dominant and determinant in his work, and is connected with his basic philosophical and theological intuitions.<sup>2</sup>

It is common to consider *Philosophy of Economy* to be the first sophiological work of Sergii Bulgakov. Sophia is mentioned here only in the cosmological sense, as the principle of the overworldly unity of the empirical world, as the “single essence” of the world and the image of its extra-temporal being. Subsequently, Bulgakov developed his teaching on the connection between the world and God, the conceptual core of which was Sophiology.

As a teaching on the participation of the world in God, Sophiology in its various versions has the same foundation—the idea of the ideal prototype of the world in God, analogous to Plato’s “noetic cosmos.” Accordingly, the connection between the world and God within the frames of the Platonic paradigm is considered the connection of the empirical world with this ideal prototype, which manifests the principle of the unity of plurality in a rather Classical (Platonic) way. In this sense, from the very outset the sophiological disposition sets

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1 The research was conducted with the support of the RSE, project № 18–18–00134, “The Heritage of Byzantine Philosophy in Russian and Western European Philosophy of the 20th–21st Centuries.”

2 See Irina B. Rodnianskaia, “Chtitel’ i tolmach zamysla o mire,” in Sergii Bulgakov, “Svet nevechernii,” in: *Pervoobraz i obraz: sochineniia v dvukh tomakh. T. 1.* (St. Petersburg: Inapress, Moscow: Iskustvo, 1999), 12: “Bulgakov began to justify metaphysically such a strategy of Christianity, which [...] would save the world, taking on itself the responsibility for the sprouts of eternity granted to it which have the Divine genealogy. Here is the source of the sophiological topic which Bulgakov lifts upon his shoulders.”

a rather concrete system of ontological coordinates, which fit into the Platonic philosophical tradition very well. Analogies to Platonic ideas and the “noetic world” are present in all sophiological constructions.<sup>3</sup> As for the attempts to create a Christian Sophiology, a comment by Sergei Khoruzhii seems quite fair: “each Christian Sophiology is from the very outset constructed within the line of Christian Platonism and is, in its philosophical essence, an attempt to combine, to unite the impersonal Platonic ontology of all-unity and the sharply personal Christian ontology of the trihypostatic God.”<sup>4</sup>

These words can also be applied to Sergii Bulgakov, for whom Sophia is “the world of intelligible ideas,” “the Divine world, existing in God “before creation,” “primordial humanity in God” and so on. Let us quote a passage from Bulgakov:

The world of ideas, the ideal *all*, which is actually contained in Sophia, exists for the creaturely world not only as foundation or causality (in the above-indicated sense) but also as the *norm*, the maximum task, the law of life, Aristotelian entelechy with respect to the potential state of being. Every entity has its idea-norm; it searches for and creates itself in keeping with a definite image that is proper to it alone, to its idea, but this is because it has in its supratemporal nature this idea as its single genuine being, τὸ ὄντως ὄν, as its unrepeatable individuality that cannot be confused with anything.<sup>5</sup>

However, a distinct feature of sophiological intuitions is the thesis that Sophia is not only the world of ideas and the principle of unity of plurality, but in some sense also possesses independence, acting as a separate entity or, as in Bulgakov’s version, is personified and endowed with the attributes of a personal being (which does not prevent the formulation of the sophiological conception within the circle of Platonic notions). Sergii Bulgakov’s texts, starting with the

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- 3 See Sergei S. Khoruzhii, “O filosofii sviashchennika Pavla Florenskogo,” in Pavel A. Florenskii, *Stolp i utverzhdanie istiny*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Pravda, 1990), xii: “Some kind of soil for sophiological ideas was always preserved in the Christian picture of being and first of all within the line of the tradition of Christian Platonism, where the analogies of Platonic notions of idea-eidos of each thing and the ‘noetical world,’ the gathering of ideas-eidoses of all things are present.”
  - 4 Sergei S. Khoruzhii, *Posle pereryva. Puti russkoi filosofii* (St. Petersburg: Aleteyya, 1994), 81.
  - 5 Bulgakov, “Svet nevechernii,” 201 (English translation [ET]: Sergius Bulgakov, *Unfading Light. Contemplations and Speculations*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 227.

*Philosophy of Economy* and ending with such later works as *The Bride of the Lamb*, are rich in Platonic terminology and direct analogies between Sophia and “the world of ideas,” which allows us to conclude that his metaphysical system as a whole has a tendency to be constructed within the tradition of Christian Platonism.

Gradually, in the course its development, the theology of Gregory Palamas acquires ever more significance in the sophiological conception of Sergii Bulgakov. We can see a transition from the Platonic to the Palamite language in his Sophiology. Externally, such a transition is conditioned by Sergii Bulgakov’s closer acquaintance with the Palamite texts, which started some time before his writing of *Unfading Light*.<sup>6</sup> Internally, it is apparently conditioned by the fact that Sergii Bulgakov was not quite satisfied with some elements of the Platonic language, while the Palamite terminology corresponded to his sophiological intuitions to a greater degree. Indeed, in combining Christian dogmatic with Platonism, it is inevitable that some difficulties of both philosophical and dogmatic character appear, and the more straightforwardly such combining is pursued, the stronger the resistance of the two ontologies to one another; they are essentially incompatible. This circumstance seems to be sufficient ground for Sergii Bulgakov to include elements of the Palamite discourse in the scope of his theology.

We can judge the significance of Gregory Palamas’ theology for Bulgakov’s sophiological conception on the basis of his own statements. For instance, in a letter to Pavel Florenskii (1914) Bulgakov writes that he studies Gregory Palamas’ texts and considers the publication of a translation of some of his major treatises “necessary and timely.”<sup>7</sup> More than ten years later, in *The Burning Bush* (1927), Bulgakov states that the development of the positive teaching about Sophia is only possible on the basis of Gregory Palamas’ teaching “on the energies

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6 See Anna I. Reznichenko, “Genezis i artikuliatsionnye formy iazyka russkoi filosofii (S. L. Frank, S. N. Bulgakov, A. S. Glinka-Volzshskiy, P. P. Pertsov, S. N. Durylin): Istoriko-filosofskii analiz” (doctoral diss., Moscow, 2013), 127: “It is known that Bulgakov first became interested in Palamas’ work as early as the mid-1910s. This interest became stable in the period of writing ‘The Philosophy of Name,’ the main portion of the text of which was created in 1918–19, and during the period of the writing of ‘Hypostasis and Hypostaticity’ (i. e., 1924) it became the foundation for the formation of the new model of correlation between God and the world.”

7 *Perepiska sviashchennika Pavla Aleksandrovicha Florenskogo so sviashchennikom Sergiïem Nikolaïevichem Bulgakovym*. Arkhiv sviashch. P. A. Florenskogo, vol. 4 (Tomsk: Vodoley, 2001), 78.

of God in their distinction from the hypostatical essence of God,”<sup>8</sup> and also that Palamas’ teaching on Divine energies refers “in its inner meaning to the teaching on the Wisdom of God.”<sup>9</sup> Finally, in *The Bride of the Lamb*, published in 1945, Bulgakov unequivocally states that “by accepting Palamism, the Church has definitely entered onto the path of recognizing the sophiological dogma.”<sup>10</sup>

These evaluations of Gregory Palamas’ theology by Bulgakov are reflected in the conceptual structure of his sophiological ontology, in the gradual change of its conceptual tools. In *Philosophy of Economy*, the first sophiological work by Bulgakov of 1912, Palamas is not mentioned at all and Sophia is interpreted predominantly in the Platonic vein as “primordial ideas,” the “soul of the world,” “κόσμος νοητός,” and so on. In *Unfading Light* (1917) “Bulgakov uses Palamas’ texts studied by him in the context of his deliberations and quotes Palamas’ works, apparently, in his own translation.”<sup>11</sup> However, Bulgakov applies the results of his studies not in the sophiological, but exclusively in the theological context, using the notion of “energy” to draw the distinction between the transcendental essence of God and his manifestations in creation: “By revealing himself to the creature, God is divested of his absolute transcendence and is manifested in his operation for the creature, in grace or (to use the expression of the dogmatic disputes of the fourteenth century) in his energies.”<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the language of Sophiology in *Unfading Light* remains predominantly Platonic (“Ideal intelligible world,” “eternal prototype of creation,” “ideal seeds of all things,” etc.).<sup>13</sup>

If in “Philosophy of Economy” Sophia is interpreted exclusively in a cosmological sense, the sophiological ontology of *Unfading Light* is essentially different. As Vasilii Zenkovskii notes, “the notion of Sophia, remaining a cosmological notion, bifurcates: Sophia is partly still within the confines of the

8 Sergii Bulgakov prot. *Malaia trilogiia* (Moscow: Obshchedostupnyi pravoslavnyi universitet, 2008), 162, note (ET: Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush*, trans. Thomas Allan Smith (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2009).

9 Ibid., 182.

10 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 19.

11 Dmitrii Biriukov, “Tema ierarkhii prirodnogo sushchego v palamitskoi literature. Ch. 2. Palamitskoe uchenie v kontekste predshestvuyushchei traditsii i ego retseptsiia v russkoi religioznoi mysli XX veka (Filosofia tvorchestva S. N. Bulgakova),” *KONŠTANTÍNOVE LISTY* 12, 2 (2019), 7.

12 Bulgakov, “Svet nevechernii,” 192 (ET, 215).

13 Ibid., 207: “The ontological basis of the world consists precisely in the continuous, metaphysically uninterrupted sophianicity of its foundation.”

world, but partly already out of it.”<sup>14</sup> “Two centers” are discovered in Sophia, which correspond to the Divine Sophia and the cosmic Sophia.<sup>15</sup> The first is Sophia addressed to God, which pertains to the inner-Divine life, while the second (in the Platonic vein) is directed towards the world, and is, in this sense “the world soul, i. e., the principle that links and organizes the world’s plurality,”<sup>16</sup> “the beginning of a new, creaturely multi-hypostaseity.”<sup>17</sup> The theological lens of *Unfading Light* introduces new motives into Bulgakov’s sophiological intuitions, and it is not accidental that in a special excursus devoted to Palamas as an apophatic thinker Bulgakov pays attention to Palamas’s drawing a sharp boundary not only “between the concept of οὐσία and the concept of the Holy Trinity, as that which is in God himself,” but also between the “uncreated energies (ἄκτιστος) and creaturely, created being.”<sup>18</sup> In this way Bulgakov emphasizes the cosmological aspect of Palamas’ teaching and, as Natalia Vaganova notes, “finds the correspondence to his own sophiological positions in his teaching about the distinction of essence and energy in God.”<sup>19</sup> In *Unfading Light*, Bulgakov considers Sophia a boundary between God and the world, uniting and separating them, μεταξύ in the sense of Plato,<sup>20</sup> at the same time imparted with hypostatical, personal attributes (“the fourth hypostasis”<sup>21</sup>).

Bulgakov’s work *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity* (1925) can be considered a borderline between the Platonic and the Palamite ways of description of the reality of Sophia, as Bulgakov’s mastering of “new logical and language space.”<sup>22</sup> “Bulgakov seeks to think of Sophia, which had previously been understood in a Platonic way (as ‘noetic essence’, the ‘perfect organism of Divine ideas’) and, following Soloviev (as ‘all-unity’), now in the Palamite way. He wants to ‘translate’ her into the energetic basis, presenting her as the unfolding world of Divine energies, distinct from the nature of the Divinity.”<sup>23</sup> The Palamite notion of “energy” is now used by Bulgakov not only in the purely theological context,

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14 Vasilii V. Zen’kovskii, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii* (Moscow: Akademicheskii proekt; Raritet, 2001), 849.

15 Bulgakov, “Svet nevechernii,” 215 (ET, 245).

16 Ibid., 203 (ET, 229).

17 Ibid., 194 (ET, 217).

18 Ibid., 124 (ET, 134).

19 Natalia A. Vaganova, *Sofiologiia protoiereia Sergiia Bulgakova* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo PSTGU, 2011), 109.

20 Bulgakov, “Svet nevechernii,” 193 (ET, 217).

21 See in more detail in: ibid., 195 (ET, 218).

22 Vaganova, *Sofiologiia*, 318.

23 Ibid., 319.

but enters the conceptual structure of his Sophiology too. According to Bulgakov, Sophia is the revelation of the transcendental Divine essence in the same sense as energy for Gregory Palamas is an act of God, in which his essence, unknowable and unparticipatable in itself, is manifested. Such identification of Sophia and energy turned out to be incompatible with understanding Sophia as “the fourth hypostasis” (even if “of another order” than the hypostases of the Trinity), which is probably connected to the fact that in Gregory Palamas’ treatise “Theophanes,” which Bulgakov relies on,<sup>24</sup> energy is equally distinct from both the essence and the hypostasis.<sup>25</sup> As a consequence—in *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity* Bulgakov tries to revise this definition of Sophia, defining Sophia not as a hypostasis, but as a special state of being—“hypostaticity,”<sup>26</sup> at the same time not ceasing to think of it as a “living intelligent reality.”<sup>27</sup>

Subsequently, in the course of ripening and detailed elaboration of Bulgakov’s teaching on Sophia, Palamite motives in her interpretation grow stronger and stronger. Thus, in *The Burning Bush* (1927) Sophia is presented as “energy of God’s energies which alone are accessible to the creature, given the complete inaccessibility (‘transcendentalness’) of God’s very essence,”<sup>28</sup> “energy, [...] God’s operation in creation.”<sup>29</sup> Unlike the Sophia of *Unfading Light*, the Sophia of *The Burning Bush* “is not a Divine Hypostasis, she is the life, action, revelation, ‘energy’ of the Divinity, which is worshipped in the Holy Trinity.”<sup>30</sup>

However, in Bulgakov’s later works the line of identification of energies with Sophia is interrupted. In *The Lamb of God* (1933), the notion of “energy” is used almost exclusively in the historical-theological context in the discussion of the formation of the Christological dogma about the two wills and two natures.

24 Biriukov D. Tema ierarkhii prirodnogo sushchego . . . , v palamitskoi literature. Ch. 2. Palamitskoe uchenie v kontekste predshestvuyushchei traditsii i ego retseptsiia v russkoi religioznoi mysli XX veka (Filosofia tvorchestva S. N. Bulgakova), *KONŠTANTÍNOVE LISTY* 12, 2 (2019), 7.

25 See Gregory Palamas, *Theophanes*, 12.10: οὐδεμία γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων ἐνεργειῶν ἐνυπόστατος, τουτέστιν αὐθυπόστατος (“none of the energies is not en-hypostatic, that is, self-hypostatic”).

26 Reznichenko, *Genezis i artikuliatsionnye formy iazyka russkoi filosofii* (S. L. Frank, S. N. Bulgakov, A. S. Glinka-Volzhskiy, P. P. Pertsov, S. N. Durylin): Istoriko-filosofskii analiz”: (doctoral diss., Moscow, 2013), 89.

27 Protopresbyter Sergii Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to The Unfading Light,” trans. Anastassy Brandon Gallaher and Irina Kukota, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 49, no. 1–2 (2005), 27.

28 Bulgakov. *Malaia trilogiia*, 137 (ET, 118).

29 *Ibid.*, 159 (ET, 138).

30 *Ibid.*, 164 (ET, 142).



As for the theology of Gregory Palamas, Bulgakov expresses in passing his hesitation regarding the adequacy of his terms οὐσία and ἐνέργεια.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the way of thinking about the reality of Sophia changes: firstly, it is identified with the Divine essence, and secondly, the distinction between “the created Sophia” and “the Divine Sophia” is pursued by Bulgakov in a more definite and sharp way than in the previous periods. As Anna Reznichenko notes, “the ontological status of Sophia in relation to the persons of the Trinity in Bulgakov’s system of the 1930 is more fixed and distinct: Sophia is *ousia*, i. e., that which is common to all hypostases, by the relation to which their personal character is defined.”<sup>32</sup> These changes are very serious in comparison with the version of Sophiology presented in *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity*, where Bulgakov emphasized that Sophia must be strictly distinguished from the essence or nature of God and understands her as energy and “the revelation of the Tri-hypostatic God about himself”<sup>33</sup> par excellence.

The device of referring to Gregory Palamas in Bulgakov’s last work, *The Bride of the Lamb* (published posthumously in 1945), points to the distancing of Sophiology from the Palamite discourse. Sophia is no longer defined as “energy”; the most we can find here is speaking about the “energies” of Sophia with reference to the Palamite language.<sup>34</sup> There are also some analogies with Palamas’ theology of rather secondary character, which does not add anything to the basic conception. At the same time, we see Bulgakov’s multiple critical judgments about Palamism. In one passage, Bulgakov notes that “Palamas considers the energies primarily in the aspect of grace, the supracreaturely ‘light of Tabor’ in the creaturely world,” while these energies have, first and foremost, “a world-creating and world-sustaining power which is a property of Sophia.”<sup>35</sup> At other junctures Bulgakov formulates what he sees as the main shortcoming of Palamist theology—the lack of clarity in his description of the relation between the Divine hypostases of the Trinity and energies: “Palamas’ doctrine of essence and energies is not brought into connection with the dogma of the Trinity, in particular with the doctrine of the three hypostases as separate persons and of the Holy Trinity in unity.”<sup>36</sup> The applicability of Gregory Palamas’ ideas within the confines of Sophiology is limited by his “fundamental idea” of the “multi-

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31 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2008), 122, note 2.

32 Reznichenko A. I. *Genezis i artikuliatsionnye formy iazyka russkoi filosofii . . .*, 91.

33 Bulgakov, “Hypostasis and Hypostaticity: Scholia to The Unfading Light”, 25.

34 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 63.

35 *Ibid.*, 18–19.

36 *Ibid.*, 18.

plicity and equi-divinity of the energies in God,” which “discloses ‘the manifold wisdom of God,’” while he proclaims the rest of Palamism to be “an unfinished sophiology”<sup>37</sup> which awaits its future interpretation and sophiological application—the same way Platonism is characterized in *Unfading Light*.

So, speaking about Bulgakov’s Sophiology, we cannot speak about its passage from the Platonic to the Palamite language, but only about the temporary convergence of its ontological model with the Palamite one, which later, in the course of the development of Sophiology, revealed its limits.<sup>38</sup> The reasons for Bulgakov’s refusal to follow the Platonic model fully are understandable: Platonism satisfied his tendency to establish a solid connection between the world and God, to justify the world, to ground it in Sophia. However, establishing the correlation between the world and God, it was necessary to preserve their essential difference, fixed dogmatically, while the Platonic model tends towards the idea that the cosmos and its beginning have the same nature and towards understanding creation as an act subdued to necessity. For Bulgakov, none of these perspectives was acceptable, at least if judged on the basis of his critique of the conceptions of emanation. As Irina Rodnianskaia notes,

it is not very easy to unite the Platonic ‘noetic place,’ where, according to the Hellenic thinker, ‘ideas’ are placed, with the theistic notion of God. For the intelligible world of ideas, according to Classical thought, belongs to the cosmos and cannot be painlessly ‘reassigned’ to the God of theism, because there is an ontological abyss between him and the cosmic, ‘created’ being.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, within the confines of Platonism the connection between the world and the Divine reality is realized in its “ideal” aspect, while the “material” aspect remains in the shadow of non-being. But for Bulgakov it was fundamental to justify the actual, becoming world, the world as history, and not only its ideal prototype. This is the basis of his characterization of Plato’s and Plotinus’ cosmologies as “unfinished” and “defective”: their matter is empty, they “are entirely ignorant of sophianic earth, the mother Demeter.”<sup>40</sup> On the other hand,

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37 Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, 18.

38 This is one of the reasons why Natalia Vaganova speaks about the “unfinished project” of re-orienting Sophiology from the Platonic to the Palamite ontological model. See Vaganova, *Sofitologiia*, 370.

39 Rodnianskaia, “Chtitel’ i tolmach zamysla o mire,” 12–13.

40 Bulgakov, “Svet nevechernii,” 216 (ET, 246).

Palamism allowed the connection with God to include the material historical actuality of the world.

What was, then, the obstacle for the complete and consistent reformulation of Bulgakov's Sophiology in terms of the Palamite ontological model? Apparently, Bulgakov's critique of Palamas' theology for the lack of connection between his doctrine of energies and the triadological dogma shows that Bulgakov himself wanted to connect them, to correlate the reality of Sophia with the hypostatical being of God.

Bulgakov formulates his own version of the Trinitarian theology in his *Chapters on Trinity*, published in 1928, soon after his "Palamitic" *The Burning Bush* (1927), but some time before the "non-Palamitic" *The Lamb of God* (1933). In this work Bulgakov solves the issue of the correlation of essence and hypostases in God. It is solved in such a way that nature, understood as "potentiality," present as "the bosom of being" and "unlit darkness" in the created "I," in relation to God, in whom there can be nothing potential, but everything is actual, loses all features of independent reality, becoming completely en-hypostasized and coinciding with the hypostatical element: "there is no nature which is not hypostatical or out-of-hypostasis; on the contrary, all life of the Divinity is en-hypostasized (ἐνυπόστατος)."<sup>41</sup> "Attempts to look beyond personality to see substance behind it, are inappropriate here. It is true that in the Divinity there is no hypostasis without essence, as well as no essence without hypostasis, for in the Divinity they are perfectly fused and inseparable, and differ only by conditional human abstraction."<sup>42</sup> And further on: "the contradiction of hypostasis and essence appeared as an auxiliary logical means in the age of Arian controversy and the very notion ομοουσιος has a negative meaning first of all."<sup>43</sup>

This is Bulgakov's way of understanding the problem of correlation between essence and hypostases in God radically influenced his sophiological conception, provoking its distancing from the Palamite model. In the main text of the *Chapters on the Trinity* the subject of Sophia is not present, but in the initially unpublished draft manuscripts,<sup>44</sup> which act as a continuation of the *Chapters*,

41 Sergii Bulgakov, *Trudy o troichnosti* (Moscow: OGI, 2001), 88.

42 Ibid., 131.

43 Ibid., 132, note.

44 See Anna I. Reznichenko, "'Vse vremennoe est' splav iz nictio i vechnosti': eshche raz o trinitarnoi ontologii prof. prot. Sergiia Bulgakova (k 150-letiyu so dnia rozhdeniia)," *Philosophy. Sociology. Art History* 4 (2021), 19: "The first publication of the 'Chapters' took place in the pages of the Parisian magazine 'Orthodox Thought' in 1928 and 1930, with comments by the author. A reissue of the 'Chapters' was already undertaken in

Sophia reappears in the context of Bulgakov's thoughts on the question of God's relation to the world. Here, considering the definition of the Trinity as *unum universorum principum*, adopted at the Fourth Lateran Council, Bulgakov argues that it cannot be attributed to the Trinity as such, but only to its Divine world, via which the Trinity is facing creation. Bulgakov distinguishes between the inner unity of the Holy Trinity, which can be thought of as *ousia* (or "the triune Divine Subject himself in His life"<sup>45</sup>) and the unity of the Holy Trinity in the creation of the world. This second unity is the very "content of this divine Life, the condensed cloud of God's self-revelation or the Glory of God,—the Divine Sophia, the Divine world, the one Origin of Creation in God."<sup>46</sup> At the same time, according to Bulgakov, the second not only does not coincide with the first, but in no way comes from the first. Now we have two separate kinds of Divine unity: "the unity of the world,—writes Bulgakov—is not based on the unity of the divine *ousia* that is common to three hypostases (as follows from the Catholic understanding), because this *ousia* is not revealed in its unity except in the life of three hypostases [...] The unity of the world is based on the fact that the unified, although tri-hypostatic God, also has a unified revelation of His Own (the Divine World — Sofia, *L. P. note*)."<sup>47</sup> Thus, Sophia is no longer understood by Bulgakov as a revelation of the transcendent divine essence on the model of the Palamite energy, but acts as some independent principle of world unity, rooted in the unity of the divine world.

In the later works published after the *Chapters on the Trinity* in the thirties, Bulgakov no longer understands Sofia as energy, and gradually its conceptualization approaches the concept of the divine essence, replacing it with itself. He speaks about Sophia as essence for the first time in *Icon and Veneration of Icons* (1931),<sup>48</sup> and the sophiological ontology of the further works, *The Lamb of God* and *The Bride of the Lamb*, is predominantly built on identifying Sophia and *ousia* (essence). As Natalia Vaganova notes, "in 'The Lamb of God' Bulgakov

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post-Soviet Russia. Only in 2009, in the Sergius Bulgakov Foundation in the Archive of the St. Sergius Institute in Paris, we discovered a continuation of the 'Chapters' (with some failure in the numbering of sub-chapters), and only at the end of 2021 did this text finally see the light."

45 S. N. Bulgakov: *Pro et contra*, anthology. St. Petersburg: RHGA, 2021, 168.

46 *Ibid.*, 168.

47 *Ibid.*, 169.

48 See Sergii N. Bulgakov, *Pervoobraz i obraz: sochineniia v dvukh tomakh. T. 2. Filosofii imeni. Ikona i ikonopochitanie. Prilozheniia* (St. Petersburg: Inapress, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1999), 263: Sophia is "the Divinity of God and the Divinity in God, and in this sense she is also the Divine world before its creation."

uses the model of correlation between hypostasis and nature in the Divinity, which he developed in 'Chapters on Trinity,'"<sup>49</sup> and this model happened to be definitive: "the proposition that the nature is hypostatized in God," Bulgakov writes, "has a fundamental significance for sophiology."<sup>50</sup>

Evidently, if Sophia is *ousia*, it is not energy anymore, for, according to Gregory Palamas, though energy is uncreated, it is different from essence. Complete en-hypostasizedness of the Divine nature and its reduction to the status of an auxiliary logical means bereaves the basic Palamite ontological judgment ("essence and energy") of one of its conjuncts, thus destroying it and depriving it of its distinctness. Sophia cannot be energy anymore, for as such, not having essence, it has nothing to differ from. At the same time, the very notion of energy, which in Bulgakov's understanding is the "active voice in relation to passive voice,"<sup>51</sup> disintegrates. If "energy is the action of nature, nature in action,"<sup>52</sup> then in relation to the Divine reality, which cannot be ascribed anything "passive," the notion of energy loses its predicate and essential attribute. Indeed, considering the Christological debate of St. Maximus the Confessor with the Monothelites (in which Maximus correlated will with nature, while the Monothelites regarded will as an attribute of hypostasis), Bulgakov concludes: "From our present perspective this dispute appears to be academic. In essence, both sides are wrong. Both will and energy are manifestations of the life of the spirit, contained in itself and revealing itself for itself (or ad extra). But the spirit is the living and inseparable unity of person and nature, so that in concreto there is no impersonal nature or natureless personality; they can be separated and even opposed only in abstract."<sup>53</sup>

The "anti-essentialist" move by Bulgakov, according to whom "personality is essence and, vice versa, essence is personal principle,"<sup>54</sup> turns the notion of energy into as an "auxiliary logical means," as the notion of essence. And, as usually happens to means, its necessity falls off simultaneously with the disappearance of the field of its application. Understanding God as the "inseparable unity of person and nature" makes the assumption of "natural energy" in him redundant and the vacant space is occupied by the reality of Sophia, who, in her "Divine form," combines *ousia* and the uncreated energy, and in her second,

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49 Vaganova, *Sofiologiya*, 336.

50 Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 97, note.

51 *Ibid.*, 106.

52 *Ibid.*, 75.

53 *Ibid.*, 77.

54 Bulgakov S. N. *Trudy o troichnosti*, 130.

“cosmic” form, retains Bulgakov’s Platonic intentions in explaining the foundations of the created world. We will omit the question of how well-founded and necessary was the affirmation of the reality of Sophia as the essence and energy in God. What appears quite clear is that Bulgakov’s refusal to follow the logic of Palamism in his sophiological conception was connected to the incompatibility of the ontological disposition, posed in his trinitarian doctrine, with Gregory Palamas’ basic thesis about the distinction between the Divine essence and energies.

Still, even in the later period of his work Bulgakov discovers in Gregory Palamas’ theology something akin to his own intuitions, lying beyond any particular terminology. In *The Lamb of God*, formulating the thought that the notion of God is relative, for the relation to the world is contained in it from the very beginning, Bulgakov notes that Palamas’s distinction between οὐσία and ἐνέργεια is connected to this correlation between God and the world:

In practice, God exists only as energy, whereas God in Himself, Deus absconditus, simply does not ‘exist.’ In Himself, He is the darkness of the Absolute, to which even being is inapplicable. But in God’s energy, His *ousia* is known; His *ousia* begins to exist only in relation. Thus, Palamas’ fundamental schema is the idea of God as the Absolute-Relative, the inclusion of relation (but of course not relativity) in the very definition of God.”<sup>55</sup>

Here Bulgakov detects behind the Palamite dichotomy of essence and energy something close to the pair of notions “essential” and “existential”: if energy is the manifestation of the Divine essence, then the predicate of existence can be applied only in relation to it, for “to exist is to be for another.”<sup>56</sup>

It is evident that the character of the reception of Palamism in Sergii Bulgakov’s Sophiology in the course of its development is heterogeneous: a period of convergence, connected with the application of notion tools of Gregory Palamas’s theology, is succeeded by a period of critical distancing. These “oscillations” are apparently connected to Bulgakov’s search for a more adequate expression for his initial sophiological intuitions. Bulgakov was interested in Gregory Palamas’s theology not as such but almost exclusively to the extent in which it was able to open the way to overcoming the contradictions between understanding God personally, which is essential for Christianity, and the Platonic intuition of the divinity and unity of the cosmos. As a consequence, the

<sup>55</sup> Bulgakov S. *The Lamb of God*, 122, note 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

point where the explaining resources of the Palamite model come to an end happens to be the borderline for its application in Sergii Bulgakov's sophiological conception.