



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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An Unfinished Dispute. How is it Possible to Criticize Bulgakov's Sophiology at the Present Time?

Natalia Vaganova

Bulgakov's sophiology has been generating heated controversy for more than a hundred years. It was Evgenii Trubetskoi who first undertook a critical attack on this doctrine, long before the famous "Paris dispute." In 1918, immediately after the publication of Bulgakov's book *The Unfading Light*, E. Trubetskoi, in his book *The Meaning of Life*, pointed out what he considered to be Bulgakov's principal mistake: "He thinks of Sophia in a gnostic way, portrays her as an independent eon."¹ No exchange of views followed Trubetskoi's speech, and this was hardly possible under the well-known historical circumstances.

E. Trubetskoi's critical remarks were purely philosophical and were addressed to Bulgakov's main philosophical work. In emigration, after Fr. Sergius turned to theology and began to develop his teaching on theological grounds, the controversy, accordingly, acquired a theological character. This stage is perfectly documented, its chronological outline is well known,² and there is con-

1 Evgenii N. Trubetskoi, *Smysl zhizni* (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), 99–100.

2 See Vladimir N. Losskii, *Spor o Sofii: "Dokladnaia zapiska" prot. S. Bulgakova i smysl Ukaza Moskovskoi Patriarkhii* (Paris, 1936) (republished: Vl. Losskii, *Spor o Sofii. Stat'i raznykh let* (Moscow: Sviato-Vladimirskoe Bratstvo, 1996); Vladimir N. Losskii "Spor o Sofii" in V. N. Losskii, *Bogovidenie* (Moscow: ACT, 2006)); Iurii P. Grabbe, *Korni tserkovnoi smuty. Parizhskoe bratstvo Sv. Sofii i rozenkreitsery* (Belgrade, 1927); Pavel N. Grabbe, *O parizhskikh "bogoslovakh"* (Rovno, 1937); Nikolai Arsen'ev, *Mudrovaniye v bogoslovii?* (Warsaw, 1936); Sergii Bulgakov, prot., "Eshche k voprosu o Sofii, Premudrosti Bozhiei. Dokladnaia zapiska mitr. Evlogiiu. Ianvar' 1936," *Prilozhenie k zhurnalu "Put"*, no. 50 (1936): 1–24; Gennadii (Eikalovich), igum., *Delo prot. Sergiia Bulgakova. Istoricheskaia kanva spora o Sofii* (San Francisco, 1980); Modest A. Kolerov. "Bratstvo Sv. Sofii: "vekhovtsy" i evraziitsy (1921–1925)," *Voprosy filosofii* 10 (1994), 159–62; "K voprosu o tak nazyvaemom "edinolichnom mnenii" mitropolita Sergiia," *Simvol* 39, liul' (1998), 151–85.

siderable research literature. A recent study by Andrei K. Klementiev, based on a number of documents, reveals the history of the “Paris disputes” completely.³

Twenty five years after Bulgakov’s death, Protopresbyter John Meyendorff stated that sophiological problematics had been exhausted as a scientific issue and would no longer be able to awake any interest among new generations of researchers.⁴ This conclusion, as we can see, has proved to be premature. Not only Bulgakov’s doctrine, but also the sophiological project as a whole, has recently received renewed attention. Sophiology research has reached a new stage, attracting more and more interest. Nevertheless, a suspicious shadow of heresy still lies over this religious and philosophical teaching. Therefore, a new appeal to this criticism of Bulgakov’s teachings seems quite important. We need a critical revision of the very criticism of sophiology, that is, we need criticism of the criticism—those positions, arguments, and accusations that we have heard before. Such a “methodological shift” is necessary in order to move on to a substantive criticism of sophiology, which means the separation of the *living* from the *dead* in this teaching and the identification of both the internal moment of the theological and philosophical *crisis* and possibilities of finding a positive way out of the current situation. The purpose of this article is to outline some possible approaches to dealing with this problem.

Let me begin with theological aspects. First of all, we have to admit that criticism of Bulgakov’s sophiology from the theological perspective *has completely failed*. The overwhelming majority of its blows missed the target; therefore, despite a number of very serious accusations, this criticism did not inflict *the slightest* damage on Bulgakov’s doctrine (except, perhaps, his reputation). To put it simply, Bulgakov’s opponents forced an open door, without affecting the essence of the doctrine. If we briefly list what exactly Bulgakov was accused of during the “Paris dispute,” we will see a very variegated and rather chaotic picture. Bulgakov’s sophiology proves to be a unique teaching that does not correspond to anything.

They pointed out the discrepancy between sophiology and the key provisions of Orthodox dogmatics, an “archaeological” attitude towards the tra-

3 See Andrei K. Klement’ev, “Materialy k istorii polemiki o tvorchestve professora protoiereia Sergiia Nikolaevicha Bulgakova (1924–1937 gg.),” *Vestnik Ekaterinburgskoi dukhovnoi seminarii* 2, no. 26 (2019), 275–370.

4 See John Meyendorff “Orthodox Theology Today” in *John Meyendorff. Living Tradition: Orthodox Witness in the Contemporary World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), 167–87 (first published: *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 13, no. 12 (1969), 77–92).

dition of the Church, the deviation into Catholicism, a sympathetic attitude towards Origenism, Nestorianism, Appolinarism, etc. Particular criticism was caused by Bulgakov's alleged "introduction" of the "fourth hypostasis" into the Holy Trinity. Along with accusations of Gnostic dualism, the doctrine was defined as emanative-pantheistic. They pointed to impersonalism, determinism, mythologism, rejection of the principles of apophatic theology, insufficient detachment from purely philosophical methods and rational techniques of cognition that impudently invade the "sanctuary of faith"—and, at the same time, excessive "creative imagination" in theological constructions.

According to Fr. Sergius Chetverikov, Bulgakov disdained "preserving ecclesiastical like-mindedness" and rated "the freedom of his individual theological creativity"⁵ above it. Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodskii) and Vladimir Lossky were convinced that Bulgakov's sophiological synthesis is faced with unsolvable contradictions in the construction of Triadology and Christology, and that, in general, "the main principle on which all his teaching about Sophia is built—the Wisdom of God [...] is not church-grounded, and the system built on it is so independent that it can either replace the teaching of the Church, or succumb to it, but cannot merge with it."⁶

The "new doctrine of Sophia" was condemned as heresy in the definitions of the Sremski Karlovtsy Synod, especially with respect to everything that concerned the "feminine principle in God," called "a special being or hypostasis, although not consubstantial with the Holy Trinity, but not completely alien to It," or "not the Hypostasis, but only [...] the hypostatity, which, however, is capable of being hypostasized, that is, becoming the Hypostasis," as well as "a being that surpasses Mother of God," or identified with the Mother of God.⁷ The works of Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) were rigorously condemnatory. Metropolitan Evlogii (Georgievskii), in a private letter to Bulgakov, describes the method of argumentation used in these works as follows: with a large amount of collected material, these works are markedly simple, even primitive. It seems like a list of references written according to the following

5 Quoted by Andrei K. Klement'ev, "Materialy k istorii polemiki o tvorchestve professora protoiereia Sergiia Nikolaevicha Bulgakova (1924–1937 gg.)," *Vestnik Ekaterinburgskoi dukhovnoi seminarii* (2019), 310.

6 Vladimir N. Losskii "Spor o Sofii," in *V.N. Losskii. Bogovidenie* (Moscow: ACT, 2006), 24.

7 See "Okruzhnoe poslanie Arkhiereiskogo Sinoda Russkoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi Zagraniitsei," *Tserkovnye vedomosti. Sremski Karlovtsy 17/18* (1927), 2–4 (Klement'ev, "Materialy k istorii polemiki o tvorchestve professora protoiereia Sergiia Nikolaevicha Bulgakova," 287).

method: “Here is the teaching of Holy Fathers, and here is a completely different teaching of S. Bulgakov.”⁸

More temperate voices urged that Bulgakov’s doctrine be treated as an ecclesiastically acceptable theologumen (Zen’kovskii); they proposed considering the issue in a broader sense—in terms of the freedom of theological-dogmatic research and the possibility (or impossibility) of dogmatic development in general (Kartashev). The professors of the St. Sergius Institute (Vysheislavtsev, Fedotov, Veidle, Zander) supported Bulgakov; however, it should be noted that, with the exception of Zander, they did not defend Bulgakov’s teachings, but rather defended his flawless pastoral reputation and good name.

It may be stated that the entire “trial” of the “Bulgakov case” was largely due to the internal Church political situation, to the clarification of relations between various Church groups in Russian Orthodoxy. In particular, the accusations of theological modernism on the part of the Karlovtsy group were in fact directed rather against Metropolitan Evlogii and the church community of the diaspora, and in this sense Bulgakov’s teaching served as the most convenient model.

Thus, despite their wide range, the specific accusations did not add up to a systemic picture. The opponents refuted the doctrine without touching its essence. They disputed the particulars but overlooked the synthesis. Such critical attitudes did not allow them to capture the theological and philosophical system created by Bulgakov as an integral system (although this integrity was indirectly confirmed by the above statement about the incompatibility of sophiology and Orthodoxy)—only then could one proceed to challenge the particular issues. In this regard, there is no particular difference between the arguments of such different people as Archbishop Seraphim and Lossky.

The final text of the conference assembled by Metropolitan Evlogii was not an official document.⁹ This text noted in particular that “the doctrine of Fr. S. Bulgakov has nothing to do with either Gnosticism or pantheism,” and that the conclusions of the Karlovtsy group, following Archbishop Seraphim, incorrectly determined its origins. Meanwhile, Bulgakov’s doctrine was nothing more than a theological hypothesis, the construction of which had yet to be completed—and, since Bulgakov’s works “have not yet been sufficiently studied

8 Quoted by Andrei K. Klement’ev, “Materialy k istorii polemiki o tvorchestve professora protoiereia Sergiia Nikolaevicha Bulgakova (1924–1937 gg.)”, *Vestnik Ekaterinburgskoi dukhovnoi seminarii* 2, no. 26 (2019), 296.

9 The conclusions were published not in the diocesan publication, but in the newspaper (see Klement’ev, “Materialy k istorii polemiki,” 314–15).

[...] an authoritative opinion of the Church authorities has not yet been expressed about them.” Therefore, “grave accusations of heresy” were premature. Bulgakov was advised to

revise his theological teaching about St. Sophia with all care, to clarify the disputable passages of his teaching in generally accessible forms, to bring them closer to the Orthodox understanding and to remove from them everything which confuses ordinary souls, those who do not have special theological and philosophical thinking.¹⁰

As we know, Father Sergius did none of this. Bulgakov began to explain his teachings in the text *The Wisdom of God: A Brief Summary of Sophiology* (1937), but this explanation did not contain any revisions or deletions.

In Metropolitan Evlogii’s document, the concept of “theological hypothesis” seems to be of special interest. It is characteristic that, in searching for a solution to this situation, Bulgakov’s doctrine was qualified with phrases not found in the toolkit of theological definitions (at least in the Orthodox theological tradition)—such as *dogma*, *theologumenon*, *private theological opinion*, or *heresy*.¹¹ This definition (“theological hypothesis”), which seemed a unique

10 Gennadii (Eikalovich), igum., *Delo prot. Sergiia Bulgakova. Istoricheskaia kanva spora o Sofii*, 33–35 (Klement’ev, “Materialy k istorii polemiki,” 314).

11 In Russian theological scholarship, the triad “dogma, theologumenon, private theological opinion” was first proposed by Vassilii Bolotov (see “Thesen über das ‘Filioque.’ Von einem russischen Theologen,” in *Internationale Theologische Zeitschrift* 24 [1898], 681–712; Vasilii V. Bolotov, *K voprosu o filioque* [Saint Petersburg, 1914], 30–36) and was widely used, including in theological teaching literature (see Sil’vestr [Stoichev], arkhim., *Dogmaticheskoe bogoslovie* [Kiev: Izdatel’skii otdel Ukrainskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvi, 2016], 121–26). “The area of dogma is *necessaria*, the area of theologumenon is *dubia*: In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas!” (Bolotov, 31). According to Bolotov, the distinction between the former (true) and the latter (probable) is not as significant as that between theologumenon (the private theological opinion of the Holy Fathers) and the “non-authoritative” private theological opinion of a “mere theologian.” Bulgakov does not enter into a direct polemic with Bolotov, but clearly does not accept his scheme. In a text printed in the midst of the dispute (1937, see Sergii Bulgakov, prot., “Dogmat i dogmatika,” in *Zhivoe predanie. Pravoslavie v sovremennosti* [Moscow, 1997], 8–25) he argues that dogmatics is broader than dogmas; it continues in “dogmatic facts” (ibid., 9). These are, for example, the sacraments, the whole liturgical tradition, prayer, etc. They are not formulated in dogmas, but have the same (binding) significance in the life of the Church as dogmas themselves. Furthermore, the boundaries of the authoritative sacred tradition are not defined, and “the ‘church fathers,’ before they became

innovation, was, in fact, a proposal for a compromise. Since this definition goes beyond the scope of the list of theological terms and does not mean any of them, it can be considered a successful and rather witty finding. But is it productive? In a sense, yes, it is, because it correctly reflects the basic intuition of Bulgakov's teaching, namely, theologizing not based on theological sources. As we can see now, the incorrectness of qualifying the origins of Bulgakov's teachings was rightly noted: theological criticism of Bulgakov's doctrine at this stage was definitely doomed to failure, since it could not undermine its foundations.

This state of affairs is determined not by the "weakness" of theology, but by other factors. Although Bulgakov's doctrine in emigration took a theological direction and a corresponding genre-stylistic design, while very large-scale it was only a logical and ontological continuation of his philosophical system. Therefore, criticism on behalf of theology was forced here to play on a foreign field. The indication that sophiology has no church foundation is based on general theological intuition, but the latter cannot in any way be resolved in adequate formulations, since it does not have the tools for revealing the existing contradictions.

It is a matter not of particular discrepancies, but of fundamental principles. If we discard all imaginary accusations (Gnosticism, etc.) and focus on the main thing, the question can be posed in this way: is Bulgakov's system an attempt to synthesize some aspects of Platonism and Palamism—or is it a fusion of two incompatible ontological models? It is clear that the answer to the second part of the question can be obtained only as a result of a thorough study of the first part, in other words, when we find out how successfully Bulgakov was able to "palamize" the Platonic elements of his teaching. The difficulty of this task is determined by the fact that, as a philosophical teaching, Palamism has not been completed. In fact, in Bulgakov's works we see an attempt to complete the Palamas's apophatics in the direction of philosophical kataphatics.

Now let me return to the philosophical criticism represented by Evgenii Trubetskoi. As already mentioned, it sounded before Bulgakov's transition to theology. Indeed, the entire critical part of Trubetskoi's book *The Meaning of*

such, were also theologians searching for the truth." Hence "in dogmatics a place must be given to dogmatic enquiry" and "the dogmatic treatment" of its material can be presented "in theologeme or hypothesis" (ibid., 19). In "The Sophiology of Death", written in the 1940s, Bulgakov uses the expression "auxiliary theological hypothesis" once (Sergei N. Bulgakov, "Sofiologiya smerti" in *Sergei N. Bulgakov. Tikhie dumy* [Moscow: Respublika, 1996], 274). It is likely that Metr. Evlogii takes the concept of "theological hypothesis" from Bulgakov.

Life is directed “against the Gnostic understanding of Sophia.” Yet it is not Soloviev’s sophiology that is considered here to be gnostic, although it really is close to Gnosticism, but the Platonic aspects of the sophiology in Bulgakov’s *Unfading Light*. However, Trubetskoi, contrary to the real state of affairs, argues that Soloviev’s Gnosticism is only rudimentary and, therefore, excusable, while Bulgakov’s Gnosticism determines the nature of his entire teaching.

Trubetskoi’s main argument is as follows: in his constructions, Bulgakov relies on the teachings of Spinoza, and hence, in his sophiology, the world of divine ideas (i. e. Sophia) is related to the created world like *natura naturans* is related to *natura naturata*.¹² This results in the identification of Sophia and creature, which is not in accordance with Christian doctrine and must be rejected as a deviation into Monophysitism.¹³

Indeed, in Bulgakov’s *Philosophy of Economy* and in *Unfading Light* among the many definitions of Sophia there is the Spinozist one represented by the terms *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. However, the definition that Trubetskoi considers the only true one—Sophia is the Platonic world of ideas—is also there. Meanwhile, Vladimir Soloviev already considered Spinoza’s principle to be a delusion and proposed to overcome it with the help of Kant’s critical idealism, which showed that between the absolute essence and the world of phenomena there is certainly a subject of knowledge.¹⁴

Having realized that understanding Sophia as a special metaphysical entity in the divine Universe is futile, Bulgakov (in his *Philosophy of Economy* and of course in *Unfading Light*) began to clarify her status as a subject: the subject of cognition, activity and culture, and her relation to the Kantian transcendental subject. Here, of course, it should be noted that, using Kant’s terminology, Bulgakov gives it a specific and largely “non-Kantian” meaning. He points out that his “transcendental subject,” in contrast to the Kantian “scheme of the mind,” is a real and living actor.

The religious question, then, arises in the unprejudiced mind, in the phenomenological field of spontaneous, undetermined religious experience. Religion, according to Bulgakov, is in this sense such a universal fact of human life that it cannot be denied. It is precisely *experience* that cannot be denied, which is realized as the experience of the unprecedented and unstoppable entrance of *the other* into the concrete-personal. In religious experience a direct *tangible*

12 Trubetskoi, *Smysl zhizni*, 99.

13 Ibid.

14 See Vladimir S. Solov’ev, “Poniatie o Boge. V zashchitu filosofii Spinozy,” *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* VIII, 3 (38) (1897), 383–414.

experience of other worlds is *given*, an experience of a higher divine reality, an *experience* of the nearness of God, and not generally, but in concreto, just for *this* person, which imperatively requires him to respond by entering into the realm of the divine. Bulgakov calls this a sophian feeling, which, in turn, raises the question of Sophia as its source. To conceive of her as some kind of special metaphysical being would be fantastic, or, at worst, would reduce religious experience to a mystical visionary of Soloviev's type, which is not only not of universal significance, but not at all obvious. But at the same time, since Sophia is the source of the personal-religious, it is impossible to think of it as something generally impersonal and extrapersonal, just as it is impossible to imagine the philosophizing person as an impersonal "transcendental subject," "which is only a regulative idea, a cut through consciousness, a methodological fiction, though perhaps a fruitful one."¹⁵ Bulgakov's idea of Sofia was thus to find, in its definition as a concrete and universal subject of religious and all other activities (economy, knowledge, culture), a possibility that would equally avoid both the fantasy of the "metaphysical being" and the "fiction" of the Kantian transcendental subject.

Having captured this perspective, Trubetskoi calls Bulgakov's teaching "deeply unsatisfactory."¹⁶ The only possible solution to the problem of Sophia, which would correspond to Christianity, Trubetskoi sees in her identification with the Platonic world of divine ideas. Let me note in parentheses that E. Trubetskoi—quite sincerely, however—is inclined to present his own interpretation of Plato's metaphysics as a "Christian teaching" of the Wisdom of God. At the same time, he distinguishes between Plato, who discovered "the only way," and Plato-pagan, whom, in his opinion, Bulgakov follows—for example, in the rapprochement of Sophia with the demiurge from the dialogue "Timaeus." Therefore, Trubetskoi sees in Bulgakov's teachings traces of Gnosticism that has not been overcome, of the Platonic or even the Schelling type. It should be noted that in Paris, during the dispute about Sophia, Bulgakov was accused of Gnosticism, monophysitism, and pantheism at the same time.

It is not the substantial understanding of Sophia that Trubetskoi considers illegal, but the introduction into Sophia of the properties of becoming and change—in other words, subjectivity and psychologism. According to Trubetskoi, who was looking for the unity and absolute synthesis of "all that is conscious and thinking" in an all-unified consciousness as absolute thought, the introduction of Sophia-*subject* into "God's plan for what should be" seemed

15 Trubetskoi, *Smysl zhizni*, 78.

16 *Ibid.*, 99.

to be a deviation from Christianity (if, of course, under the Christian teaching of Wisdom we understand the generalized scheme of the purest and most unsophisticated Platonism, which, with references to patristic authority, Trubetskoi reproduces).

The Christian understanding of Sophia, according to Trubetskoi, makes us “think of the relationship between this force and the world created in time as the relationship of two natures, essentially different and therefore not merged, but at the same time forming an inseparable unity [...] the relationship between Sophia and this world is in no way, nor can it become, an identity. The inseparable unity of two natures seems possible and proper here, but not their merging into one.”¹⁷ The philosopher’s attempt to present Sophia in the paradigm of Chalcedonian definitions is obvious, but is it possible in principle to combine the Christological dogma with the Platonic realism of ideas? Was it not the unsolvability of this very problem that later prompted Bulgakov to move away from Platonism?

The striving for a purely Christian understanding of Sophia inevitably leads Trubetskoi to a transcendental problem—in the formulation as it has been called for in Russian philosophy: how—not only theoretically, but also practically—can the limit to a human’s individual consciousness be removed in order to “[...] fill my consciousness with a sobornal consciousness”?¹⁸

Trubetskoi, quite in the Russian manner, hopes to solve the transcendental question in a non-transcendental way. Another book, published almost at the same time as *The Meaning of Life*, had a very characteristic title, *Metaphysical Presuppositions of Knowledge*, and an even more characteristic subtitle: “An attempt to Overcome Kant and Kantianism.” Here Trubetskoi criticizes Kant for not completing the transcendental question, for he did not pose and, as a result, did not solve the problem of the *unconditional foundation* to the representations and concepts of the subject.¹⁹ The consequence was the dogmatism of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which manifested itself, in particular, in the inadequacy of the anthropological justification of knowledge: if, according to Trubetskoi, a priori concepts cannot be justified outside the subject, they will not have a universal and objective value.²⁰ At the same time, the ontological status of the subject does not play a role, no matter if it is connected only with *my*

17 Trubetskoi, *Smysl zhizni*, 99.

18 Ibid., 97.

19 Evgenii N. Trubetskoi, *Metafizicheskie predposylki poznaniia. Opyt preodoleniia Kanta i kantianstva* (Moscow, 1917), 13.

20 Ibid.

own self, with “universal consciousness,” or even with the “world soul”²¹—the subject as the bearer of a specific empirical psyche cannot be a priori. Hence, Trubetskoi finds the main contradiction of Kantian transcendentalism: no psychological subject, be it a human person or *any other being*, can provide the a priori function of transcendental apperception in such a way that sensory representations have a universal character. And if it is not conditioned by such a subject, then the problem in the Kantian sense does not exist at all. Trubetskoi believes that the question of the possibility of a priori knowledge is the basis of all knowledge in general, and this must necessarily lead us to overcoming Kant and Kantianism by going metaphysically beyond the limits of Kant’s teaching.²² So, perhaps, Trubetskoi’s rejection of Bulgakov’s sophiology was not at all caused by his imaginary Gnosticism, but by the fact that Bulgakov demonstrates a more sympathetic tendency towards Kant? Calling Kant an *asophian* philosopher, Bulgakov, nevertheless, declares that the transcendental problem of religion is completely analogous to those basic problems that were raised and studied by Kant in his three “critiques.” The content of the *third* critique is closest to the problem of religion.²³

Trubetskoi would like to find “such a being” that would be able to become the subject of perception of the fullness of universal revelation. It wholly “co-feels” and “co-realizes” Sophia as the All-Unity. However, in that version of the development of metaphysical idealism, to which Trubetskoi was committed, he could not find such a subject under any circumstances. In the book *Metaphysical Presuppositions of Knowledge* (written at the same time as *The Meaning of Life*) Trubetskoi tries to “overcome Kant and Kantianism.” Kant, according to Trubetskoi, does not complete the transcendental question to the very end, since he does not point to the *unconditional foundations* of the ideas and concepts of the subject. This requires a metaphysical transcendence of the limits of Kant’s teachings. As a result, we see that Trubetskoi balances between awareness of the transcendental problem and unwillingness to include in the sophiological synthesis theoretical reflection more loyal to Kant’s thought, while Bulgakov offers an attempt to synthesize Kant’s transcendentalism in the understanding of Sophia as a universal subject of cognition and activity.

21 Trubetskoi, *Metafizicheskie predposylki poznaniia*, 13.

22 *Ibid.*, 14.

23 See Sergei N. Bulgakov, *Svet Nevechernii* (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), 8–9. See Natalia Vaganova, “Transtsendental’nyi ideal Kanta i sofologiia Bulgakova,” in *Sofiologiia i neopatristscheskii sintez*, ed. Konstantin Antonov and Natalia Vaganova (Moscow: PSTGU, 2013), 65–85.

Interestingly, Trubetskoi's general attitude against Bulgakov's sophiology was largely determined by circumstances of personal character. In fact, Trubetskoi ascribed to Bulgakov's doctrine all those "sins" that are actually characteristic of Vladimir Soloviev's sophiology. In his effort to cleanse the latter of Gnostic and even occult moments, Trubetskoi, in fact, accused Bulgakov of them. However, when Trubetskoi turns to his own sophiological constructions, we can easily ascertain that his teaching on the "positive potentials of Sophia" as the foundations of the emerging world is a rather eclectic *locus communis* of Sophiology which included both Soloviev's intentions and some of Florenskii's propositions, and, of course, Bulgakov's ideas.

For example, Trubetskoi postulates the non-identity of Sophia and the created world. But even though the world is "other," it still has its beginning in Sophia as a possibility and reality. He provides a general scheme of antinomism: the "other" world denies the divine Sophia, but the contradiction will be overcome in eternity. And as for the "other" world, quite in Bulgakov's style, Trubetskoi defines it as relative non-being ($\mu\eta\ \acute{o}\nu$, as distinct from absolute non-being, $\acute{o}\upsilon\kappa\ \acute{o}\nu$), as *potential* Sophia.²⁴ This world is striving for an actual, realized all-unity, which is Sophia in her completeness,²⁵ etc.

Indeed, a great deal of Trubetskoi's ideas do not just remind the reader of *Unfading Light*, but literally repeat its formulations in a slightly modified form. Of course, he does not take the formulations which were presented in *The Meaning of Life* as gnostic (and in fact they correspond to Soloviev's thought), but those that satisfied Trubetskoi's desire to see Sophia immaculately Orthodox, unsuspecting for an Orthodox reader—both a metaphysician and a dogmatist.

However, the question as to how Trubetskoi understood the synthesis of individual consciousnesses, these "all-unities in possibility," into the all-unity in reality, obviously goes beyond the scope of philosophical and theoretical analysis and leads us to completely different speculations. Kant refused to cross this line. Spurred on by his refusal, not only Trubetskoi, but also other representatives of Russian philosophy rushed to this line, which often forced them to move from philosophy to theological problems.

To sum up, the specific formulation of the transcendental problem on the basis of Russian philosophy in Bulgakov's system showed that the subject cannot freely "hypostatize" the objective worlds, which was of great interest for

24 Trubetskoi, *Smysl zhizni*, 109.

25 Ibid.

Russian social thought.²⁶ Reasonable and spontaneous at the same time, sobornal and particular, the subject is immersed in a laborious, active, continuous, growing, and essentially beneficial effort to transform chaos into cosmos, into the creation of life as an organic synthesis of two ontologies (“God” and “world”). In this process, *not yet being* (“hypostatistiy”, in Bulgakov’s terminology), becomes *being* (“hypostasis”), which is most clearly achieved throughout human culture as a combination of material, social, and spiritual projections of human being. All in all, Bulgakov’s sophiological theology constitutes a single and indivisible continuum with the philosophical part of his system. His sophiology, regardless of its theological “good quality,” has demonstrated the demand for the idea of building an Orthodox theological and philosophical synthesis. Bulgakov himself, while claiming that “belief never establishes prohibitions for reason in its *proper* domain,”²⁷ considered the positive theological teaching of Sophia to be an unresolved task and a matter of the future.

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26 See Natalia Vaganova, “Russian Sophiology and the Problem of the Subject in Modern Philosophy,” in: *Beyond Modernity. Russian Religious Philosophy and Post-Secularism*, ed. Artur Mrowczynski-Van Allen, Teresa Obolovitch, Pawel Rojek (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 86–96.

27 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 184.