



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

Hallensleben, Zwahlen, Papanikolaou, Kalaitzidis (Eds.)
Building the House of Wisdom
Sergii Bulgakov and Contemporary Theology:
New Approaches and Interpretations

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.



EPIPHANIA

Herausgegeben von
Barbara Hallensleben, Guido Vergauwen, Nikolaus Wyrwoll
in Zusammenarbeit mit
dem Zentrum für das Studium der Ostkirchen
der Universität Freiburg Schweiz

Band 19

Building the House of Wisdom

Sergii Bulgakov and Contemporary Theology:
New Approaches and Interpretations

Edited by
Barbara Hallensleben, Regula M. Zwahlen,
Aristotle Papanikolaou, Pantelis Kalaitzidis

 **Aschendorff**
Verlag

Münster
2024

Publiziert mit Unterstützung
des Schweizerischen Nationalfonds
zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung

Publiziert von
Aschendorff Verlag GmbH & Co. KG
Soester Straße 13
D-48155 Münster
www.aschendorff-buchverlag.de

Cover:
Aschendorff Verlag GmbH & Co. KG

Text:
© Barbara Hallensleben, Regula M. Zwahlen, Aristotle Papanikolaou, Pantelis Kalaitzidis

ISBN 978-3-402-12060-6 (Print)
ISBN 978-3-402-12061-3 (E-Book PDF)
DOI <https://doi.org/10.17438/978-3-402-12062-0>



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No-Derivatives 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND) which means that the text may be used for non-commercial purposes, provided credit is given to the author. For details go to <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. To create an adaptation, translation, or derivative of the original work and for commercial use, further permission is required. Creative Commons license terms for re-use do not apply to any content (such as graphs, figures, photos, excerpts, etc.) not original to the Open Access publication and further permission may be required from the rights holder.

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. Gavriluk	
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

From Social Trinity to “Linguistic Trinity”: Sergii Bulgakov’s Contribution to Analytic Theology

Nikolaos Asproulis

Since the mid-twentieth century a revival of the interest in Trinitarian theology has taken place, initially spurred on by theologians from different Christian traditions¹ and most recently by analytic philosophers of religion² who by employing various metaphysical or logical arguments try to provide their own rational reconstruction of the doctrine of the Trinity. At the same time, increasing scholarly interest in the person and work of Sergii Bulgakov is clearly evident today not only in the English-speaking world, but more widely, which draws our attention to a possible direct or indirect encounter on this crucial topic.

In his *Philosophy of the Name*³ and *The Tragedy of Philosophy*,⁴ Bulgakov exploits a Trinitarian approach to reality, starting out from a tripartite understanding of the proposition “I am A”=subject–copula–predicate. In this chapter, an attempt is made to use this logical-grammatical exploration as a means to struggle with the “logical problem of the Trinity.” After briefly describing the major views on the Trinity (e. g., the Greek/social and the Latin), the chapter

-
- 1 Cf. for instance: Giulio Maspero and Robert Wozniak, eds., *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology. Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology* (London/Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2012).
 - 2 Cf. for instance: Melville Stuart, ed., *The Trinity. East/West Dialogue* (Springer/Science + Business Media, BV, 2003); William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the TriPersonal God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Michael Rea, ed., *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology*, vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Beau Branson, “The Logical Problem of the Trinity,” (PhD diss., Graduate Program in Philosophy, Notre Dame, IN, 2014).
 - 3 Sergii Bulgakov, *Philosophy of the Name*, Cornell University Press, 2022.
 - 4 Sergij Bulgakov, *The Tragedy of Philosophy (Philosophy and Dogma)*, trans. Stephen Churchyard, intro. John Milbank (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2020).

focuses on Bulgakov's "linguistic trinity"⁵ in dialogue with the "Material Constitution" theory as represented by Michael Rea and Jeffrey Brower, in order to justify his view as a valuable, albeit unintended, Eastern Orthodox contribution to contemporary philosophy of religion.

The Patristic-historical Background: A Brief Overview

Let us now provide a brief overview of the patristic-historical and contemporary analytical account of Trinitarian theology.

Since the early post-apostolic era, the Church has been challenged by the question as to how to make sense of the affirmation that there are three persons and still one God, in other words, how to combine two seemingly contradictory claims. In line with Brower and Rea, this philosophical, or rather "logical problem" consists in the following assertion:

On the one hand, it affirms that there are three distinct Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each of whom is God. On the other hand, it says that there is one and only one God. The doctrine therefore pulls us in two directions at once—in the direction of saying that there is exactly one divine being and in the direction of saying that there is more than one.⁶

Throughout the centuries, various theories have been formulated towards a solution to this philosophical problem. Most of them, however, proved erroneous if not dangerous. This was the case with *modalism*, according to which the three divine persons are not really distinct from each other, with *subordinationism*, which claims that not all the Trinitarian persons are divine, or *polytheism*, according to which there is more than one God.

It was not until the fourth century that an adequate terminology became available, without however, providing a definite solution to the debate. While the West considered the Greek *hypostasis* (particular) as synonymous with the Latin substance (concrete universal), this was not the case with the East, which eventually ended up with a distinction between substance (a generic essence, abstract universal) and *hypostasis* (particular instances of essence) and an identification of the latter (a clearly ontological term) with the person (a

5 I take the term from and base much of the discussion on Joshua Heath's article "Sergii Bulgakov's Linguistic Trinity," *Modern Theology* 37, no. 4 (2021), 888–912.

6 Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea, "Material Constitution and the Trinity," in *Oxford Readings*, 127.

relational term).⁷ It was the merit of the Cappadocians in the East to "ascribe to the three divine hypostases the properties constitutive of personhood, such as mutual knowledge, love, volition . . .,"⁸ leading to an *ontological* understanding of personhood. At the same time, Augustine, in his *De Trinitate*,⁹ by making use of psychological analogies of the individual human mind, followed a different path, by highlighting the unity of Godhead and understanding person as subsisting relations, that is, in a *logical* way. Although recent studies¹⁰ of the works of certain Eastern and Western patristic thinkers (like Gregory of Nyssa, John of Damascus, etc.) as well as Augustine (or Boethius) show that a shared understanding might be at work, rather than a deep rift between their views, the personalistic ontology in the East (premised on the diversity of the three divine persons) over against the substance ontology in the West (premised on unity) became, in the subsequent centuries, a "controlling schema" for Trinitarian theology.

The year 1892 saw the Jesuit Theodore de Régnon publish his monumental work under the title *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*.¹¹ In this study, by employing the dialectic between person and nature, de Régnon offered a binding (albeit schematic) understanding of Trinitarian theology which accounts for a clear-cut division between Eastern and Western Trinitarian theologies. As the still normative story goes, the East, mainly following the Cappadocian Fathers, begins with the diversity of the persons, thus emphasizing the Trinity (*de Deo trino*) of persons, while the West, in line with Boethius, Augustine and Aquinas, starts with the divine essence, focusing on the unity of God (*de Deo uno*). The so-called "de Régnon paradigm" has recently been boldly criticized for relying too much on historical generalizations.¹² Yet, a

7 For such an interpretation see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

8 J. P. Moreland and W. L. Graig, "The Trinity," in *Oxford Readings*, 29.

9 For a discussion see: Michalis Philippou, "Η τριαδική θεολογία του De Trinitate του Αγίου Αυγουστίνου και οι κριτικοί της," in Stavros Zoumboulakis & Pierre Salembier, *Η ελληνική και ευρωπαϊκή συμβολή στον Ευρωπαϊκό πολιτισμό* (Athens: Artos Zoes, 2019) 115–56.

10 Cf. for instance, Richard Cross, "Two Models of the Trinity?," in *Oxford Readings*, 108–26.

11 Théodore de Régnon, *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (3 vols. Paris: Viktor Retaux, 1892–98).

12 Michel René Barnes, "De Régnon Reconsidered," *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 51–79; D. Glenn Butner, "For and Against de Régnon: Trinitarianism East and West," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 4 (October 2015): 399–412. In contrast see

considerable number of contemporary theologians still took it for granted in their discussion of the Trinity (K. Rahner, C. Gunton, V. Lossky, J. Zizioulas, S. Bulgakov, R. Jenson, C. Gunton, etc.), following the alleged deep dichotomy between a Greek and a Latin Trinitarian view.¹³

Social Trinity vs. Latin Trinity: An Archaic but Modern Debate

Does this very complex doctrine still make sense today? While Enlightenment thinkers boldly questioned the validity of any religious authority in general and Christian doctrine in particular, today numerous Christian philosophers have attempted to re-conceptualize the doctrine of the Trinity in a philosophically and logically defensive manner. This renewed interest in solving the “logical problem” of the Trinity arose especially with the attempt by analytic philosophers and theologians to defend the logical coherence of Christian doctrine. Echoing “de Régnon’s paradigm,” with its one-sidedness, these intellectuals have been led to identify two basic Trinitarian models with their variations under the rubric of *social trinitarianism* (“three self” theories) and *Latin trinitarianism* (“one self” theories).¹⁴ Schematically, the former amounts to the Greek/Eastern patristic view, giving priority to the diversity of the Trinitarian persons, the latter to the Latin/Western, stressing the unity of God. This distinction, although useful, is still misleading, to the extent that it does not take into account several figures of both currents like Athanasius of Alexandria, Tertullian, Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus, Peter Lombard, etc., who could be easily classified in the opposite camp.¹⁵

The central commitment of social trinitarianism, exemplified mainly by the Cappadocians, lies in the fact that there are three distinct centers of self-consciousness in God (following a more contemporary conception of the person;

Kristin Hennessy, “An Answer to De Régnon’s Accusers: Why We Should Not Speak of ‘His’ paradigm,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100, no. 2 (2007): 179–97.

- 13 See for instance, Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997); Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1957), who extensively draws on de Régnon; John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006); Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2003).
- 14 For a general, comprehensive and critical overview of all the different models and theories, cf. D. Tuggy, “Trinity,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed March 23, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trinity/> (access 2024/01/26).
- 15 Cf. Cross, “Two Models”; Moreland-Graig, “The Trinity.”

cf. the distinction between humanity in general and Peter, Paul, Mary, etc. in particular) with a danger of resulting in tritheism, while in Latin trinitarianism, championed primarily by Augustine and Aquinas, there is only one God, not compromised by the diversity of persons (Augustine is hesitant to speak of "three persons"), possibly leading to a classic version of modalism (as is the case with K. Barth or K. Rahner).¹⁶

Three major sub-models of social trinitarianism have been identified: a) functional monotheism, b) group mind monotheism and c) trinity monotheism, each of them often being developed in different directions, yet keeping close to the basic assumption of the plurality in God.¹⁷

Functional monotheism proposes a "harmonious [...] interrelated functioning"¹⁸ of the three persons as the basis of their unity. Richard Swinburne, for instance, drawing on Richard St. Victor's "trinity of love" model (in which love is understood as perfect, fully mutual and total sharing) and distinguishing between God and divine, holds that each of the three "is God" in the sense that each possesses all divine attributes, while he intends to overcome previous accusations that an overemphasis on causal intra-trinitarian relations makes the Son a sort of divine creature (drawing a distinction between "ontological and metaphysical necessity"¹⁹ or his more nuanced account of "dependent and independent necessity"²⁰).

The *group mind model*, (represented by, among others, Champion, Bartlett, and Williams)²¹ claims that Trinity is a group mind composed by the (sub) minds of the three persons in the Godhead.²² In this respect the mind of the Trinity itself should not be understood as a self-conscious self in addition to

16 For a critical survey, see Moreland-Graig, "The Trinity," and Tuggy, "Trinity."

17 Cf. Moreland-Graig, "The Trinity," and Tuggy, "Trinity."

18 Moreland-Graig, "The Trinity," 35.

19 Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 88.

20 Richard Swinburne, "The Social Theory of the Trinity," *Religious Studies* 54, no. 3 (2018): 419–37.

21 Cf. John Champion, *Personality and the Trinity* (New York: Flemming H. Revell Co, 1935); Charles Bartlett, *The Triune God* (New York: American Tract Society, 1937); C. J. F. Williams, "Neither Confounding the Persons nor Dividing the Substance", in *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne*, ed. A. G. Padgett (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 227–43.

22 Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," in *The Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 221; Moreland-Graig, "The Trinity," 36; Michalis Philippou, "Θέματα Αναλυτικής Χριστιανικής θεολογίας," in *άλλες μελέτες στην αναλυτική φιλοσοφία της θρησκείας*, ed. St. Virvidakis, M. Philippou (Athens: Artos Zoes, 2018), 463ff (in Greek); Tuggy, "Trinity."

the three sub-minds, an understanding that would amount to Quaternity. For this model to become more intelligible, Leftow²³ employs quite controversial thought experiments involving surgical operations in human beings so as to conceptualize the relation between the sub-minds in the group-mind.

Trinity monotheism (championed by D. Brown, K. Yandell, L. Graig, J. P. Moreland, et.al.)²⁴ holds that although the three divine persons are divine, it is the Trinity as a whole that can be properly called God. In this regard “the Trinity is the sole instance of the divine nature.”²⁵ This part-whole understanding of the divinity of the persons again relies on an ambivalent understanding of the concept of “God” (the Trinity is God; Father, Son, and Spirit are divine persons). Peter van Inwagen,²⁶ by employing the concept of “relative identity” (the Father is the same being as the Son; the Father is not the same person as the Son) indirectly attempts to defend the coherence of this model.

On the contrary, Brian Leftow,²⁷ a strong critic of the *social* theory and a basic advocate of *Latin trinitarianism*, on the basis of the Athanasian Creed, the Council of Toledo (675), Thomas Aquinas, and the analogy of time travel, makes use of the concept of the “trope” (an individualized case of an attribute; “the Persons have the same trope of deity”)²⁸ so as to conceptualize his understanding of God as “living three life-streams,” by famously referring to the “Radio City Music Hall Rockets.”²⁹ Following his argumentation, God’s life naturally runs in three streams; that is, “God’s life consists of three non-overlapping lives going at once.”³⁰ To secure the diversity of the Persons and avoid the thread of modalism, Leftow perceives Aquinas understanding of relational properties in terms of “acts/events” which constitute the Triune life.

23 Leftow, “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” 221.

24 David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London: Duckworth/Open Court, 1985); Keith Yandell, “The most brutal and inexcusable error in counting?: Trinity and consistency,” *Religious Studies* 30, no. 2 (1994): 201–17; J. P. Moreland and W. L. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003); W. L. Craig, “Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder,” *Philosophia Christi* 8, no. 1 (2006): 101–13.

25 Moreland-Graig, “The Trinity,” 39; Philippou, “Topics of Analytic Christian Theology,” *Θέματα Αναλυτικής Χριστιανικής Θεολογίας*, 459.

26 See his “Three Persons in One Being: On Attempts to Show that the Doctrine of the Trinity is Self-Contradictory,” in Rea, *Oxford Readings*, 61 ff.

27 Brian Leftow, “A Latin Trinity,” in Rea, *Oxford Readings*, 77 ff.

28 Leftow, “A Latin Trinity,” 77.

29 Ibid., 79 ff. In contrast see William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tripersonal God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 109 ff.

30 Leftow, “A Latin Trinity,” 86.

A nuanced version of "one-self theory," put forth by the two "Karls," Barth and Rahner, suggests a different reception of the term person as "modes of being"³¹ or "manners of subsisting"³² so as to remain faithful to biblical monotheism. Yet, serious problems arise with regard to the coherence of this doctrine, which amounts to a revival of the Sabelianism of old, to the degree that the different modes might be considered "strictly sequential,"³³ or in logical and not ontological terms.

Another quite interesting new theory classified in between social and Latin trinitarianism is the Brower/Rea "Material Constitution" model of the Trinity.³⁴

Having sketched in brief the variety of models which try to conceptualize the Trinitarian doctrine, we must ask in which model one can classify Bulgakov's trinitarianism. One can certainly relate Bulgakov's theology to social trinitarianism in general and the Trinity monotheism sub-model in particular. Although he makes use of various philosophical tools in his attempt to build his system, Bulgakov is more at ease with the Eastern patristic tradition, which seeks to interpret it through the lens of his much-contested and sometimes obscure sophiology. According to Bulgakov Divine Sophia, is considered "the pleroma, the divine world, existent in God and for God."³⁵ In other words, Sophia (as far as it concerns the divine being), while it "is nothing other than God's nature," is more than this, since it is the very self-revelation of the entire Holy Trinity; it is the divine world within which the divine ousia is revealed and hypostasized in the three hypostases. As he puts it, "Sophia [...] as the divine world, exists in God and [...] is present before God."³⁶ To paraphrase a definition used before, "Sophia [in the place of The Trinity] is the sole instance of the divine nature." By making use of the Sophia concept, Bulgakov seeks to move beyond bygone conceptual bipolarities that give priority either to *ousia* or *hypostasis* in the Trinity—which according to him do not successfully elucidate God's trinitarian being. In this vein, he tries to give an active role to each one of the divine persons in God's self-revelation as Trinity. Through then the

31 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, i2, trans. G. T. Thomson, and Harold Knight, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956).

32 Rahner, *The Trinity*, 42–5, 103–15.

33 Tuggy, "Trinity."

34 Jeffrey Brower and Michael Rea, "Material Constitution and the Trinity," in Rea, *Oxford Readings*, 128 ff.

35 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 103.

36 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 30.

ad intra relationships of the divine persons, God the Trinity is actualized. As Papanikolaou puts it:

All that God is, which is the self-revelation of God to Godself, is actualized in the eternal being of God and this actualization is the work of the Holy Spirit, whose relationship to the Son is such that the Holy Spirit actualized the content that is the Son, and in so doing, brings to completion the self-revelation of Absolute Spirit.³⁷

Sophia appears then to function as the conceptual background of Bulgakov's firm Trinitarian ontological view of the whole reality (divine world and the created realm). In this vein, it is not an exaggeration to argue that the so-called "Linguistic Trinity" is nothing other than the Sophia–Trinity account, being "actualized" in the realm of language, as the "I am A" [= subject–copula–predicate] proposition (and vice versa).

The "Material Constitution theory" and Bulgakov's "Linguistic Trinity"

In this section, by exploring the model of *Material Constitution* as it was initially proposed by Michael Rea and Jeffrey Brower, along with certain comments suggested by William Hasker,³⁸ I seek to show that Bulgakov's "Linguistic Trinity" can possibly fit into this scheme so as to provide a possible way out of the logical problem of the Trinity.

a) What is the meaning of the "material constitution" theory. In Brower's and Rea's words:

This problem arises whenever it appears that an object *a* and an object *b* share all of the same parts and yet have different modal properties. To take just one of the many well-worn examples in the literature: Consider a bronze statue of the Greek goddess, Athena, and the lump of bronze that constitutes it. On the one hand, it would appear that we must recognize at least two material objects in the region occupied by the statue for presumably the statue cannot survive the process of being melted

37 Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Why Sophia? Bulgakov the Theologian," *The Wheel* 26–27 (2021):17. For a detailed account of Bulgakov's Trinitarian metaphysics, see Brandon Gallaher, *Freedom and Necessity in Modern Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

38 Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tripersonal God*, 129 ff.

down and recast, whereas the lump of bronze can. On the other hand, our ordinary counting practices lead us to recognize only one material object in the region.³⁹

In their view the problem of material constitution should be understood in the light of Aristotle's notion of "accidental sameness." According to the Greek philosopher,

familiar particulars (trees, cats, human beings, etc.) are hylomorphic compounds—things that exist because and just so long as some *matter* instantiates a certain kind of *form*. Forms, for Aristotle, are complex organizational properties, and properties are immanent universals (or, as some have it, tropes). The matter of a thing is not itself an individual thing; rather, it is that which combines with a form to make an individual thing.⁴⁰

Following this line of argumentation, a hylomorphic compound is constituted by *matter* and *form*, or in the paradigmatic example of a living organism which is preferred by Aristotle, the same hylomorphic compound is now constituted by a substance (in the place of matter) and an accidental property (in the place of form).

By virtue of various, and sometimes "kooky" paradigms (like the one referring to the "seated-Socrates" and Socrates)⁴¹ Aristotle would agree with the common sense that there is only one material object that fills, in this respect, a particular place, as is the case, for instance, in the kooky paradigm of Socrates and seated Socrates. The two "objects" then, while they share all of the same parts, have different modal properties, meaning that they are no longer two different objects, a fact that would contradict common sense, since it is impossible for two objects to occupy one and the same place. In this perspective Aristotle would argue that the relation between the two objects is not one of identity but is a variety of "numerical sameness," that is, two objects (Socrates and seated Socrates) are "one in number but not in being."⁴² If one thinks that this example is too "kooky" for serious reflection, one could take into account another more common example, that of the bronze statue and the lump of bronze:

39 Brower and Rea, "Material Constitution," 127.

40 Brower and Rea, "Material Constitution," 131.

41 Ibid., 132–33, referring particularly to Gareth Matthews, "Accidental Unities," in *Language and Logos*, ed. M. Schoenfeld and M. Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

42 Brower and Rea, "Material Constitution," 132–33.

Thus, one can continue to believe that there are bronze statues and lumps of bronze, that every region occupied by a bronze statue is occupied by a lump of bronze, that no bronze statue is identical to a lump of bronze (after all, statues and lumps have different persistence conditions), but also that there are never two material objects occupying precisely the same place at the same time.

Indeed, if one reflects on the relationship between a lump of bronze, a bronze statue and the statue, one should admit that the one and the same place is still occupied by one single object, the statue, while at the same time one can identify three different objects (the bronze statue, the lump etc.), to the extent that common sense does not always “count by identity.” In spite of any welcome reservations that one might have or any similarities with the Relative Identity theory outlined above, it seems that the “material constitution” theory provides us with the general framework and the appropriate conceptual tools for seeking a solution to the logical problem of the Trinity.

b) In this respect, Sergii Bulgakov is not an ordinary thinker.⁴³ Well known for his quite controversial sophiology, he widely authored on various philosophical and theological topics with remarkable creativity for a contemporary Orthodox intellectual. It is not my purpose here to either focus on Sophia or to fully deal with his rich and multilevel work. In contrast, and having briefly referred to his Sophia account, special attention will be paid to two quite important works of his, little known because they remained untranslated until recently, but highly valuable for the discussion of the “logical problem of the Trinity.” By doing so I do not argue that Bulgakov can be considered an analytic thinker *per se* in the modern sense of the term, or that the above described “Material Constitution theory” is but a sequel of his overall philosophical explorations. However, as it will become clear, his speculations on language and consciousness present interesting and valuable points of convergence with this theory which can certainly be utilized in the discussion.

It was the atmosphere of his early period that led him to join the debate about the nature and the limits of language in God-talking. Bulgakov has been intensely involved in the well-known “imiaslavie (name-worshipping)” contro-

43 For an overview of his legacy and thought see the special double issue 26–27 of *The Wheel* including contributions by Rowan Williams, Aristotle Papanikolaou, Brandon Gallaher, Andrew Louth, Regula Zwahlen, etc.

versy⁴⁴ that broke out around the relationship of the Name of God to God on Mount Athos. Following eminent colleagues and friends like Pavel Florenskii, Bulgakov sided with those who asserted that God is contained and present in the Name.⁴⁵ An output of this historical adventure was the book *Philosophy of the Name* (1917–1921), where Bulgakov seems to provide a preliminary sketch of what could be called a "trinitarian ontological view" (that is, Being is trinitarian in itself). In this respect he focuses on language, as a revelatory means through which we obtain knowledge of the surrounding world. In an otherwise quite paradoxical assertion, in which one can discern a hidden theological concern that recalls the modern animal studies, Bulgakov claims that "God brought all the animals to Adam, in order to see [...] how they named themselves through him and in him." In this vein, language in general and names in particular take on an ontological aspect, not being merely functional words without relevance for reality; they rather "function as modes of being and acting of that which is named."⁴⁶ If this is the case, the Name of Jesus is not an abstract name, but Jesus himself. Being well informed about patristic theology, Bulgakov couples this view with the famous Palamite distinction between divine essence and energies, so as to further substantiate the ontological character of language, as it is clearly expressed in a single proposition (subject/copula/predicate-name). As Bulgakov himself put it in his *Philosophy of The Name*, the subject of the proposition points to the essence while the predicate/name is understood as the energy: "the pronoun expresses by itself the ousia, the name [...] is the revelation of a thing [...] because in the name its [...] *energeia* is made manifest."⁴⁷ Clearly, Bulgakov is a realist in his metaphysical vision, an element which can be coupled with a certain "materialism" in his religious view, in opposition to any philosophical or religious idealism, evident in many of his counterparts of the time, not only in religion but also in philosophy.

According to Heath, what is distinctive for Bulgakov, is not that he just makes use of the Palamite distinction (a common gesture of most of the contemporary Orthodox theologians and scholars), but that he approaches the

44 For a general account see Scott M. Kenworthy, "The Name-Glorifiers (Imiaslavie) Controversy", in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, eds. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, and Randall A. Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 327–42.

45 Joshua Heath, "Sergii Bulgakov's Linguistic Trinity," 3.

46 Ibid., 4.

47 *Filosofia Imeni [The Philosophy of the Name]*, 50, 61, as cited in Heath's "Sergii Bulgakov's Linguistic Trinity."

proposition in clear Trinitarian terms, a move that will be fully expressed, and I would say completed, in his *The Tragedy of Philosophy*. Besides, as has been argued recently, “these works represented the beginning of Bulgakov’s final transition to the mature works of theology.”⁴⁸

Thus, in *The Philosophy of the Name*, Bulgakov argues that the subject of a proposition counts for “the first hypostasis of being in which is generated the second hypostasis, the word, and which, perceiving its bond with the verbal expression [...] accomplishes its third hypostasis (the copula).”⁴⁹ Following at some point his predecessor Vladimir Soloviev,⁵⁰ Bulgakov would clearly see in language a revelation of the trinitarian structure that underlies the whole reality. As Heath observes again, a weak point in this vein is that Bulgakov does not discern between a clear personal or an impersonal nature of the proposition: For him the subject can easily be an “it”, not necessarily a He or She. By no means can this be seen as an inadequacy of his thought. Rather, it can be better understood as an initial and perhaps immature understanding of the trinitarian structure of the proposition which needed to be further developed and nuanced in his later work.

Thus, this line of thought would be further advanced in his *The Tragedy of Philosophy*. In this more or less mature sequel to his early linguistic explorations, Bulgakov would more clearly connect the inherent trinitarian structure of reality with the Holy Trinity. According to Heath, the “fundamental form of the proposition is not ‘A is B’ but rather ‘I am A.’”⁵¹ Not an impersonal tripartite structure but a personal one, which now is clearly bound to the Holy Trinity.

Since a proposition always consists of three basic elements, that is, the “subject, a predicate, and a copula,” Bulgakov argues for the trinitarian foundation of the whole reality, the Substance, Being. As he clearly puts it, “Substance is a living proposition consisting of a subject, a predicate, and a copula,”⁵² the three in one at once, a sentence which can be considered a response to the diachronic philosophical question about the relationship between the One and the many, which often prioritizes unity/monism over otherness or multiplicity, in our case, triunity. In his latter book Bulgakov finds the opportunity to provide a

48 John Milbank, “Introduction” to Bulgakov’s, *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, trans. *ibid.*, xl.

49 *Filosofia Imeni* [The Philosophy of the Name], 50, as cited in Heath’s “Sergii Bulgakov’s Linguistic Trinity.”

50 Cf. his *Lectures on Divine Humanity*, ed. and trans. Boris Jakim (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1995).

51 Heath, “Sergii Bulgakov’s Linguistic Trinity,” 5.

52 Bulgakov, *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, 236.

certain misreading in the history of philosophy, which tends to absolutize one of the elements of the proposition over against the triunity of the reality. As he himself argues: "Substance" exists not only "in itself," as a subject, but also "for itself," as a predicate, and, moreover, "in and for itself," in the copula, as existence," so as to confirm the triune nature of reality. And he continues by saying: "And these three beginnings are by no means merely dialectical moments of a unity, negating each other and being sublated into a synthesis; no, they are, simultaneously and with equal dignity, three, like three roots of being which in their joint result make up the life of substance."⁵³ Bulgakov will also provide a scheme by which he tries to clarify the relationship between these three poles:

In this way, substance is like an equilateral triangle



whose angles may be placed in any order, but in which each of the three necessarily presupposes both of the others.⁵⁴

In contrast to *Philosophy of the Name*, in this work Bulgakov is more confident and clear in connecting the proposition not with an abstract dialectic trinity but with the trinitarian doctrine: "The subject, the hypostasis, is the first; the predicate, the εἶδος [eidos], the second; the copula, existence, φύσις [phusis], the third. Yet it is impossible to say that the third element is thereby in any sense the synthesis of the first and the second, or that the first is the thesis to the second's antithesis. In general, these three moments are by no means of a logical nature, of the kind which necessarily characterizes dialectical contradictions. On the contrary, they stand for ontological relationships."⁵⁵

Bulgakov's insistence on the triune character of Substance, meaning of the whole reality, has tremendous importance for our discussion here. Without being involved in all the details of his complex thought and for the sake of our argumentation in this respect, I would try to merely rephrase the material constitution theory, as described above, so as to show Bulgakov's relevance for contemporary analytic, philosophical thought.

⁵³ Bulgakov, *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, 11.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 18–19.

Consider then instead of the bronze statue of the Greek goddess, and the lump of bronze that constitutes it, the fundamental proposition "I am A." On the one hand, it would appear that we must recognize at least three "elements" (subject, predicate and copula) in the proposition. At the same time, our ordinary counting practices lead us to recognize only one proposition/Substance. The three "objects" then, while they share all of the same parts, have different modal properties (e.g. being subject, predicate or copula), meaning that they are no longer three different "objects", a fact that would contradict common sense, since it is impossible for three "objects" to occupy the same place at once. In this perspective, Aristotle would argue that the relation between these three "objects" is not one of identity (consider here Bulgakov's reservations about the predominant tendency of philosophy towards monism) but is a variety of "numerical sameness," meaning that three "objects" (I, am, A) are "one in number but not in being." If one thinks that the example of "Socrates and seated Socrates," much used by analytic thought today, is too "kooky" to be taken seriously, let us reflect closer on the bronze example to further justify Bulgakov's primordial assumption of the triune character of Substance.

Returning again to the previous analysis of the "material constitution" theory, one can continue to believe that there are bronze statues and lumps of bronze, in our cases that there is a subject, a predicate and a copula, which together constitute one and the same proposition, one Substance while no subject is identical to its predicate or copula (after all, subjects and predicates have different persistent conditions), but also that there are never three "objects," occupying precisely the same place at the same time, but just one proposition/Substance.

Indeed, if one looks more carefully at the relationship between the subject (say, a lump of bronze), the predicate (the bronze statue) and the copula (the statue), one should admit that the one and the same place is still occupied by one single object, the one proposition/Substance (the statue), while at the same time one can clearly identify three different objects (the subject, the predicate and the copula), to the extent that common sense does not always "count by identity." Linguistic Trinity then, this primordial structure as it has been described by Bulgakov, appears to fit well the theory that in my view is the most adequate, that of "material constitution," ready to offer valuable insights into the analytic discussion of the logical problem of the Trinity.

If we would like to offer a preliminary practical application of Bulgakov's linguistic Trinity (encapsulated in the following verses: "Substance" exists not only "in itself," as a subject, but also "for itself," as a predicate, and, moreover, "in and for itself," in the copula, as existence" and "Substance is a living prop-

osition consisting of a subject, a predicate, and a copula"), then one could set out two of the central tenets of the doctrine of the Trinity, where his view perfectly fits:

Thesis 1: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not identical (which amounts to the personal otherness in the Trinity: subject/predicate/copula);

Thesis 2: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are consubstantial (which amounts to the one divine substance: one proposition/Substance).

What is lacking here is the special role attributed—according to certain authors —⁵⁶ by the Greek Fathers to the hypostasis of the Father as the cause of existence of the other two hypostases, which in traditional terms is known as the *monarchia* of the Father.

By Way of a Conclusion

This is a chapter only introductory in character, seeking to read Bulgakov as an analytic thinker. My initial goal was to deal with Bulgakov's more philosophical work, showing how valuable a resource it can be for the ongoing discussion taking place in analytic (but also continental) philosophy with respect to the trinitarian doctrine. Despite the hesitancy on the part of the Orthodox due to their apophatic overemphasis on working with analytic tools and reason or language in their God-talk, Bulgakov's explorations in language have much to contribute to the deepening of our understanding of the fundamental Christian paradoxical question that is how to combine the One and the Three in the Holy Trinity. Much work remains to be done with respect to certain aspects of Bulgakov's thought, such as how one can incorporate his understanding of Sophia in his "analytic" vision, or what its role is, if it plays a role at all, of the *monarchia* of the Father, a basic axiom of doctrinal orthodoxy, or the relationship between personhood and nature in this scheme.

56 Cf. in particular Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*.