

Building the House of Wisdom. Sergii Bulgakov – 150 Years After His Birth

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Abstracts

Rowan Williams

Bulgakov's Christology

Many readers of Bulgakov will be inclined to agree with the criticism of Lossky and others that his Christology has an Apollinarian flavour. This paper sets out to question this conclusion, on the basis of an examination of how his concept of the “hypostatic” evolves, and argues that he is proposing a model of hypostatic existence in which the idea of generative and meaning-giving *care* for the world is fundamental in defining what consciousness and human agency entail, and is at the centre of any account of the divine image in us.

Brandon Gallaher

Creation out of nothing as Creation out of and in God: Bulgakov's Chalcedonian Ontology

Bulgakov's sophiological account of creation is one of the most obscure and contradictory parts of his work. It weaves together but holds apart God and creation. Creation out of nothing is reenvisioned as a distinct form of active and creatively directed emanation out of God which ultimately can be understood as in or within God with all creaturely being said to mirror Christ in being uncreated-created. This novel but ultimately orthodox doctrine of creation serves a radically Christocentric doctrine of creation: creation embodies a difference in unity of uncreated and created without mingling, without change, indivisibly and undividedly: Chalcedonian ontology.

Catherine Evtuhov

“Religion and Politics”

What does it mean for a religious worldview to lie at the foundation of politics? Bulgakov's 1906 essay with this title explores the deep structures of political parties, whether it is possible for individuals of profoundly different moral convictions to unite around a single political platform, and the crucial place of the church in proposals for reform. My talk turns to the period of Bulgakov's life before and during the Revolution of 1904-7, revisiting his writings in *Osvobozhdenie*, *Voprosy zhizni*, and *Narod* to think once more about Russian politics of the early twentieth century and the possible implications of his deep political engagement for Russia on one hand, and his own later religious-philosophical perspectives on the other.

Panel I: Religion, Politics, and Economics

1) Dionysios Skliris

The World as the Household of Wisdom: Political Theology and Philosophy of Economy

The subject of the paper is how for Fr Sergii Bulgakov 'building the house of Wisdom' comprises Political Theology and Philosophy of Economy as an articulation of practical issues of divine-human communion. The paper will observe Bulgakov's evolution from a Christian socialist stance to a full-blown 'political Sophiology' in the later phase of his work. Bulgakov was influenced by the ideal of 'free theocracy' propounded by Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900). However, he was also interested in pluralism and the distinction between Church and State, which are characteristic of modern liberal democracy. One starting point of Bulgakov's political theology was the irreducible freedom and dignity of the human person. He articulated both democratic and socialist versions of Political theology, but he was also concerned by the prevention of totalitarianism. At the same time, Bulgakov was highly critical of the responsibility of the Church for its entanglement with secular power and for this reason he viewed clericalism as a distortion of authentic Christian political theology. We shall observe how Bulgakov had engaged in a dialogue with liberal democracy. I shall also examine his critique to the atheist presuppositions of some political philosophies which were historically related to liberal democracy, while developing at the same time how Bulgakov envisioned ways in which fundamental liberal values could become an organic part of his Sophiological project. The paper will highlight how Bulgakov tried to formulate a balance between on the one hand the inspiration from the 'primitive communism' of the Church of the 1st century and, on the other hand, his liberal anti-totalitarian stance of non-coercion. And it will be concluded by a comparison with more recent and contemporary approaches, such as on the one hand the various 'Liberation theologies' of social emancipation, and, on the other, the political theologies of divine-human communion, such as the political philosophy of 'methexis' by the 'Radical Orthodoxy' movement, the proposition of a political theology of Chalcedonian theosis that is based in distinctions, propounded by Aristotle Papanikolaou, and the relevant political theology by Rowan Williams.

2) Yuri Safoklov

Independent? Resistant? Cooperative? Father Sergii Bulgakov's Thoughts on the Church-State Relations and the Paradigm of Postsecularism

After its „birth” in Jerusalem, the Christian Church immediately experienced the neighbourship of the state, having transformed from an object of social rejection and state persecution to an influential political and social actor in the Roman Empire. In Russia, the Church underwent an opposite process of having been downgraded from a state-building institution to a minor state authority under Peter I. Sergii Bulgakov elaborated on a concept for the state-church relations in his works and reports for the ROC Local Council of 1917-1918. His visions reveal quite new perspectives on the problem in the ongoing epoch of postsecularism.

3) Tikhon Vasilyev

Rethinking the language of economics as a systematic Christian response to economic and ecological crises in the thought of S. Bulgakov

This paper deals with the problems of modern economics showing why efforts to curb the growth of CO₂ emissions have so far not led to transformative results. It also outlines areas of economic, sociological, philosophical and theological thought that can be considered as an alternative to the existing order. Finally, it discusses Bulgakov's thought and shows how relevant he is to modern discussions in the emerging field of economic theology.

Nathaniel Wood

Bulgakov's Chalcedonian Politics of Divine-Human Personality

Bulgakov's account of Divine-Humanity attempted to deepen the Chalcedonian dogma by examining the dynamic union of the divine and human natures within Christ's personal consciousness. This paper looks at political theology in light of Bulgakov's creative Chalcedonianism, especially his understanding the process of the deification of Christ's human nature. The contemporary relevance of Bulgakov's theology, as well as the Chalcedonian dogma, is revealed in the way the dynamics of Christ's divine-human personality can inform a Christian politics centered on the human person.

Antoine Arjakovsky

Sophiology and personalism, pillars of a new political science for the XXIst century

The universal character of sophiology and personalism, developed by Father Sergius Bulgakov in his book on the *Revelation of John*, lays the foundations for a new political theory which takes seriously the theme of the Kingdom of God on earth. A rediscovery of the Wisdom may enable the state to transform its solitary conception of sovereignty into the trinitarian vision of an open, divine-human and genuinely fraternal society. For the sapiential tradition of Asian religions rediscovered today by the jurist Mireille Delmas Marty, harmony is found in the balance between freedom and security, competition and cooperation, exclusion and integration, innovation and conservation. According to the Judeo-Christian wisdom tradition, the state should be able to embody virtues such as wisdom and discernment, counsel and valor, knowledge and fear. Such an ecumenical metaphysics, capable of reconciling East and West, nature and culture, time and eternity, allows man to be in the world in the mode of being beyond the world.

Panel II: Anthropology and Spirituality

1) Ivan Ilin

'Transcende te ipsum': Faith, Prayer and Name-Worship in Unfading Light

Bulgakov begins his *Unfading Light* with the critique of Western "immanentism" (or onto-theology, to use Heideggerian-Kantian neologism) that compromises Divine transcendence both in ontological (pantheism) and epistemological (full intelligibility of God) dimensions. Bulgakov thus sees his task as reaffirming both ontological (Sophia) and epistemological (faith) transcendence of God in the light of Divine revelation. It's the latter line of thought that will be analyzed in my paper. It shows that faith and reason in Bulgakov are not contradictory but rather interrelated, and examines Bulgakov's "reaffirming" analysis of faith with its constitutive elements—religious experience, prayer, name-worship, and self-transcendence.

2) Sarah Livick-Moses

The Kenotic Iconicity of Sergii Bulgakov's Divine-Humanity: A Feminist Retrieval

Sergii Bulgakov's systematic theology develops both his doctrine of God and his Christology along inherently iconographic lines. The language of Proto-Image and Image in his doctrine of God advances this iconicity in his understanding of the antinomic relationship between God and Creation as grounded in Divine Sophia. The icon later serves as the means by which the kenotic nature of Sophia is demonstrated as fundamental to his Christological and Trinitarian theology, both of which hold implications for his anthropology. This paper will evaluate Bulgakov's iconology and the implications of his work on image and kenosis for our theology of gender and sexuality, as well as suggest potential edges of feminist retrieval for contemporary theological anthropology.

3) Joshua Heath

Sergii Bulgakov and the Practice of Speculation

In this paper, I interpret Bulgakov's speculative writing as a spiritual discipline. I show how his major trilogy – especially its vision of the inherence of the world in God – is a cruciform effort to measure the present by the promise of the coming Kingdom. I support this reading through an analysis of Bulgakov's writings on *ascesis*, which unfold alongside his writings on the nature of thought. I argue that Bulgakov's understanding of *ascesis*, understood as the transformation of one's perspective on the present through Trinitarian self-definition through the other, offers an immanent interpretive framework for analysis Bulgakov's own texts, including the most speculative.

John Milbank

From Grammar to Wisdom: Bulgakov's Trinitarian Ontology

Bulgakov thought that modern philosophy, by ignoring the Trinity, overstressed either subjectivity, objectivity or vital force. More specifically, he neither accepted the Kantian critique, nor the Trinitarian metaphysics of Hegel and Schelling. Instead, he built both upon Jacobi's metacritique of Kant and on the tension between idealism and realism in Fichte, who was responding to Jacobi as much as to Kant. From a Trinitarian perspective this tension need not be resolved. It is instead exacerbated as a grammatical ontology which interprets finite being in terms of real predication or propositionality: all things are involved in the definition of the subject only via the object and what links them is active love. The subjectivity also of the object is approached in the interpersonal realm but only fully achieved in the infinite God.

Nikolaos Asproulis

From Social Trinity to "Linguistic Trinity": Sergii Bulgakov's contribution to analytic theology

In his early *The Philosophy of the Name* and *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, Sergii Bulgakov exploits a trinitarian approach to reality starting from a tripartite understanding of the proposition "I am A"=subject-copula-predicate. In this paper an attempt is made to use this logical-grammatical exploration as a means to struggle with the "logical problem of the Trinity," much discussed in the context of contemporary analytic theology. After briefly describing the relevance of analytic thought for modern Orthodox theology as well as reviewing the dominant views on the Trinity (e.g. the Greek/social and the Latin), the paper will focus on Bulgakov's "linguistic trinity" in relation to "Material Constitution" theory as represented by Michael Rea and Jeffrey Brower in order to justify his view as a valuable, although unintended, Eastern-Orthodox contribution to contemporary philosophy of religion.

Pavel Khondzinskii

Sergii Bulgakov's „Karamazov Excursus”

The last part of the "Big Trilogy" by Sergius Bulgakov, "The Bride Of the Lamb", ends with the excursion "Augustinianism and Predestination", dedicated to the refutation of the theory of predestination, which st. Augustine formulated in polemics with Pelagians. Criticizing Augustine's views on the posthumous fate of unbaptized babies, Bulgakov in his excursus recalls Ivan Karamazov, who rejects world harmony based on the suffering of innocent children. At the same time, a critical analysis of the argumentation presented by Fr. Sergius, reveals that his own concept of "variable" created freedom, leading to apocatastasis, ultimately presupposes the reconciliation of the tormentor with the tortured, against which Ivan Karamazov rebelled first of all.

Panel III: Anthropology and Personhood

1) Deborah Casewell

The Authenticity of Creativity

Sergei Bulgakov's theology coalesces around a personalist understanding of God, and underscores God as creative principle. In this respect, his thought has similarities to a contemporary Orthodox thinker of his, Nikolai Berdyaev, who also underscores personalism and the importance of creative as our response to the world. Bulgakov and Berdyaev's focuses and audiences were, however, different, and Bulgakov speaks more of Sophia and kenosis, unlike Berdyaev, for whom the activity of creativity *ex nihilo* is paramount. This essay will argue that Bulgakov can be seen as presenting a theology of human authenticity, and then use that framing to further contrast his thought with that of Berdyaev. This will open up new ways of exploring Bulgakov's thought, and of applying and analysing his system.

2) Jack Louis Pappas

Sergei Bulgakov's Fragile Absolute: Kenosis, Difference, and Positive Dissociation

This paper places Bulgakov's account of Trinitarian personality in conversation with the metapsychological interpretation of German idealism articulated by Slavoj Žižek. Like Žižek, Bulgakov's reading of idealist sources, is marked by a distinctive emphasis on the positive and meta-transcendental significance of antinomy as an underlying precondition of (both human and divine) personhood. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to at once demonstrate how these features of Bulgakov's theology might be clarified by a metapsychological reading, as well as to explicate how Bulgakov's theology might provide a crucial intervention within contemporary metapsychological theory more broadly.

3) Justin S. Coyle

On Mangodhood: Satan after Schelling

My paper enlarges upon the (largely un-commented) satanology of Sergei Bulgakov. It does so by measuring Bulgakov's use of another unnoticed satanology -- that of F.W.J. Schelling. The paper shows how Bulgakov adopts and adapts Schelling's satanology along three points: self-creation, (anti-)trinitarian theology, and evil's personhood. All of which raises a question: what does it mean that Bulgakov sometimes recovers the Fathers not in spite of Schelling, but rather through him?

David Bentley Hart

Gods, Chimaeras, and Portmanteaux: Bulgakov and the Metaphysics of Personhood

Though it has become a commonplace in modern theology to speak of Christian "personalism," or of Christianity's particular reverence for "personhood"—based chiefly on Trinitarian and Christological dogma—the theological history of the language of "persons" is the history of a largely accidental association between a few minimalist dogmatic formulations and an altogether ambiguous concept. Yet Sergii Bulgakov, through a sort of inextricably interweaving consideration of doctrine, ontology, and a metaphysics of subjectivity produced an account of personhood not only utterly internally coherent, but also, it turns out, fundamental to the Christian understanding of reality.

Panel IV: God-Humanity

1) Dario Colombo

Mariology as personalized Sophiology: Sergii Bulgakov's Chalcedonian Theology

"But the heart and soul, the personal center of creation, is the Virgin Mother." This quote is to be examined. The first step is to present Bulgakov's thinking as a Chalcedonian way of thinking: Jesus is one person in two natures. The Chalcedonian formula opens the question of the God-manhood and presupposes a series of dogmatic premises, which are examined in Sophiology:

Creation was created to receive God. Because Jesus is not a created person, but the divine Logos incarnate it becomes clear, why Mary is the heart and soul of creation: Mary is the one who conceives and gives birth to the incarnating *God*.

2) Austin Holmes

A Proposal for Bulgakovian Ecology

Sergii Bulgakov's theological vision of the natural world provides fertile ground for cultivating an astute ecology. The first part of this paper investigates the ideas of corporeality, sensuality, and beauty in Bulgakov with an eye to contemporary ecology's interest in embodiment and reciprocity. The second part alludes to a qualified Christian animism, panpsychism, or vitalism based on Bulgakov's pneumatology, angelology, and sympathies for pagan religion(s). The third part examines Bulgakov's ruminations on animal life and the eschatological "humanization" of the natural world. Taken as a whole, these elements indicate principles for a future Bulgakovian ecology.

3) Mark McInroy

Shapers of Deification in the West: Sergii Bulgakov and Myrrha Lot-Borodine

This paper maintains that Sergii Bulgakov shaped twentieth-century perceptions of deification in the West through a frequently overlooked route, namely, Myrrha Lot-Borodine's seminal studies of the doctrine published in 1932 and 1933. At a time when many Russian theologians' works remained untranslated, Lot-Borodine's groundbreaking articles presented the first sustained Orthodox defense of deification widely accessible to Western readers. In key regards, however, this paper maintains that Lot-Borodine's studies in fact functioned as a conduit through which Bulgakov's version of the doctrine was made known in the West, even though Bulgakov's influence on Lot-Borodine has often gone unrecognized.

Panel V: Ontology

1) Caleb Henry

Sergii Bulgakov's Early Marxism: A Narrative of Development

This paper offers a brief narrative of Sergii Bulgakov's intellectual development during his Marxist period (circa 1895-1900). After identifying the heart of Bulgakov's Critical Marxism as a correlation of Marxist materialism with the Kantian notion of the transcendental unity of apperception, it tentatively explores the consequences of this conjunction upon Bulgakov's early intellectual evolution, specifically in relation to his developing understanding of materialism itself.

2) Taylor Ross

Creatio ex Sapientia in Sergei Bulgakov's Unfading Light

This paper inspects one piece of “Egyptian treasure” in Fr. Sergei Bulgakov’s storehouse—Plotinus’s initially puzzling doctrine of intelligible matter—in order to clarify the triform taxonomy of “nothing” he limns in his early *Unfading Light*. Embellishing this Plotinian term of art beyond our author’s otherwise vague allusions to its “sophianic” implications promises to elucidate Bulgakov’s subtle distinction between emanation and *creatio ex nihilo*, even as it illuminates the Russian theologian’s recovery of Neoplatonic insights under the auspices of revelation.

3) Liubov Petrova

The Reception of the Palamite Theology in the Sophiology of Sergei Bulgakov

The paper discusses the main avenues of reception of the theology of Gregory Palamas in the sophiology of Sergii Bulgakov and reveals the nature and boundaries of the application of the Palamite discourse in the sophiological conception depending on the stage of development of philosophical and theological thought of Sergii Bulgakov.

Antonio Bergamo

Sergej N. Bulgakov: Entre théologie kénotique de l'évènement et ontologie trinitaire

Sergej Bulgakov's itinerary of thought offers two hermeneutic perspectives that allow for the Christian mystery to be grasped in its globality: the sophiological perspective and the kenotic perspective. These two perspectives, rooted in a preceding tradition, on the one hand unveil a kenotic theology of the event of God's saying/giving himself in Jesus Christ in the light and power of the Spirit, and on the other hand, they refer to the emergence of an ontology that emanates from this event. This paper therefore retraces the underlying lines of thought and potentialities of Bulgakov's contribution, incorporating related studies undertaken by P. Coda in the context of the Sophia University Institute's specialization in Trinitarian Ontology, from the Trinitarian event to its self-revelation and self-communication in creation and in history.

Alexei Kozyrev

Le débat sophiologique dans le contexte de la théologie politique

La sophiologie n'induit pas une doctrine politique définie, mais cela ne signifie pas que le « débat Sophiologique », que nous voyons à son apogée au milieu des années 1930, ne puisse être interprétée dans les limites de l'ontologie politique. Parmi les partisans de la sophiologie, on trouve à la fois la « gauche » (G. Fedotov, dont le journalisme politique est publiquement condamné par la direction de l'Institut St-Serge), et la « droite » (V. Ilyin, publiant un article sur la Sainte Sophia dans le journal “Vozrozhdenie” (“Renaissance”)). Contrairement à la situation avec les “Imeslavcy” (“glorificateurs du Nom”) en 1913, où le sort de la dispute ecclésiastique était soutenu par l'autorité du pouvoir monarchique, la dispute de 1935 s'est déroulée dans une

situation d'incertitude canonique. Les deux juridictions qui ont blâmé Boulgakov se sont retrouvées dans une position hétéronome – le monarchisme ressentimentaliste des Karlovites et le concordat forcé avec le despotisme stalinien des Sergiens. La juridiction de l'Exarchat russe-grecque ("Eulogiens") s'avère être une sorte d'exutoire. Sans faire d'implications politiques forcées pour ses fidèles, elle prépare le terrain pour un développement théologique florissant. Aujourd'hui, la critique de la sophiologie est combinée avec la critique du modernisme visée au concept d' « orthodoxie radicale » (Milbank) par les milieux conservateurs, ou avec les accusations de sophiologues qu'ils ont ouvert la voie au totalitarisme de Staline par des nationalistes. Cependant, parmi les zélotes orthodoxes de la confrérie au nom de Photius, on trouve à la fois le collaborateur Stavrovsky et Vladimir Lossky, un participant à la résistance, et dans la vive opposition de la confrérie au nom de Photius à Boulgakov, on peut voir des rêves slavophiles de christianisation orthodoxe de l'Europe.

Panel VI: Church

1) Nikos Kouremenos

Is it all the Greeks' Fault? Reconsidering the Byzantine Legacy

Bulgakov's *By the Walls of Cherson*, his so-called "catholic temptation", in which Soloviev's influence is more than obvious, was composed in 1922 although remained unpublished for several decades. Key topic is a critical assessment to caesaropapism and ecclesial nationalism, both considered to be consequences of the Byzantine influence upon the Russian church. To what degree was Bulgakov's anti-Byzantine attitude original? In this paper, I will attempt to examine the extent of influence that Slavophiles or Soloviev exercised on Bulgakov's negative perception of Byzantium.

2) Graham McGeoch

Sergius Bulgakov and Latin American Liberation Theology

This paper offers a reading of Sergius Bulgakov from the perspective of Latin American Liberation Theology, highlighting potential links and silences. Liberation Theologians expressed reticence about 'European Political Theology' in the early days – due to its 'middle-class production and therefore essentially 'reformist' nature. Bulgakov's programme is overlooked despite some striking features of his theology, which resonate with Liberation Theology: the nature of the Church, the experience of God, and personhood, not to mention his magisterial reflections regarding Christology and Pneumatology.

3) Adalberto Mainardi

The Vision of Unity. The Ecumenical Thought of Father Sergii Bulgakov

Relying on published and unpublished sources (archival material from WCC, Institute St Serge), the paper will focus on the evolution of Bulgakov's ideas on the unity of the Church. From an early stage, under the influence of Solov'ev, Bulgakov moves to a more nuanced reflection, in relation with his important ecumenical experiences at Lausanne (1927), Edinburgh (1938) and within the St Alban and St Serge Fellowship. His ecumenical views are strictly related to the development of an original ecclesiology, deeply rooted in eschatology.

Natalia Vaganova

Unfinished dispute. How is it possible to criticize Bulgakov's sophiology today?

Thirty years after Sergius Bulgakov's death, protopresbyter John Meyendorff stated that sophiological problems as a scientific topic are exhausted and would no longer be able to arouse any interest among new generations of researchers. This conclusion, as we can see, turned out to be premature. Not only Bulgakov's doctrine, but also the sophiological project as a whole, has recently got renewed attention. Sophiology research has reached a new stage, attracting more and more interest. Nevertheless, a suspicious shadow of heresy lies on 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 were voiced before. Such a "methodological shift" is necessary in order to move on to a substantive criticism of sophiology as such - to the separation of the living from the dead in it and to the identification in this teaching of both the internal moment of the theological and philosophical crisis and the possibilities of positive research outcomes from the current situation.

Paul Gavriluyk

"The Training for Dying and Death": A New Reading of Bulgakov's Sophiology

This paper proposes that the central inspiration of Bulgakov's system was a set of revelatory experiences that he had while confronting mortality in various forms. I show how the encounter with mortality and dying shaped Bulgakov's worldview from his early childhood experiences to his struggle with throat cancer towards the end of his life. My contention is that Bulgakov's central theological intuition – that all things are “in God” – stems from his earth-shattering experiences of witnessing the deaths of those close to him that were accompanied by an equally powerful sense of the reality of eternal life and resurrection. In order to make my case, I look at the sources that are often neglected in the discussions of Bulgakov's theology: his *Autobiographical Notes*, *Spiritual Diary*, and the essay “The Sophiology of Death.” Having established the importance of the *memento mori* theme in Bulgakov's spirituality, I consider its implications for his theological system. I reach a conclusion that eternity revealed through death is an existential axle of Bulgakov's sophiology.