

темы дел Божиих. Но, чтобы взойти к созерцанию этих основ бытия, нужны подвиг очищения от страстей и жизнь по заповедям Евангелия.

Прозреть всюду свет Слова Божия может только преображенный ум. Когда Солнце Правды воссияет в очищенном уме, то все для него выглядит иначе, весь мир видится пронизанным Божественным Светом. Такого рода созерцание есть очень высокая ступень в духовном становлении, предпоследняя и неизбежная в лестнице духовного восхождения, бесконечным пределом которой является созерцание Самого Триипостасного Божества [1, с. 169].

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ANTINOMISM, TRINITY AND THE CHALLENGE OF RATIONALISM IN THE THEOLOGY OF SERGII BULGAKOV

У статті детально досліджуються особливості софіологічної концепції Сергія Булгакова в межах його богословських пошуків, дається їй виважена оцінка з урахуванням намірів мислителя та отриманих ним результатів.

Ключові слова: Бог, Абсолют, Творець, Божественна Софія, Тварна Софія, Усія, творіння, сутність, іпостась.

В статье детально исследуются особенности софиологической концепции Сергия Булгакова в рамках его богословских исканий, дается ее взвешенная оценка с учетом намерений мыслителя и полученных им результатов.

Ключевые слова: Бог, Абсолют, Творец, Божественная София, Тварная София, Усия, творение, сущность, ипостась.

The paper examines in detail the features of Bulgakov's Sophiology concept in his theological inquiry, given its balanced assessment taking into account the intentions of the thinker and his results.

Key words: God, the Absolute, the Creator, the Divine Sophia, the Created Sophia, Ousia, creation, essence, hypostasis.

The accusations of pantheism and determinism against Bulgakov's sophiology are well known although the complexity and obscurity of his theology has often prevented a sober evaluation of the substance of these accusations. It is hoped that conferences such as ours will go some ways towards preparing the ground for a long-needed critical judgment concerning his theology that avoids the extremes of both enthusiasm and condemnation. What is less well appreciated is that in Bulgakov's own theology he was attempting to overcome what he regarded as problems with pantheism, determinism and rationalism in Solov'ev's own sophiology. Here his antinomism is crucial in understanding his theological project and in this paper we will explore its relevance for sophiology and Trinitarian theology, some of the problems of Bulgakov's thought (which ironically are where he falls into the same errors as Solov'ev) and a possible antinomic response in Bulgakov's theology to these difficulties.

Solov'ev, Bulgakov argued, 'generally sins by an excessive rationalism in his theology' insofar as he conflates a speculative account of the self-generation of the Absolute discernible to reason with the Christian *revelation* of the Holy Trinity, which is the crux of reason, resulting in 'an excessive deduction of creation' [3, p.140, 167]. This can be seen particularly in Solov'ev's characterization 'without elucidation' of the 'transcendent absolute' by the 'problematic' kabbalistic notion *En-Sof* which he then 'illegally and without any explanation' equates with the hypostasis of the Father on which basis he then 'rationally deduces its relation to the world' and the world and the Absolute's 'mutual determination' of one another [3, p.130-133, 140]. *En-Sof* and God the Father, Bulgakov continues, are treated as synonymous when they are actually quite distinct ideas 'belonging to different planes' with the former being 'the transcendent Godhead before disclosure' [3, p.140], the 'NOT-something' of negative theology [3, p.140], whereas the latter, being 'the first hypostasis of the triune God' [3, p.140], concerns 'God

who discloses Himself to the world—as the beginning [*nachalo*] of this disclosure'[3, p.140] Bulgakov specifically notes how Solov'ev, having 'completely swallowed up and excluded' the "Other" 'by the notion of absolute all-unity', then imports metaphysical "need" into the Absolute thereby 'limiting [the absolute] by means of some incomprehensible fashion not in accordance with its notion.' Creation cannot be impelled if it is a divine free act of God: 'The "Other" can be created only entirely without constraint and one is not supposed to [create] from metaphysical necessity' [3, p.167]. Bulgakov is objecting here not simply to Solov'ev's rationalism, but to God being made into what Karl Barth would later call a 'world-principle' [4, p.140]. But is there a response to this conundrum?

Here Bulgakov, following Florensky's understanding of truth as the formal logical form of an antinomy or self-contradictory judgement where the antithesis entrains its thesis and vice-versa, argues that antinomy is especially characteristic of religious consciousness with its contact with the mystery of the transcendent world. Religious experience, for reason, contains what appears to be a contradiction. On the one hand, one has God, as the object of religion, what is given to religious consciousness, who is something, which is utterly transcendent, alien to what is natural and external to man and the world. On the other hand, God reveals himself to the religious consciousness of man: 'he touches it, he enters within it, he becomes its immanent content.' Both moments of religious consciousness are given simultaneously as 'poles, in their mutual repulsion and attraction.' The object of this consciousness, the Godhead, is both 'transcendentally-immanent or immanently-transcendent' since God is necessarily *both* (error comes from emphasizing only one of the poles) the one who dwells in light inaccessible (1 Tim. 6:16) and the one who condescends to reveal Himself to the world and dwell with man as a man (Jn. 14:23) [3, p.99]. When we translate these basic elements of experience into the

language of the philosophy of religion 'we immediately see that before us is clearly a contradictory combination of concepts resulting in an antinomy' since the transcendent cannot be simultaneously immanent and remain transcendent and vice versa [3, p.29, 39, 99, 102]. Antinomy admits of two contradictory, logically incompatible, but 'ontologically equally necessary assertions', which testify to the existence of a mystery beyond which reason cannot penetrate but which is 'actualized and lived in religious experience' [9, p.77]. Yet *rational* impossibility and contradictoriness is not the guarantee of a *real* impossibility so we should be spurred on to lay bare and realize the antinomies of religious consciousness to their furthest consequences to discern the mystery. When applied to theological truths we are forced to hold both thesis and antithesis together through a "*podvig* of faith."

We then shall explore how Bulgakov applied his antinomism to the Doctrine of God. Bulgakov's theological antinomism can be seen particularly clearly in three key antinomies [1, p.264]. He argues, firstly, that "God" in Himself, insofar as one can say anything about Him, is an Absolute "Not-is" or Divine Nothingness beyond all relations, that is, theological apophaticism. Yet God is simultaneously absolute relation in Himself (immanent Trinity), that is, theological kataphaticism. However, an apophatic understanding of God, without being tempered by kataphaticism, ultimately negates everything including Being itself which implies a relationship including God's relationship to creation. One must, therefore, inevitably turn in theology to God's relationship to a creation over against Him that defines Him as its "God." One is immediately faced here with a cosmological antinomy between God as Absolute self-relation in Himself (immanent Trinity) who is perfect eternal fullness and completeness and, as God creates the world out of love putting Himself in relation to it with its temporal relative and becoming Being, God as Absolute-Relative (economic Trinity). For God as Absolute self-relation in Himself creation need not have been created but for God as Absolute-Relative, creation is a part of God's own self-definition as Creator and Redeemer and so it had to be created for God to be God. At least ideally, Bulgakov holds to a unity between these two self-definitions of God with the Absolute being *in* the Absolute-Relative or the immanent *in* the economic Trinity. The last antinomy explored is between the Uncreated or Divine Sophia which is the eternal *ousia/Godmanhood* of the Holy Trinity by which God the Father reveals Himself to Himself through His "Dyad" of the Son and Spirit *and* the Created Sophia which is the divine basis of creation or even creation itself which is God's Wisdom dwelling in non-being and becoming.

However, there are serious problems with this theology. Bulgakov argues that two modes/images of Sophias apparently "exist", one which is primary and divine—that is, the divine world, the *ousia* of the Holy Trinity as a movement of love—and one which is secondary and created—that is, the created Being of creation which is the divine love/Sophia of God poured out in becoming—but they are one in a unity in difference [5, p.60; 8, p.126]. Bulgakov certainly favours this "antinomic" conception of Sophia, but he stresses that they are one reality and the Created Sophia (creation) is the Divine Sophia (the divine substance) in becoming and so He can express this in unitary language which emphasizes creation as a mode of God: 'The one Sophia and the one divine world exist both in God, and in creation, although in different ways: preeternally and in time, absolutely and relatively (as a creature)' [2, p.239; 1, p.262]. It is not an accident that this account of creation appears *prima facie* monist and

emanationist since Bulgakov was attempting to marry the Christian doctrine of creation (emphasizing freedom) with a sort of quasi-emanationism or divine outpouring/overflowing (*izliianie* as opposed to strict *emanatsiia*) (emphasizing necessity) [5, p.69; 3, p.167]. This is a form of the Neo-Platonist tradition of the self-diffusiveness of the Good [12] but Bulgakov was consciously highlighting its latent pantheism and attempting to Christianize it. The Created Sophia is sometimes identified with the world soul understood as the divine foundation of creation or divine energies [5, p.63, 79,172, 176] and sometimes with creation as such [5, p.52, 55, 62]. Yet this lack of clarity about creation is not crucial for Bulgakov's system because, following Solov'ev [12, p. 78], all Being must be a mode of divine Being so that properly speaking 'The world as the creaturely Sophia is uncreated-created' [5, 63]. Creation is not merely *implicitly* divine but quite *explicitly* so in its foundation. Bulgakov held that only the Absolute God, Holy Trinity, properly *is*, having Being (*ousia*), essence and existence. God is Absolute, possessing the All, and nothing can limit Him or He would cease to be Absolute but merely relative. There can be nothing alongside of, outside of or apart from the divine Being of God, Sophia, neither the creature nor the "nothing" out of which it is created since 'all belongs to this life and world' of God as Trinity [5, p.43, 117; 8, p.124-125; 9, p.148]. Bulgakov alleged that this was not pantheism as an impious pantheistic 'deification of the world', but 'an entirely pious' [6, p.199-200; 10, p. 144-146] pantheism which is more precisely called 'pantheism' understood as 'the truth that all is in God or of God' [7, p. 27; 9, pp. 71-73, 147] or 'the world is that which is not God [*ne-Bog*] existing in God, God is that which is not the world [*ne-mir*] existing in the world. God posits the world outside of Himself, but the world possesses its Being in God' [1, p.262].

Bulgakov is continually reducing his antinomies to one of their theses thereby undermining his own theology. Thus the cosmological antinomy is reduced to its antithesis of God as Absolute-Relative ("God in creation") insofar as God as Absolute ("God in Himself") eternally co-posites Himself as Absolute and Creator thus wholly immanentizing Divinity. In turn, the sophiological antinomy is reduced to the thesis of the Divine Sophia insofar as creaturely Being (the created Sophia) is simply a different mode/image of the Divine. Indeed, one might even go so far as to say that the central difficulty in Bulgakov's system is not that it is antinomic, or even that he reduces all of his antinomies to one of its theses, but that he is not antinomic enough insofar as his cosmological and sophiological antinomies are *false* antinomies as the same reality is simply stated twice but in a different form. Absolute-Relative is still the Absolute only eternally positing itself in becoming just as the Created Sophia is simply the Divine Sophia in the 'stream of becoming' [1, p.261; 12, p.155]. Bulgakov's antinomism, which attempts to balance the transcendence and immanence of God, is continually being undermined by the role of Sophia, as a sort of immanentizing drive in Bulgakov's thought. Sophia, which is ostensibly the idea of the identity *and* difference of the divine and creaturely, often seems to degenerate in him into a trope for the divine nature of all Being insofar as God not only will be but is all in all. Indeed, we are speaking of the negation of freedom through the necessity of divine love. Since love/Sophia is covalent with Godmanhood, Christ, as the God-Man who calls us to our own Godmanhood in Him, has become the 'law of Being for natural humanity.' Bulgakov refers to the force of this law as 'sophianic determinism' [8, p.435; 9, pp.146-148].

But is there some way of out of this pantheistic morass? One possibility, and we shall devote the last portion of the paper to exploring it, is that when Bulgakov says that the Divine and Creaturely Sophias are one this is in reference to the unity of God's self-revelation in Himself and in creation since there exists a fourth antinomy between the unrevealed divine ousia and its revelation as sophia. If Sophia is the self-revealed divine Being in whom the Father reveals Himself by His two hands (Son and Spirit) then what of His "hidden essence"? The Father in Himself as a hypostasis remains undisclosed and He only reveals Himself in and as His self-revealed Being of divine Love-Sophia through His dyad so that the undisclosed depth, the primordial darkness, the mystery, source and depth of His hypostatic Being God is Ousia. Bulgakov does not wish to separate the Being of God proper (*Ousia*) from what is revealed (Sophia) as what is revealed is a true-revelation, identical in the divine life so He speaks of Sophia-Ousia. The Ousia of God abides within the Father, He possesses Himself as Love but unrevealed 'in the capacity of Sophia' and he states this in the following formula: 'Sophia so far as the hypostasis of the Father is concerned, connotes predominantly Ousia-prior to its revelation as Sophia' [9, p.41]. Ousia, therefore, is the common unrevealed foundation or substance for all the hypostases which is then revealed as Sophia binding together God in and through His Self-revelation as Love, but Bulgakov argues that one must strictly distinguish the two [7, p.25], although in practice they are one (Sophia-Ousia), just, as we shall see, in the next chapter, is the case with the Divine and Creaturely Sophias. This means quite simply that the Father as the beginning, the unrevealed source is never a pure arbitrary will, freedom with no *ratio*, a divine, proud, frigid and loveless NO, but He is the Will of Love and as one must attempt to retain the apophatic we can refer to Him as the Abyss of Love, who if He is a pure NO and nothingness then this is only insofar as this is somehow also Love itself (otherwise, and this is *always* the danger with Bulgakov, one loses the apophatic dimension entirely): 'The Absolute *loves*; He is the Father [...] If the Son and the Holy Spirit are Love and the revelation of Love, the Father is Love itself, the very Heart of Love and, truly, the Will of Love'[6, pp.394]. The distinction between ousia (unrevealed) and sophia (self-revelation) is of course reminiscent of that between essence and energies but it is my opinion that Bulgakov took the distinction from Solov'ev and German Romanticism (Boehme, Hegel, Schelling) but then was inspired to adapt it by Palamism.

In essence, what Bulgakov seems to have been reaching towards in this suggested antinomy is three-fold: a) God as God even in Himself includes a certain hierarchy, an order or taxis although this wholly rules out any subordinationism; b) in His own life as God wholly immanent as transcendent, there must always be the possibility (without allowing change in God Himself) of yet *more* of God to give to Himself as Love and this *more* is grounded in His superabundant freedom which is Love-Will so one may say that it is the same God revealed in creation as revealed in God Himself but this does not mean that God is creation since the divine ousia is not the divine sophia; and c) God is a perfect movement of knowledge and Love and for this synthesis to exist there must be a movement from darkness to self-revelation, from self-composure to pure self-giving. Bulgakov wishes to avoid Solov'ev's rationalism and determinism so he not only does not describe the Father as positing Sophia, as the Father generates His Other for Solov'ev, but casts a double antinomy over the whole divine dialectic firstly through

identifying the Father with the NOT-something and secondly by creating an antinomy between the Ousia of God and His Sophia revealed by His two hands. Following the format of Bulgakov's earlier antinomies we shall state this proposed hypothetical antinomy as follows [9, p.40-41]:

IV. Antinomy of Divine Being (The *Ousia-Sophia* of God in the Father and in the Trinity)

THESIS: God is Absolute, the Father, who in his personal, hypostatic being, possesses Sophia, His substantial Wisdom, as *Ousia*, His own nature as unrevealed source, the mystery and depth of His undisclosed hypostatic being as primordial divine darkness, the Divine Nothingness, an Abyss of Love.

(Ousia in the Father)

ANTITHESIS: God is absolute self-relation in Himself, Holy Trinity, with the Father revealing to Himself His personal hypostatic being, *Ousia*, in and as *Sophia*, His substantial Wisdom in the dyad of the Son and Spirit by the power of His self-denying sacrificial love, possessing her in the triunity of the Holy Trinity in common with the Son and Holy Spirit.

(Ousia-Sophia in the Trinity)

Problems remain of course such as the fact that Bulgakov will often treat Ousia and Sophia as synonymous and will not presuppose anything like the fourth antinomy we have suggested plus the fact that if God's self-revelation is Himself, in the same way as the divine energies, so being wholly divine, then it unclear how we do not come to the same Creator/creature collapse once God reveals Himself in and as the Created Sophia/creation. Thus we are suggesting that resources exist within Bulgakov's own sophiology which may save it from its own excesses but in saying these resources exist we need a) to be clear that his sophiology is problematic for any orthodox Christian theology; and b) that if these resources exist then Bulgakov was not a heretic in intent but one searching for new theological paths that unfortunately sometimes led him into real theological error.

Yet perhaps the risks he ran to hold together heaven and earth in a unity in difference were worth taking, for *without risk there is no faith*. In daring so much, Bulgakov's errors, like Origen, become instructive to contemporary theologians, as in their flawed brilliance like a lightning flash they not only darken one's sight but illumine the shape of the rule of faith much more than a dozen windy treatises regurgitating say Cappadocian ontology or the exegesis of Theodoret in a theology of repetition ever could. But more importantly, in the daring of spiritual assurance that Bulgakov shows in his speculation, he creates new ways of speaking that can be brought into the heart of the Church and ecclesified, purified and tried through prayer and communion. He is then revealed as the secret whetstone of modern Orthodox theology and, it is my belief, that as his work becomes better known, it will become gradually apparent how so much of contemporary Orthodox God-talk (from Eucharistic theology, to the strong emphasis on the apocalyptic and even the revival of Palamas) can be traced to one who is like an awakening giant.

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CHURCH OR SOPHIA?: THE TRAGEDY OF FATHER SERGIUS BULGAKOV

У статті розглядаються особливості софіології о. Сергія Булгакова як філософської системи, яка суперечить апофатичному характеру богослов'я св. отців.

Ключові слова: богослов'я, пантеїзм, панентеїзм, Божественна Софія, тварна Софія, софіологія, філософія, філософська система, Церква.

В статті розглядаються особливості софіології о. Сергія Булгакова як філософської системи, протилежної апофатичному характеру святоотеческого богослов'я.

Ключевые слова: богословие, пантеизм, панентеизм, Божественная София, тварная София, софиология, философия, философская система, Церковь.

The article researches the features of Father Sergius Bulgakov's sophiology as a philosophical system, that is contrary to the apophatical character of patristic theology.

Keywords: theology, pantheism, panentheism, the Divine Sophia, the Created Sophia, sophiology, philosophy, philosophical system, the Church.

In his book *Die Tragödie der Philosophie* Father Sergius Bulgakov writes: "The history of philosophy is a tragedy. It is the story of the inevitability of the falling down of Icaros, and his incessant new attempts to fly upwards...Flying upwards is in the nature of the philosopher, he feels compelled to fly upwards to the sky. But it is unavoidable that his wings will melt in the rays of the sun, and that he is smashed on the ground. Still, he has contemplated something when he was in the air, and he speaks about it in his philosophy. The true philosopher, like the true poet – which is, in fact, the same thing – , does not ly or deceive. He is always completely honest and sincere. Nevertheless it is his fate to fall down, for he has the desire to create a system..." [8, p. 14].

In this beautiful text, which reminds of the mythical language of Plato, Father Sergius prophesies, against his own will, the intellectual path he himself would go, in particular in his work as a theologian. For he, too, had the desire to transform a profound experience and intuition into a philosophical system. At another occasion I had already the chance to speak here in Kiev about the sophiology of Fr Bulgakov, and the theological problems which are involved in this philosophical and theological system [5]. Today I want to speak more about the experience and intuition which lies at the bottom of it, and how this intuition was to be dominated by the theological and philosophical system which he wanted to create, and to which he gave the name "sophiology".

In his *Autobiographical Notes* Fr Sergius describes the religious crisis he went through as a young man. He lost his faith during his first years as a student at the Seminary in Orël, and, as he says, "from the age of fourteen to about thirty the prodigal son withdrew into a far country..." [1, p. 34]. The teaching and the stifling atmosphere of the clerical world at the Seminary could not satisfy his spiritual and intellectual needs. The first sign of a spiritual awakening, and of the return to the religious faith of his childhood, happened when he was twenty-four years old. During a trip across the southern steppes of Russia he was impressed by the mysterious beauty of nature. "I sucked up the light and the air of the steppes. I listened to the revelation of nature". Until that moment nature had been for him something lifeless, and if he experienced its beauty, he regarded that as a "deceptive mask". But, he writes, "suddenly my soul was joyfully stirred", and he received a feeling that nature was the "vesture of the love and glory of a loving Father..." [1, p. 61]. What Fr Sergius describes here is very revealing, for his sophiology is exactly that: an

attempt to express the cosmic dimension of salvation. The created world, the cosmos, which was called "good" by its Creator, but has taken part in the fall of man, is not to be seen as "neutral", but is to be sanctified. Indeed, Fr Sergius describes this experience as his "first encounter with Sophia" [1, p. 63].

Three years later after this event, Fr Sergius had a similar spiritual experience, an experience of a beauty which was more than just an aesthetic emotion. When he was in Dresden at the Zwinger Museum, he saw Raphael's "Sistine Madonna". And he writes: "The eyes of the Heavenly Queen, the Mother who holds in her arms the Eternal Child, pierced my soul. In them there was an immense power of purity and the knowledge of suffering.... I cried joyful and yet bitter tears, and with them the ice melted from my soul...This was not an aesthetic emotion, but it was an encounter, a new knowledge, it was a miracle. ...I ran there every day to pray and weep in front of the Virgin, and few experiences in my life were more blessed than those unexpected tears" [1, p. 63, 104]. Here the dominant feature is that of a "Feminine Being", a "Feminine Presence", an experience of what Goethe has defined as the "Eternal Feminine", *das Ewig Weibliche*. These feelings would be fed by his reading and knowledge of such great authors and thinkers as Jacob Boehme, Vladimir Soloviev and Fjodr Dostoevsky (I think in particular at the passage in his novel *Demons, Besy*, where the earth is described as the "Great Mother", and, indeed, is identified with the Mother of God). Combined with his knowledge of philosophy, in particular the great philosophers of German Idealism, Schelling and Hegel, Bulgakov developed his "sophiology". It is evident that his philosophical mind needed a *system*, and that was his "tragedy".

I want to put forward the thesis that the experiences which Fr Sergius describes in his *Autobiographical Notes* were an experience, still unconscious, of the *Church*, that is, the *liturgical* dimension of the Church. Fr Sergius himself liked to say: "One should imbibe theology from the bottom of the Eucharistic chalice". In his book *The Orthodox Church* Fr Sergius writes: "One aspect of the Orthodox liturgy must be noted particularly – that is its cosmic quality. It is addressed not only to the human soul but to all creation, and it sanctifies the latter. This sanctification of the elements of nature and of different objects expresses the idea that the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is extended by the Church over all nature. The destiny of nature is allied to that of man: corrupted because of man, she awaits with him her healing" [3, p. 292]. In my