

Correlating Sophiology:
An interdisciplinary dialogue on Sergii Bulgakov's
Sophia. The Wisdom of God

International doctoral colloquium, Fribourg – 2020
Universities of Fribourg and Geneva

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The international colloquium for promoting the reception of the work of Sergii Bulgakov (1871-1944) in Eastern and Western theology, aims to bring together researchers on the occasion of the publication of the newly annotated German-Russian edition of his book *Sophia. The Wisdom of God*, in which Bulgakov introduced his Sophiology to English readers in 1937.

Sergii Bulgakov's Sophiology

Sergii Bulgakov is currently being rediscovered as one of the preeminent Orthodox theologians of the 20th century. His systematic project of Sophiology is conceived of as a way to circumvent numerous theological impasses into which, in his opinion, Christian theology as a whole has fallen. In the book *Sophia. The Wisdom of God* Bulgakov, who was involved in the ecumenical movement ("Life and Work" and "Faith and Order", which led to the foundation of the World Council of Churches in 1948), tries to arouse the interest of his Western partners in Sophiology. He presents this systematic approach as the Orthodox alternative to the schools that then dominated Western Christian thought, (neo-)Thomism and Modernism in Catholicism, and what he calls "liberal Jesuanism" and "Barthianism" among Protestants. At the same time Bulgakov's Sophiology got in the crossfire of Orthodox church-politics in the Russian diaspora in the 1930s, and generated fierce controversies that have not been solved until today. These controversies have not remained hidden from the Western public and, in view of Bulgakov's growing popularity, they require explanation.

According to Bulgakov, Sophiology must be disentangled from its "peculiar exotic Oriental flavour of 'gnosis'", because its underlying problem affects "the very 'essence of Christianity'": it bears upon "*all Christian teaching and dogma, beginning with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation and ending with questions of practical everyday Christianity in our time. [...] All the dogmatic and practical problems of modern Christian dogmatics and ascetics seem to form a kind of knot, the unravelling of which inevitably leads to sophiology*". Sophiology is additionally presented as a way out of the contemporary theological controversies surrounding 'dialectical' theology (Karl Barth), which is interpreted dealing with secularisation through world-denial: Bulgakov argues that this can only lead to a dead end, whilst conversely Sophiology is based on an affirmation of the world as God's creation, though a recovery of the underdeveloped Patristic doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity – the unity of the three hypostases through their shared 'nature' (*ousia*) – which, Bulgakov believes, has been

received predominantly in the Eastern Church through the doctrine of the divine ‘activities’ (*energeiai*) as both uncreated yet immanent to creation. Eventually, Bulgakov presents Sophiology as the very synthesis of Divine-humanity in which the bad ‘dialectic’ of unresolved contradictions – between dualism and monism, materialism and idealism, humanism and theocentrism etc. –, “which burdens and exhausts our time” can be overcome.

The new German-Russian edition of “Sophia. The Wisdom of God”

The original Russian text of *Sophia. The Wisdom of God* has never been published. Therefore, at the Sergii Bulgakov Research Center at the University of Fribourg, an annotated German-Russian edition is being prepared in cooperation with prof. Alexei Kozyrev of the Lomonosov University in Moscow. The original manuscript from the archives of the St Serge Institute of Orthodox Theology, which was consulted for the reproduction of the Russian text, brings to light informative passages deleted by Bulgakov, which serve to understand the genesis of the text. Above all, the text-critical publication of the Russian original – in comparison with the existing English and French translations – offers a fresh point of departure for the discussion of Sophiology in Orthodox theology, which remains deeply controversial but continues to generate renewed interest.

The colloquium on Bulgakov’s *Sophia. The Wisdom of God* aims at an intensive exchange between scholars, all focussed on close reading of the text. Participation in the entire event is therefore required. In preparation, all participants will receive the complete text of the German-Russian edition of Sergij Bulgakov’s *Sophia. The Wisdom of God* as well as a set of passages missing in the English version.

The colloquium

The colloquium will bring young researchers, especially from Switzerland, the UK the USA, Canada, France and Russia (doctoral students and post-docs), from different theological disciplines and different ecclesiastical traditions, into conversation with established Bulgakov-specialists. The conversation will be oriented toward the opportunities and challenges that Sophiology presents as a theological paradigm in the twenty-first century. Papers can be offered in English, French and German.

The majority of the participants have engaged with Sergij Bulgakov’s work in their doctoral theses, but all are asked to examine whether Sophiology offers relevant solutions for their studies and current theological questions. The colloquium will proceed in three stages:

- 1) Bulgakov’s Sophiology will be analysed and discussed in its own context.
- 2) The young researchers will present their research in connection with Bulgakov’s Sophiology – with the support of established scholars.
- 3) Bulgakov’s approach will be examined for its viability in contemporary theological and philosophical debates.

The results will be integrated into the publication of the German-Russian edition of *Sophia. The Wisdom of God* and in the preparation of further events and publications. The overall aim is to promote the reception of Sergii Bulgakov’s work in contemporary theology, both Western and Orthodox.

Provisional Programme

Thursday, May 7

11h00	Liturgy in the Orthodox Chapel (Salesianum)	
12h30	Lunch	
14h15	Welcoming address (official start)	Chalamet/Hallensleben
14h30	Sergii Bulgakov's „Sophia“: Why context matters	Regula Zwahlen
15h00	Sophiology? A theological introduction	Barbara Hallensleben
15h30	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
16h00	The Sophia Affair: What They Argued About, and Why It Still Matters	Roberto De La Noval
16h30	Discussion / First impressions	everybody
17h00	<i>Short break</i>	
17h10	La “Sophie divine”: de Soloviev à Boulgakov	Ciprian Apintiliesei
17h40	Théologie trinitaire de Boulgakov	Ryan Donell
18h10	Commentaire	Barbara Hallensleben
18h20	Discussion	
19h10	<i>Short Break</i>	
19h20	Sophiology and the book of Revelation	Christophe Chalamet
19h50	Discussion	
20h30	<i>Dinner</i>	

Friday, May 8

08h30	La mise en paroles des visites du Verbe en tant qu'icônes verbales. Lire saint Bernard de Clairvaux à travers la théologie sophiologique de Serge Boulgakov	Stefan Constantinescu
09h00	Thomas Merton et son poème « hagia sophia »	Agnès Gros
09h30	Commentaire	Christophe Chalamet
09h40	Discussion	
10h10	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
10h30	Bulgakov and Palamas	Michael Miller
11h00	Sophia und/oder Energie(n)	Kseniya Babkova
11h30	Comment	Brandon Gallaher
11h40	Discussion	
12h15	<i>Lunch</i>	
14h15	<i>Key Note: Bulgakov's Sophiology and Ecclesiology</i>	Brandon Gallaher
14h45	Discussion	
15h15	<i>Break</i>	
15h30	Bulgakov and Gregory of Nyssa on Universal Salvation	Daniel Li
16h00	Sophia in the Gospel of John	Harry Moore
16h30	Comment	Johannes Zachhuber
16h40	Discussion	
17h10	<i>Coffee Break</i>	

17h30 **Bulgakov's trinitarian doctrine as a paradigm shift
in Sophiology**

18h00 **Sophiology and overcoming of metaphysics**

18h30 Comment

18h40 Discussion

19h30 *Dinner*

Julien Lambinet

Oleg Davydov

Barbara Hallensleben

Saturday, May 9

08h30 **Sophiology and Eucharist**

0900 **Sophiology and Mariology**

09h30 Comment

09h40 Discussion

10h10 *Coffee break*

10h30 **Aspects of Bulgakov's Antinomic Ontology**

11h00 **Sophiology and digitalization**

11h30 Comment

11h40 Discussion

12h15 *Lunch*

13h30 **Evaluation and conclusion**

Ivan Ilin

Dario Colombo

Jennifer Wasmuth

Jack Pappas

Oliver Dürr

Aristotle Papanikolaou

Participants

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Prof. Dr. Christophe Chalamet, Prof. associé en théologie systématique, Université de Genève.

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Prof. Brandon Gallaher, Senior Lecturer of Systematic and Comparative Theology, University of Exeter

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Prof. Dr. Barbara Hallensleben, Professorin für Dogmatik und Ökumenische Theologie an der Universität Fribourg, Mitglied des Direktoriums des Instituts für Ökumenische Studien, Direktorin des Studienzentrums St. Nikolaus für das Studium der Ostkirchen

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Michael Miller, doctoral student, University of Cambridge (supervision: Rowan Williams).

Harry Moore, doctoral student, University of Oxford (supervision: Johannes Zachhuber)

Prof. Dr. Aristotle Papanikolaou, Professor of Theology, Archbishop Demetrios Chair in Orthodox Theology and Culture, Co-Director, Orthodox Christian Studies Center, Fordham University, New York

Prof. Dr. Jennifer Wasmuth, Direktorin des Instituts für Ökumenische Forschung in Straßburg.

Jack Pappas, doctoral student, Fordham University, New York (supervision: A. Papanikolaou)

Prof. Dr. Johannes Zachhuber, Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, Trinity College, University of Oxford.

Dr. Regula Zwahlen, Wissenschaftliche Leiterin der Forschungsstelle Sergij Bulgakov am Institut für Ökumenische Studien, Universität Fribourg.