

## *Sophia. The Wisdom of God – an Ecumenical Dialogue*

**Doctoral Online-Colloquium, Fribourg – January 14–15, 2021**  
*Universities of Fribourg and Geneva (CUSO)*

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The doctoral colloquium is organized 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, 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*”.

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*

The Online Zoom-Seminar on Bulgakov's *Sophia. The Wisdom of God* aims at an intensive exchange between doctoral students and scholars, all focussed on close reading of the text. The working language will be English.

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 the English translation with annotations with regard to several divergences and mistakes in comparison with the Russian original.

In addition, Roberto De La Noval will present his paper "The Sophia Affair: What They Argued About, and Why It Still Matters", and some doctoral students will present their projects related to Bulgakov's work.

The conversation will be oriented toward the opportunities and challenges that Sophiology presents as a theological paradigm in the twenty-first century. All are asked to examine whether Sophiology offers relevant solutions for their studies and current theological questions.

*You will receive Zoom-Links upon registration until January 11  
by e-mail to: [regula.zwahlen@unifr.ch](mailto:regula.zwahlen@unifr.ch)*

**Provisional Programme**

***Thursday, January 14***

13h30–14h00 (CET)	Welcome, Round of introduction	<i>Christophe Chalamet</i>
14h00–14h30	Introduction	<i>Regula Zwahlen</i>
14h30–15h30	Close text reading	<i>Barbara Hallensleben</i>
<i>Break</i>		
16h00–18h00 (10h00–12h00 EST)		<i>Roberto De La Noval</i>
<b>The Sophia Affair: What They Argued About, and Why It Still Matters</b>		
Discussion		

***Friday, January 15***

14h00–14h15 (CET)	Introduction (brief review)	
14h15–15h30	Close text reading	<i>Barbara Hallensleben</i>
<i>Break</i>		
16h00–17h00		<i>Oleg Davydov</i>
<b>Sophiology and Analogy of being: two styles of interpretation God/world relations</b>		
Discussion		
17h00–18h00	<b>Final Discussion</b>	

## *Organisation*

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

**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

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

## *Keynote*

**Roberto De La Noval**, PhD, University of Notre Dame, USA

**The Sophia Affair: What They Argued About, and Why It Still Matters**

## *Invited Participants*

**Dr. Nikolaos Asproulis**, Deputy Director of the Volos Academy, Greece

**Ksenya Babkova**, Doktorandin (supervision: Barbara Hallensleben), Teilnehmerin am Doktoratsprogramm “De Civitate Hominis”, Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin der Forschungsstelle Sergij Bulgakov, Universität Fribourg.

**Dario Colombo**, Diplomassistent am Department für Glaubens- und Religionswissenschaft, Philosophie; Mitarbeiter der Forschungsstelle Sergij Bulgakov, Universität Fribourg (supervision: Barbara Hallensleben).

**Stefan Constantinescu**, Assistant diplômée, Département des Sciences de la foi et des religions, Philosophie, Université de Fribourg

**Ryan Donell**, doctorant, Université de Genève (supervision: Christophe Chalamet)

**Oliver Dürr**, Diplomassistent in Systematischer Theologie an der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Fribourg. Mitarbeiter des Studienzentrums für Glaube und Gesellschaft (supervision: Barbara Hallensleben).

**Joshua Heath**, doctoral student, Trinity College, University of Cambridge; Thesis: “Language and Metaphysics in the Thought of Sergij Bulgakov” (supervision: Rowan Williams)

**Caleb Henry**, doctoral student, University of Toronto, University of St. Michael’s College (supervision: T. A. Smith)

**Agnès Gros**, doctorante, Université de Genève (supervision: Christophe Chalamet)

**Ivan Ilin**, doctorat ès lettres en études théologiques, Université de Fribourg (supervision: Barbara Hallensleben)

**Dr. Oleg Davydov**, Prof. of Systematic Theology, Far Eastern Orthodox Seminary, Khabarovsk (RF)

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

**Prof. Paul Ladouceur**, Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Divinity at Trinity College, University of Toronto

**Daniel Li**, doctoral student, University of Exeter (supervision: Brandon Gallaher)

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

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

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

**Stefan Schneider**, Doktorand am Institut für Historische Theologie, Universität Wien (supervision: Ioan Moga)

**Thomas Allan Smith**, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, University of Toronto

**h. Tikhon Vasilyev**, Dphil, <https://theology.education>, St. Petersburg

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