

Creation Ex Nihilo through The Prism of Father Sergei Bulgakov's Sophiology

Father Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944), directly influenced by Vladimir Solovyov and especially by Father Pavel Florensky, developed his sophiological concept which takes a central place in his doctrine of Trinity and God's economy. The main failure of the Russian sophiology is that the question of God's Wisdom is not christologically founded in the spirit of the New Testament and patristic teaching. Bulgakov neglects the theology of God's uncreated energies. He thinks that it does not sufficiently explain the creation of the world as well as the relationship between God and the world. According to him, the creation of the world and its unity with God can be explained only through a mediator who acts as an "ontological bridge" between The Creator and the creation. Bulgakov, using the ontological mediation paradigms that are characteristic for some certain ancient philosophical systems, especially Neo-Platonism, develops his doctrine of Sophia. She is immanent to both the nature of God and the creation. This attitude leads Bulgakov to the position of pantheism. In order to avoid this danger, he modifies his teaching introducing two models of Sophia: -"Divine Sophia" and "Created Sophia". Unlike the patristic theology, Bulgakov's sophiological essentialism does not tend the antinomy of apophatic-kataphatic theology, and thereby he puts into question the ontological difference between the Creator and the creation. It is a failed attempt to interpret the dogma of the creation of the world ex nihilo, through categories and concepts that are alien to the church tradition.

Keywords: Sergius Bulgakov, Sophia/sophiology, creation ex nihilo, Neo-Platonism, essentialism, pantheism

The idea of an ontological mediator between the transcendent and the immanent, the eternal and the temporal, the one and the many, between the ontologically primary and the one derived from it, is often found in ancient philosophical systems of monistic or dualistic provenance in different ways. The mediator is on a lower ontological level than the supreme transcendental principle. It enables the emergence of the relative plural world, without making the transcendence of the one supreme being questionable.

The paradigm of ontological-cosmological mediation points to the basic trajectory along which the sophiology of Father Sergey Bulgakov (1871 – 1944) moves, which, for example, in

many ways reminds of Neoplatonist ontology, although it differs from it in terms of content¹. In his book *Unfading Light* («Свет Невечерний» published in 1917), in which he develops his sophiological concept for the first time in a theological context, he states that the relationship between God and the creation cannot be explained as a cause-and-effect relationship². In the author's own words, "the world is not an effect, and God is not its cause, not only because God, understood as the first cause, is already included in the causal chain, in the realm of the relative, but because the effect explains its cause only if it is of the same order as its cause"³. However, between the Uncreated and the creation there is a radical ontological difference, an unbridgeable ontological chasm. Therefore, according to Father Sergey Bulgakov's point of view, a mediator is needed. There must be something mediating between the order of the uncreated and the order of created existence, between the divine and the human. Conversely, neither the creation of the world nor the incarnation of the Logos of God would be possible. Such a mediator is the divine Sophia, because she is immanent in both divine and human

¹ Sophiology is a syncretistic philosophical concept, which was established in the Russian religious philosophy by Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900), and was accepted and further developed by Fr. Pavel Florensky (1882 – 1937) and Fr. Sergey Bulgakov (1871 – 1944), as well as by other Russian thinkers. Unlike Solovyov, these two of his successors try to harmonize the sophiological concept with the teaching of the Church, or rather to interpret the Church Faith Teaching through the prism of the previously adopted sophiology. Bulgakov distances himself from Solovyov's views. He writes: "I do not share his gnostic tendencies and I think that in his poetry he is very far from the orthodox understanding of Sophia, but I respect him as my philosophical teacher in Christ, at the time when I was moving from Marxism to Idealism, and then and to the Church". Zander, L.A. *Bog i mir*. Miroszertsanie ottsa Sergiusa Bulgakova. T. 1, Paris, 1948, 107 [=Zander, L.A., *God and the world* (2 vols. 1948) (Russian text) (a survey of Bulgakov's thought). A much stronger influence on Bulgakov, especially in the first period of his work, came from Florensky.

Due to the syncretistic character of this teaching, modern critics recognize in it various philosophical elements from German Idealism, Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, and Kabbalah. In the Decision of the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (October 17/30, 1935) condemning Bulgakov's sophiology, accusations of the following heresies can be noted: 1) neochiliasm; 2) divinization of humanity; 3) neopaganism (Platonism and Kabbalahism); 4) Valentinian Gnosticism; 5) dualism; 6) pantheism; 7) Crypto-Arianism; 8) Barlaamism; 9) eunomism and 10) antitrinitism. Bogdan M. Lubardić: „Хришћанска философија оца Сергеја Булгакова и учење о Софији: између Софије и софиологије“ *Богословље, Часопис Богословског факултета Српске православне цркве*, [=Christian philosophy of father Sergei Bulgakova and the teaching about Sophia: between Sophia and sophiology" *Bogoslovlje, Journal of the Faculty of Theology of the Serbian Orthodox Church*] 2, (2002): 210.

² Earlier, Bulgakov had already established the beginning of his sophiology in the book "Philosophy of Economy" (1912). "Historical humanity, and every person in it, partakes of Sophia, and above the lower world floats the upper Sophia, shining in it as reason, as beauty, as economy and culture. Between the world as cosmos and the empirical world, between humanity and Sophia, there exists a living communion, which can be compared to nourishing a plant from its root." S. N. Bulgakov: С. Н. Булгаков, *Философия хозяйства, Сочинения в двух томах*, т. 1 [=*Philosophy of Economy, Works in two volumes*, Vol. 1], Moscow 1995, 158. According to Bulgakov, economy is not only a social or gender process, but also a religious process, the purpose of which is to establish the lost connection between natura naturans and natura naturata (nature that creates and nature that is created). In this work, written largely under the influence of Kant's methodology and language, the question of the transcendent subject of the economy is analyzed. А. Р. Козырев: А.П. Козырев. *Софиология о. Сергия Булгакова: «теологема» или «философема»?* [=Sophiology of Archpriest Sergey Bulgakova: 'theologeme' or 'philosopheme'?] in: *Философия религии: альманах*, [=Philosophy of Religions, Almanac], 2010-2011, 228.

³ Bulgakov Sergius: Сергий Булгаковъ, *Свет не вечерний: Созерцания и умозрения*, Сергиев Посад [=Unfading Light: *Contemplations and Speculations, Sergiyev Posad*] 1917, 176.

reality⁴. In the afore stated work, Bulgakov writes about the divine Sophia: "She is a subject. A person, or in theological terms, (she is) a hypostasis. Of course, she is different from the hypostases of the Holy Trinity, she is a separate fourth hypostases of a different order. She does not participate in the inner divine life – she is not God. Accordingly, she does not turn the three-hypostasis into four-hypostasis, the trinity into fourness, because after her the many hypostases (of men and angels), who are in a spiritual relationship with God⁵, follow in succession. Bulgakov soon desisted from naming Sophia a hypostasis, then defines her as hypostatic, and later equates her with God's essence⁶. However, it is especially important to understand the initial identification of Sophia as a hypostasis, which is not of the same order as the Three Divine Hypostases, because it would largely explain Bulgakov's sophiological concept as a whole, as well as his interpretation of the Christian teaching on the creation of the world.

The term ὑπόστασις has a long and rich history in antiquity. In the classical period, it was initially used in the field of medicine, and later in philosophy⁷. It was introduced into the

⁴ In the *Timaeus*, Plato says that God composed the universal soul "from the indivisible essence, which is eternally the same, and from the divisible essence, which pertains to bodies, in the middle of the two he made a mixture of a third kind of essence, that is, of the nature of the Same and the Other". *Платон, Тимай*, [Plato, *Timaeus*] (35a), translation from ancient Greek into Macedonian and foreword by Vitomir Mitevski, Skopje 2005, 26. The world soul is simultaneously divine and composed/physical/material. This doctrine was later developed in Neoplatonism and was the basis of some heretical teachings on Christian triadology. See: Zyablitsev Georgy: Георгий (Зяблицев), „Платон и святоотеческое богословие“, *Богословские труды*, [= "Plato and patristic theology" in *Theological Works (Russian text only)*] 32, (1996): 243.

⁵ Bulgakov, Sergius: Сергей Булгаковъ, *Свет невечерний*, [=Unfading Light] 212. Quasi-personal characteristics are ascribed to the divine Sophia. Namely, she loves, (reciprocates God's love), but in a passive way.

⁶ After the fierce criticism directed at him regarding the naming of Sophia a hypostasis, Bulgakov had to clarify his position. He writes a special paper titled „Ипостась и ипостасность: Scholia к Свету Невечернему“ [=Hypostasis und hypostaticity: Scholia to the "Unfading Light"], in: *Сборник статей посвященных Петру Бернгардовичу Струву к дню тридцатипятилетия его научно-публицистической деятельности* [=Collection of articles dedicated to Pyotr Berngardovich Struva on the day of the thirty-fifth anniversary of his scientific and journalistic activity, 1890–1925. Praha/Prague 1925, 353–372. Here Sophia is no longer called a hypostasis, but a hypostaticity. It is a certain essence that does not exist independently as a separate hypostasis, but is "hypostasised" inside something else, and that, according to Bulgakov, is the Holy Trinitarian divine life. "Sophia or the divine world is an organism of ideas, all for all and in all – All wisdom. She has life in herself, although not for herself, because she hypostasizes in God. [...] the divine Sophia, although not a hypostasis, nevertheless, she is never without-the-hypostatic nor outside-the-hypostatic, because she hypostasizes parte ante. At the same time, its immediate hypostasis is not the Father, even though He is also revealed in the divine Sophia, but the Logos Who reveals itself to the Father as a demiurge hypostasis." Sergius Bulgakov: Сергей Булгаковъ, *Агнецъ Божій, О Богочеловечестве, часть I*, [=The Lamb of God, On God-manhood, part I], Париж/Paris, 1933, 135–136.

In his long-term work, Bulgakov constantly develops and modifies his sophiological doctrine in several directions in a way in which the ontological status of the divine Sophia is constantly upgraded to a higher and higher level (cosmological principle, hypostasis, hypostaticity, God's ousia), and to the highest when he finally identifies Sophia with God's essence. Although this identification is clear, Bulgakov inconsistently denies it. Such inconsistency can be explained as the duality of his overall thought, between his attempts to remain faithful to the Faith Teaching of the Church, and at the same time to give a new interpretation of church dogmas through the prism of the sophiological concept.

⁷ The noun ὑπόστασις appears in the classical period in the Hippocratic Corpus, (Liddell/Scott 1895a supp. 303). Apart from medicine, it is found in various fields and disciplines (hydrography, meteorology, culinary, ontology). The semantic range of this expression is conditioned by the individual meanings of the verb ὑφίστημι/ὑφίστηται –

philosophical dictionary by the Stoics, whose comprehension of ὑπόστασις is what is real and concretely exists, as opposed to what can be imagined. The Peripatetics adopted this term. For them ὑπόστασις is an actualized being, a single object that is a union (unity) of idea (form) and matter⁸. In the context of Bulgakov's understanding of Sophia, as a second-order hypostasis, one should take into account the Neoplatonist, or rather, Plotinus' understanding of hypostasis. Namely, contrary to the widespread notion that Plotinus teaches about the three hypostases of the One, the Mind and the Soul, modern research shows that he very rarely names the One ὑπόστασις and uses this term, above all, for the Mind and the Soul, as well as for the individual essences. In Plotinus' system, hypostasis means only the manifestations and appearances of the One in the other, in the multiple, that is, in the Mind, the Soul, and the Cosmos⁹. They are not so much independent principles, as they are principle manifestations in hypostasis of the higher principle, and in the first place it is the One¹⁰. From the first principle, (the One) "which remains (dwells) in its inherent state, i.e. from the fullness of its perfection and from the inherent energy (the first energy, i.e. the energy of the essence b. m.) energy was born that acquired a hypostasis, (received, attained actualization, b. m.) from the great power, greater than all others, and came (passed) into being and essence (εἶναι καὶ οὐσίαν). That alone (the first principle, b. m.) remains on the other side of the essence ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας. (that is, it is beyond, transcendent to the second derived essence, b. m.)"¹¹. According to Plotinus, hypostasis is synonymous with essence, but in a very limited and strictly precise philosophical sense. Namely, a hypostasis

leans, puts itself under (something), descends, falls to the bottom, conceals, opposes, realizes, assumes, expresses submission, commits, takes (something) to itself, stops, becomes permanent (stable), attends, exists. The ancient Greek word ὑπόστασις was primarily used in a physical (material) sense and signified: support, foundation, substratum, something that is the result of thickening, condensation or settling, sediment, something down at the bottom, under-the-standing. But ὑπόστασις can also denote reason, basis of reasoning, support of thought, plan or idea, basis of hope, confidence, determination, assurance, determination, essence, person. Femić Kasapis, Jelena: Фемић Касапис, Јелена (2010): *Порекло термина φύσις, οὐσία, ὑπόστασις и њихов семантички развој од првих помена до црквених отаца*, [= *The Origins of the Terms Physis, Ousia, Hypostasis and their semantic development from the first evidence to the Church Fathers*], Београд/Belgrade 2010, 79–92.

⁸ Mefodius Zinkovsky: Мефодий (Зинковский), „История термина «ипостась» и его богословское употребление“ [= "History of the term "hypostasis" and the ego theological use"] in: *Метапарадигма, Альманах богословие философия естествознание*, 4, (2014): 35–36. [Metaparadigm: theology, philosophy, natural science: almanac] 4, (2014): 35–36). (Russian text only)

⁹ The term *hypostasis to Plotinus' One* can only be used figuratively. He uses the term *hypostasis for the One* only when he wants to show that it is not a quantitative characteristic of being, nor a mental abstraction, but that it actually and independently exists. Plotinus says of the One that it is “like a hypostasis,” because it is the cause of every hypostasis and therefore transcends all hypostases. Svetlana Mesyats, “Does the First have a Hypostasis?”, *Studia Patristica* vol. LXII, *Papers presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011*, In; *The Geneses of Late Antique Literature*, ed. Markus Vinzent, Leuven- Paris -Walpole, MA 2013, 46.

¹⁰ Mefodius (Zinkovsky), "History of the term "hypostasis" and the ego theological use", 40. (Russian text only)

¹¹ “μένοντος αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ οικείῳ ἦθει ἐκ τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ τελειότητος καὶ συνούσης ἐνεργείας ἢ γεννηθεῖσα ἐνέργεια ὑπόστασιν λαβοῦσα, ἅτε ἐκ μεγάλης δυνάμεως, μεγίστης μὲν οὖν ἀπασῶν, εἰς τὸ εἶναι καὶ οὐσίαν ἦλθεν· ἐκεῖνο γὰρ ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας ἦν.“ Ennead, 5, 4:2. *Plotini opera*, t. II, *Enneades IV-V*, ed. P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, Leiden: Brill 1959.

always stands in dependence on another *par excellence* essence from which it derives. Hypostasis is essence "number two" versus essence "number one". The conceptual meaning of the term hypostasis implies something that is not independent, but dependent on the First. Each new hypostasis is on a lower ontological and value level than the previous hypostasis. Each hypostasis is the result of the emanation of the higher principle, which is inherent in its nature. In this way, the chains of hypostases form a cascading mediating ontology, which does not question the priority of ontological monism, and at the same time explains the manifoldness of the world. Such a metaphysical concept of Plotinus is conceivable from the aspect of his teaching about the double energy activity of all actualized beings¹². Namely, he distinguishes two types of energy, energy that is of the essence and energy that arises from the essence¹³. "It is necessary to distinguish the energy of the essence (ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας) from the energy arising from the essence. The energy of the essence does not differ from the essence to which it belongs, it is always the (same) essence itself. But the energy emanating from the essence is distinct from it as from its own cause. Each hypostasis has both the first and the second energy."¹⁴ The inner activity of the energy of an actualized ousia (hypostasis) necessarily reflects (is transmitted) externally as an activity which, in turn, results in the emergence of a new hypostasis. The higher hypostasis emanates and self-reveals (self-expresses) through the lower hypostases.

In continuation, touching on certain aspects of the sophiological concept, we will see to what extent Plotinus' ontological matrix can serve as a hermeneutic key to understanding the basic coordinates according to which Bulgakov's sophiology moves, in the context of triadology and God's economy. Using the paradigm of intermediary ontology, he tries to explain the unity between God and the world. The basic task of sophiology is to explain the relationship between God and the world, that is, to arrive at a philosophical foundation for the concept of all-unity, or theanthropy (Solovyov). The main dilemma before Bulgakov is how to explain the transition from the absolute to the relative, but at the same time to avoid monism and dualism, which are not acceptable from Christian point of view¹⁵. God is absolute and transcendent. But as Bulgakov notes, "The transcendent does not remain by itself in its transcendence; it has a *trans* behind which it hides, but also through which it determines itself. In other words, the Absolute is relative in its absoluteness and the Transcendent is immanent

¹² Femić Kasapis, Jelena, Origin of the term φύσις, οὐσία, and ὑπόστασις, 97.

¹³ About Plotinus' teaching on the dual energy see: Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*, New York 2012, 21–23.

¹⁴ *Ennead*, 5, 4:2.

¹⁵ Bulgakov, Sergius, *Bride of the Lamb*, On God-manhood, part III, Paris 1945, 7–10.

in its transcendence if it truly exists and has meaning (gilt), if it does not turn into a zero for both thought and being, into a void for both¹⁶". The revelation of the absolute in the world presupposes the self-discovery of the absolute in itself¹⁷. Through the self-revelation of God in a triadological context and in the context of God's economy, Bulgakov tries to ensure ontological continuity between God and the world created by Him. In order to see the specificity of Bulgakov's teaching about the divine Sophia, it is necessary to take into account how he interprets the dogma of the homoousion of the Holy Trinity. Although he does not dispute the patristic understanding of ὁμοούσιος, he nevertheless believes that it does not fully explain the relationship between God and the world, and therefore that this dogma needs an additional philosophical interpretation which, in fact, leads to his sophiological concept¹⁸. Bulgakov identifies the Father as a kind of "transcendent principle" in the Holy Trinity, similar to the One in Plotinus' triad, with the difference that there is no subordination in the Holy Trinity. The Father reveals Himself in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, and the content of the Father's revelation is all that is of God, i.e., all the fullness of God's nature (essence). The self-revelation of the Father is a pre-eternal act of God's love, in which there cannot but be a pre-eternal relationship (pre-eternal love) towards the world that is yet to be created in time¹⁹. The

¹⁶ "The Absolute and the Transcendent is deeper and more comprehensive than the relative and the immanent, therefore it is its source. The Absolute and Transcendent is Mystery, in relation to which the relative and immanent is revelation, and in relation to itself it is self-revelation. The categories of *mystery* and *revelation*, in general, have an incomparably greater general and principled meaning than the categories of *cause* and *effect*." Bulgakov Sergius: Сергій Булгаковъ, *Утѣшителъ, О Богочеловѣствѣ, часть II*, [= *The Comforter, On God-manhod, part II*] YMCA PRESS, 1936, 407.

¹⁷ Sophia is a "medium" through which the Divine Hypostases eternally reveal themselves and know each other. In the act of pre-eternal self-revelation, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit realize their divine nature and establish their hypostatic characteristics.

¹⁸ According to Bulgakov's general stance, the dogmatic theology of the Church needs not only a contemporary philosophical interpretation, but also a philosophical refinement and elaboration. According to him, the dogmatic formulas are undefined, and the necessary philosophical implications are not completely derived from them. The Christian Hellenism of Father Georges Florovsky, to a large extent, was provoked precisely by the attempts of theologians-sophiologists to interpret church dogmas through modern categories and concepts (German idealism, romanticism). In the language of the Gospel, new wine should not be put into old wineskins (Matthew 9:17). The holy fathers, when formulating the Christian dogmas, radically rethought the terms borrowed from the ancient philosophy.

The dogmatic teaching of the Church is based on God's Revelation. His clear theological expression and formulation also includes "very intense philosophical work" as we see from the case of Cappadocians, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Gregory Palamas. But after a truth of faith has been dogmatized (formulated at an Ecumenical or Local Council and as such accepted by the Church) it can be interpreted, but it no longer belongs to the "sphere of philosophical competences". See: Georgi Kapriev: Георги Каприев, „Аксиоматика, историчност, рецепция: византийската философия и нейните съвременни проекции“ [= "Axiomatics, historicity, reception: Byzantine Philosophy and its Modern Projections"] in: Християнство и култура, бр. 2 (59), [=Christianity and Culture, no. 2 (59)] 2011: 25. (Bulgarian text only)

¹⁹ "The second Hypostasis is revealed in the divine Sophia through its own hypostatic character not only as Word and Wisdom, but also as Son. [...] Sonship, in itself, is some pre-eternal kenosis of the Son, self-absorption in love for the Father, hypostatic sacrifice of the Lamb. [...] The self-revelation of God is a work of sacrificial love, in which the Father is a priest Who loves, and the Son is a sacrifice Who loves." Сергій Булгаковъ, *Агнецъ Божій*, 134. [*Bulgakov, Sergius. The Lamb of God, 134*. The term κένωσις usually in church theology refers to

Divine Sophia, as a pre-eternal idea of the existence of the world, is inherent to God's ousia; even more Bulgakov speaks of the divine Sophia as the "revealed God's ousia". Therefore, according to him, the divine Sophia cannot be identified only with the Second Hypostasis of the Logos of God, but she belongs to all Three Hypostases²⁰. Bulgakov's identification of the divine Sophia with God's essence violates the apophatic stance of the entire Orthodox Traditional Faith Teaching about the absolute unknowability of God's nature, hypostasized by the Three Divine Hypostases²¹. God's conceptions, ideas, or logos are "infused" into the very

the incarnation of Christ and His Self-sacrifice with the crucifixion for the redemption and salvation of fallen humanity. But Bulgakov, under the influence of the philosophy of Friedrich V. J. Schelling unjustifiably extends the meaning of κένωσις into the realm of triadology and into the whole economy of God. Namely, according to him, God's ego depletion is present in the pre-eternal relationships of the Holy Trinity, but it is also expressed in the act of creating the world, in the action of the Holy Spirit, the founding of the Church. Aidan Nichols, "Sergei Bulgakov and Sophiology", *Light From the East, Authors and Themes in Orthodox Theology*, London 1995, 59. Κένωσις does not refer to the Divine Nature, which is eternal and unchanging, but to the Person of the Incarnate Logos of God, which willingly assumed (became hypostasis/embodiment of) human nature. Therefore, kenosis is a Christological term and cannot be applied in a triadological context. The intra-trinitarian κένωσις that Bulgakov talks about is actually in support of his teaching about the unity between the "divine Sophia" and the "created Sophia". Divine Sophia as the "content" of the kenotic self-revelation and self-giving of the Three divine Hypostases is a metaphysical basis and model for God's economy. But the withdrawal of this analogy inevitably implies determinism in God's plan. Also, Bulgakov's sophiological (intrinsic) kenotism is permeated with emphasized psychologism and represents a neglect of the apophatic aspect of theology. Compare: Justin Popović: Јустин Поповић, *Догматика Православне Цркве, књига друга, Богочовек и Његово дело (христологија и сотериологија)*, [=Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church. Book II., Godman and His work (Christology and Soteriology)] Београд/Belgrade 1980, 146-148; Vladimir Lossky: Владимир Лосский, Боговидение, прев. В. А. Рещиков [=The Vision of God, trans. from French by V.A. Reshchikova], 2006, 60-62, 539.

²⁰ According to Bulgakov, it can be said that Sophia is the Logos, but not that the Logos is Sophia; also, it can be said that Sophia is the Holy Spirit, but not the opposite. He does not accept the New Testament and Patristic identification of the Wisdom of God with the Person of the incarnate Logos of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. According to him, Christological sophiology, or as he calls it "logosological sophiology", is a consequence of Christological disputes. About the Christological understanding of the Wisdom of God in the Bible and among the holy fathers, see: Zdravko Peno: Здравко Пено, „Софија и софијанизам“, *Теолошки погледи*, [=“Sophia and Sophianism” in Theological views], XLI No. 1 (2008) 25–55. With some of the holy fathers, one finds the understanding of God's Wisdom as a general characteristic of God. But this refers to the energies of God, common to the Holy Trinity. In patristic theology the kataphatic and apophatic names of God do not refer to God's beyond-essence, which is unnameable, but to the essence which is manifested in the energies. God's essence is called essence only because it expresses itself in its own energies. The general names of God refer to what is *around* God. They signify the indivisible action of the transcendent Trinity and testify to the indivisibility of the Godhead.

²¹ In this context, it is good to remember the famous words of St. Gregory Palamas: “The transcendence of God (τὴν ὑπερουσιότητα τὴν θεϊάν) can neither be named with words, nor understood, nor contemplated in any way, it surpasses everything and is beyond comprehension (ὑπεράγνωστον), it is unattainable even to the unlimited powers of heavenly minds, and for all it remains completely and forever (in all ages) unattainable and ineffable (ἀληπτὸν τε καὶ ἀρρητόν). For there is no name for it by which it can be named in the present age or in the age to come, nor [is there for it] a word (λόγος) composed in the soul or uttered by the tongue, nor [is there for it] any sensation (touch) of the senses or the mind (ἐπαφή τις αἰσθητῆ ἢ νοερά); nor a representation at all (φαντασία); and is there anyone who, because of the denials, will not regard it as the most perfect unattainability, for it is outstandingly set apart from all it is or named anyhow. This is why, recognizing this truth as higher than all truth, we should not, literally [in the strict sense], (κυρίως) call it either essence or nature. [...]; not the essence or nature itself is to be named, but the essential emanation and energy of God”. *Gregorii Palamae dialogue qui inscribitur Theophanes sive de divinitatis et rerum divinarum communicabile et incommunicabile*, Migne, PG, 150, col. 937. For the holy fathers from the East the apophatic of the person is characteristic, and for the medieval scholastics – the apophatic of the essence (nature). The first apophatic model is an expression of immediate live experience, resulting from personal communion with God through his uncreated energies, while the second apophatic model represents an intellectual renunciation of cataphatic analogies. See: Stefan Sandžakoski: Стефан Санџакоски

essence of God. The distinction between God's nature and God's will, between God's intra-Trinitarian life and God's action in relation to the world, is broken. Bulgakov does not respect the distinction, characteristic of the patristic thought, between theology and economy²². It can be observed that Bulgakov's tendency is to make a projection of what belongs to the economic activity of God onto the inner life in God.

According to Bulgakov, God's essence, or Sophia, is not limited exclusively to the inner life of the Holy Trinity. According to him, the divine Sophia does not exist only for the mutual self-revelation and togetherness of God's Hypostases. She is both a transcendent condition for the creation of the world and an ontological foundation of the creation of the world, a prerequisite for the unity of the world with God. The pre-eternal Sophia is revealed in creation. However, if Sophia is God's essence, and the world was created through Sophia and is sophic in nature, then God's relationship to God's creation is brought into relation to God's essence, not to God's energies. The world is identified with God. With this essentialist approach, Bulgakov involuntarily strays into cryptopanteism, and this is one of the most problematic points in his sophiology. He, in order to avoid accusations of pantheism, introduces the teaching of the created Sophia, which is, in fact, a kind of transposition (transfer) of the eternal Sophia outside of God, on the plane of nonbeing and creation. God, acting as Creator, allows His Wisdom to "enter" nonbeing, i.e. allows what is "outside" of God to appear as absolutely nothing (οὐκ ὄν), and then as (μη ὄν) a being that is not quite determined. Bulgakov's sophiological concept implies an intermediary structure through which the gradual transition from the absolute to the relative, from the Uncreated to the creation, is possible. Namely, the divine pre-eternal Sophia is a kind of hypostasis-essence (in the sense of a mediator) for the self-revelation (self-knowledge of God) in the Holy Trinity, and the created Sophia is the hypostasis-essence of the divine pre-eternal Sophia, for its revelation in creation as its entelechy²³. In fact, Sergei Bulgakov, through the prism of his sophiological concept, makes an unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the matrix of mediating ontology with the Christian vision

Анофатичка философија на Corpus Areopagiticum, [=Aprophatic Philosophy of 'Corpus Areopagiticum'], Скопје/Skopje 2003, 122–123. (Macedonian text only). Christos Yannaras: Христо Јанарас, *Хайдегер и Дионисије Ареопагит, или о одсуству и непознању Бога*, прев. С. Јакшић, [=Heidegger and Dionysius the Areopagite, or On the Absence and Ignorance of God], trans. into Serbian S. Jakšić, Нови Сад/Novi Sad 2016, 72–74.

²² This was precisely the basic problem of the Donicean theology.

²³ In the context of the sophiological concept, it is much more appropriate to identify Sophia as hypostasis, rather than as ousia. Because, according to Bulgakov, it is revealed (actualized) ousia. But ultimately, the terms hypostasis and ousia that he uses can be understood as synonyms. It does not cause any substantial changes in his teaching at all. His reiteration in relation to the naming of Sophia with the term hypostasis occurs due to the pressure of criticism coming from the clearly and precisely theologically differentiated terms hypostasis (person) and essence (nature).

of the relationship between God and God's creation. Not coincidentally, various critics in his sophiology recognize elements from Platonism, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and other philosophical systems, which, although mutually opposed, nevertheless, in a different way, are characterized by the idea of mediating instances.

The problematic nature of the sophiological explanation of the relationship between God and the world can be seen from the aspect of the theology of God's uncreated energies, which is theologically most clearly articulated by Saint Gregory Palamas. Primarily, one should keep in mind the distinction of God's essence from the energies, the source of which is God's essence itself. Their distinction does not imply separation. God's nature and Its energies belong to the Three Persons. In the context of sophiology it is especially important to emphasize that God's energies are not some kind of hypostatic intermediary between God and creation. St. Gregory Palamas emphasizes that not everything originating from or being manifested by someone receives the quality of a being or existence from him by birth or origin, and it is not obligatory that it has its own hypostasis²⁴. The energy of God, although existing, is not an independent substance.

"Since grace has appeared, it is no longer obligatory to do everything through mediators." In these words of St. Gregory Palamas, as noted by Sergei Horujius, is the simple Orthodox answer to sophiology²⁵. Orthodoxy establishes an energy relationship between God and the world, which does not imply intermediary instances, as it is the case when the relationship between God and the world is explained in line with essence²⁶. God's energies do not have a mediating role, they do not have their own hypostasis, nor a separate essence (substance) – they are the actions of God, in which God is fully present. God creates the world with His uncreated energies. Beings are not created from energies, but through energies from *ex nihilo*. Creations are not a continuation of God's energies, but are effects (results) of their action. According to the confession of St. Gregory Palamas, God allows the creation to be, but the created being is not given the essential properties of God's nature (ousia), nor does it come into any kind of immanent contact with it. What creation can partake in are the actions of hypostatic and uncreated energies of the essentializing will of God. Man communes with God according to

²⁴ Georgi Kapriev: Георги Каприв, *Византийска философия*, [=Byzantine Philosophy], София/Sofia 2011, 361. In this attitude of St. Gregory Palamas, the difference between Patristic theology and Plotinus' metaphysics is perceived. According to him, the energy activity of the higher hypostasis always leads to the emergence of a new hypostasis.

²⁵ Khoruzhiy, S.: С. Хоружий „Перепутья русской софиологии“, *О старом и новом*, [=“The Crossroads of Russian sophiology, *Of the old and new*]. Санкт-Петербург/Saint-Petersburg: 2000, 160.

²⁶ Here one should take into account the Christocentricity of the Palamite theology and the correction made by St. Gregory Palamas regarding the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius on the hierarchy. See: Георги Каприв, *Византийска философия*, 374–375.

God's energies, not according to God's essence. "The divine essence is hypostasized and in its innerness can essentially partake only and exclusively the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity, which together with the essence make up the one and indivisible being of God"²⁷. The Divine Persons have (are carriers of) Their own nature, and not its "products", and in that sense They have the primacy over Their own essence. They commune with the creation, but not through essence, but through the uncreated energies of essence.

One of the fundamental failures of Bulgakov's theology is the neglect (circumvention) of the theology of uncreated energies. He calls the theology of St. Gregory Palamas as well as the overall patristic theology "incomplete, unfinished sophiology". There is a certain reason behind Bulgakov's restrained attitude towards the patristic heritage. Namely, the ontological model of energies is inherent to the biblical-patristic theology, while, on the other hand, sophiology, promoted by Bulgakov and through which he perceives everything in theology and God's economy, is characterized by the essentialist model of ontology (*essentia*, οὐσία). Although he knows the oral teaching of the distinction between God's essence and its energies, he cannot accept it on the one side, and remain true to his sophiology on the other. The sophiological ontology of essence is incompatible with the patristic ontology of energy. Hence, numerous deviations of Bulgakov's theology from the theology of the Church arise. He does not use the terms hypostasis, ousia, and energy in their strictly defined dogmatic meaning because, according to him, everything is overshadowed by the essentialist ontology.

In the sophiological interpretation of the relationship between God and the world, a clear distinction simply cannot be drawn between God's essence and the creation. The pantheistic outcome of the sophiological doctrine, although not aimed for by Bulgakov, is nevertheless inevitable. He unsuccessfully tries to avoid pantheism (he calls his teaching panentheism πάν ἐν θεῷ, "all is in God") by modifying his sophiology with the teaching of the two sophias: the divine Sophia as eternal first foundation of the world and the created Sophia as the divine power of the life of the creations. However, it is about the same Sophia in her two modalities²⁸. This means that God's essence is both inside creation and outside of it²⁹. The second created Sophia

²⁷ Bogdan M. Lubaradić: Богдан М. Лубарадић, „Хришћанска философија оца Сергеја Булгакова и учење о Софији: између Софије и софиологије“, [=] "Christian Philosophy of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov and his teaching on Sophia: Between Sophia and Sophiology", 212.

²⁸ John Meyendorff: Јован Мајендорф, „Појам стварања у историји православног богословља“, *Теолошки погледи*, [=] "Creation in the History of Orthodox Theology," (Serbian translation in: *Theological views*), бр./no. 1-4, (1994): 37–38: "Between the uncreated Sophia (or the essence of God) and her created duplicate, there is a difference, but also an ontological continuation, even identity." (paper author's translation of the citation for the purpose of this publication)

²⁹ "Sophia is the very nature of God, not only as an act, but also as a divine eternal fact; not only as a force, but also as a consequence. [...] In Sophia, God knows and sees Himself, He loves Himself, not with mutual personal

is the projection of the divine Sophia into the meonic reality of the divine *fiat*. "The physical Sophia arises from the divine Sophia. [...] The created Sophia, in a certain sense, does not repeat the divine one, but represents a set of creative variants of her theme."³⁰ In the divine and the created world, everything is "one and identical in content, but not in being"³¹. As Nikolay Loski observes, according to this stance of Bulgakov's, it appears that "there was no real creation, but only a relocation or incarnation of the previously existing content in God took place. Also, man does not create any positive new content, but only repeats the eternal content of the divine nature in the form of time. [...] According to Bulgakov, creative action can be new only in the modal sense, i.e. it can only turn the possible into the real. This teaching minimizes the creative abilities of both man and God."³² Bulgakov's essentialism entails a certain deterministic understanding of history. Everything that happens in it is a part of an organic process that is sociologically pre-determined.

Bulgakov understands God's energies in an essentialist sense. Aidan Nichols, commenting on the sophiological cryptopanteism, notes: "Bulgakov considers that the (created) world is an energy of the divine essence, and that it is an energy that God has placed outside of Godself, in the non-being, and which energy, permeating with that non-being, acquires the form of a process or existence"³³. From the point of view of Bulgakov's essentialist approach, the attitude that "the being of the world is a divine being"³⁴ is not at all surprising. "The world is 'created God.' It is a unity of the Absolute and nothing, the Absolute in the relative, and the relative in the Absolute, the Absolute stops, changes Its actual absoluteness and makes It potential in order to give place to the relative, which thus joins the Absolute. Through the creation *ex nihilo* the Absolute seems to establish two centers: one eternal and one created; in the bosom of the most self-sufficient eternity appears the 'absolute that arises' (Solovyov's expression, b. m.), that is, the second center. Together with the superbeing

love, such as the eternal love of the Three Hypostases is, but He loves His Godhead, His Divinity, His divine life, worthy of love. Sophia is the Deity of God or the Deity in God and in this sense, she is also the divine world before creation. For the created world, God is Sophia, because in her and through her He reveals Himself as a Person and Triune God and as the Creator. The world was created through Sophia and in Sophia, because there is no other principle and there cannot be. Consequently, the world is Sophia, but in creation, created, existent in time. The world was created on the basis of Sophia, therefore it is destined for a state in which God will be all in all – that is, to become completely sophian." Sergius Bulgakov, *Icon and icon veneration*, <http://ivashek.com/ru/our-books/e-books> (accessed on 02/13/2020).

³⁰ Bulgakov, Sergius, *Bride of the Lamb*, 92, 94.

³¹ Bulgakov, Sergius, *The Lamb of God*, 148.

³² N. O. Lossky: Н. О. Лоский, *История русской философии*. [=History of Russian Philosophy] Москва/Moscow 1991, 262–263

³³ Nichols Aidan, "Bulgakov and Sophiology", *Eastern Churches Review/ Sobornost*, 13.2 (1992), 28; cited according to Богдан М. Лубарадић, „Хришћанска философија оца Сергеја Булгакова и учење о Софији: између Софије и софиологије“, 211.

³⁴ Bulgakov, Sergius, *Unfading Light*. 192.

essential one, the Absolute being appears, in which the Absolute reveals Itself as the Creator, reveals Itself in Him, realizes Itself in Him, the Self becomes included in the being, and in this sense the world is God who comes into being. [...] By creating the world, God thereby also shows (introduces) Godself into the creation, it is as if He Himself becomes a creation. God self-empties into the nothingness, transforming it into His own image and likeness."³⁵ Bulgakov, trying to emphasize the inner unity between God and creation, uses expressions and formulations that further strengthen the impression of his hidden pantheism: the world is "created by God", "God repeats Godself in creation", "as if making a creation of Godself", "the world is an emanation of God, plus something new".

We will briefly address another problematic point in the sophiological explanation of the creation of the world and its relationship with God. Namely, Bulgakov, from his own sophiological (pantheistic) position, could not help but come into conflict with the traditional faith teachings of the Church about the free creation of the world by the Creator. God created it, but he did not have to create the world. The existence of creation is not an ontological necessity, but the fruit of God's freedom and love. This attitude is unacceptable for Bulgakov, because according to him it implies the randomness of the creation of the world. He points out that God's freedom must not be evaluated from the aspect of created freedom which is related to potential possibilities. Therefore, according to Bulgakov, the claim that God could have not created the world is a consequence of excessive anthropomorphism. For Bulgakov, the view that God freely created the world is acceptable only from the point of view that there is nothing "outside" of God that conditions the act of creation. God is the Creator of the "nothing" and of that "outside" of Him. But on the plane of the intra-trinitarian life of God, there is a necessity for God to be the pre-eternal Creator. The "inner necessity" for the creation of the world has its basis in the inner self-revelation of God's Hypostases which takes place through the divine Sophia. "It is necessary to include the creation of the world in God's own life, to compare it with Him, to compare the creative act of God with the act of Self-comprehension of God. One should be able to simultaneously connect, identify, but also differentiate, as it is possible in the teaching of Sophia, the divine and created, the same, but also different."³⁶ The inner dynamics of the self-revelation of the Three Hypostases in and through the divine Sophia "necessarily" implies the external Self-revelation of God, that is, the very act of creation.

³⁵ Bulgakov, Sergius, *Unfading Light*, 193.

³⁶ Bulgakov, Sergius, *Bride of the Lamb*, 52.

Once again, we will turn to Plotinus' ontology, as to a hermeneutic model for interpreting Bulgakov's sophiological doctrine. John Rist, considering the question of whether the "creation" ("birth") of the world is a necessity for the One, states that the will of the One and One's essence are identical. There is no difference between the activity of the One and One's will on which the activity itself depends. It cannot be said that the One is activated by virtue of One's will, because One is fully active. Emanation is a necessity for One, because it is One's nature. One must necessarily emanate to be what One is in Oneself. One's emanation is One's will and essence. Plotinus uses the notion of will in relation to the One to show that the process of emanation is not arbitrary. One wills what is necessary; necessity, in fact, is One's will. "Creation is as free as One is free. Freedom is incompatible with pantheism."³⁷ It is precisely in this thought that it is revealed why Bulgakov finds it necessary to point out that God, according to His nature, is necessarily also the Creator. He writes: "God in Godself is equally God and Creator, with perfect equality of the necessity and the freedom of His being. This thought can be expressed differently – God cannot not be but the Creator and the Creator cannot not be but God. The idea of the creation of the world is as co-eternal with God as God's own being in the divine Sophia, and in that sense and in that sense alone, God cannot be sidestepped without sidestepping the world, and the world is necessary to God's very being; the world, in a certain sense, is to be included in God (in God's being, b. m.), although this inclusion in no way means a crude pantheistic identification of God and the world, according to which God is the world."³⁸ Bulgakov understands God's will in the spirit of Platonism and Neoplatonism. Namely, according to him, the concept of will does not have a voluntarist, but an intellectual character. God's will is an aspiration that what God Godself is pre-eternal by nature be realized on the plane of creation. God, in order to be what God is by God's nature, must also be a Creator. The creative striving is a work of the ontological necessity. As it is known, the patristic thought, facing the question of the alleged internal determination of God to necessarily be the Creator, has provided the teaching on the eternal ideas (paradigms) about the creation of the world which belong to God's will and not to God's essence. However, this patristic teaching is not acceptable for Bulgakov, because it cannot be explained through the prism of his sophiology.³⁹

³⁷ J.M. Rist: Джон М. Рист, *Плотин путь к реальности*, прев. Е. В. Афонасин, И. В. Брестов, [=Plotinus: The Road to Reality., trans. from English I.V. Berestova and E.V. Afonasiina], Санкт – Петербург/St. Petersburg, 2005, 97–98.

³⁸ Bulgakov, Sergius, *Bride of the Lamb*, 53–54.

³⁹ According to him, the distinction between God's essence and God's will introduces a duality in God. He asks the question: do the ideas (paradigms) correspond to the divine Sophia or to the created Sophia? The criticism that Bulgakov directs to patristic teaching, in relation to this issue, should be the subject of separate consideration.

The truth about the creation of the world is a mystery, which, above all, is "the object of faith and the content of the Revelation" and "cannot be determined by the power of human thought"⁴⁰. Despite this sound theological attitude, however, Bulgakov, according to his intellectual temperament, in relation to the subject of the creation of the world, engages into rationalistic speculations, which are not in accordance with the teaching of the Orthodox faith. His sophiology represents an unsuccessful attempt to interpret the biblical teaching about the creation of the world out of nothing, through categories that are alien to the Church's Traditional Faith Teaching⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Bulgakov, Sergius, *Bride of the Lamb*, 12.

⁴¹ Bulgakov's sophiological teaching was officially condemned twice, by the Decree of the Moscow Patriarchate (September 7, 1935) and by the Decision of the Bishops' Council of the Russian Church Abroad (October 17/30, 1935, No. 1651). By several theologians, direct or indirect participants in the sophiological dispute, all revealed and hidden deviations of Bulgakov from orthodoxy are clearly indicated. The list of Bulgakov's contemporaries who critically addressed his sophiological teaching is long; we will only mention Archbishop Antony Khrapovitsky, St. John of Shanghai, Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), Metropolitan Sergei (Stragorodsky), Vladimir Lossky, Father Georges Florovsky. According to Father John Meyendorff, the overall early phase of Lossky and Florovsky's work can be characterized as a reaction against Bulgakov's sophiology. John Meyendorff, "Creation in the History of Orthodox Theology", [In the Serbian translation: p. 38]. Father Sergius Bugakov tried to defend his teaching on several occasions. But his attempts did not bear fruit. He, being under the threat of being dissolved and excommunicated from the church community, publicly renounced his sophiology as a false teaching and remained a faithful son of the Church of God until his repose in the Lord (July 13, 1944).