Sergei Bulgakov's Sophiology Historical Parallels and Ecumenical Dialogues

Michael Yuryevich Kuznetsov

PhD Philosophical Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy, V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, 4 Svobody Square, Kharkiv, Ukraine

| **Abstract** | Sergei Bulgakov's sophiology offers a distinctive contribution to Russian religious philosophy by incorporating Divine Wisdom (Sophia) into Trinitarian theology, thereby bridging materialism and idealism while addressing the existential and theological crises of modernity. This study investigates historical parallels between Bulgakov's sophiological framework and ancient philosophical-theological traditions, aiming to demonstrate how these connections revitalize Orthodox theology and illuminate mediating principles in divine-human relations. An interdisciplinary methodology is applied, combining historical-philosophical analysis, comparative-theological examination, and detailed textual interpretation of primary sources. Bulgakov's major works are scrutinized alongside writings by early Christian figures (Origen, Arius, and Gnostic texts) and the Middle Platonist Plutarch, with attention to the socio-political context of early 20th-century Russia influencing Bulgakov's intellectual development. The comparative analysis uncovers profound parallels: Origen's emanationist theology and allegorical methods correspond to Bulgakov's portrayal of Sophia as a hypostatic bridge; Arius's emphasis on hypostatic distinctions echoes Bulgakov's non-hierarchical quadriform divine structure (God–Sophia–Holy Spirit–Son); Valentinian Gnostic aeonic emanations shape his fourfold essences; and Plutarch's daimonic intermediaries reflect Sophia's function in mediating between transcendent and immanent realms. The research asserts that: 1) Bulgakov innovatively retrieves and orthodoxizes ancient motifs, adapting emanationist and mediating principles to avoid heresy while enriching Trinitarian doctrine; 2) his sophiology critiques dogmatic rigidity and dualistic extremes, affirming the inherent divinity and goodness of creation; 3) this framework provides lasting relevance for contemporary theology, promoting mystical unity, ecumenical dialogue and a holistic understanding of human-divine interaction amid modern challenges. |
| **Keywords** | Gnosticism; Plutarch; Sergei Bulgakov; Sophiology; Trinitarian Theology. |

Corresponding Author
Michael Yuryevich Kuznetsov
V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, 4 Svobody Square, Kharkiv, Ukraine, pwanz87@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov (1871–1944) developed sophiology as a key part of Russian religious philosophy (Gallaher, 2013). He integrated Divine Wisdom (Sophia) into Trinitarian theology to connect God and creation. Born into a clerical family in Oryol, Russia, Bulgakov initially adopted Marxism at Moscow University as a way to solve social problems. Events like the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) (Evtuhov, 1991), the 1905 Revolution, and personal crises showed the limits of materialism. Bulgakov transformed the traditional Trinity into a quadriform structure: God the Father as source, Sophia as wisdom, Holy Spirit as life-

giver, and Son as incarnate Word. In works like Unfading Light (1917) and Philosophy of Economy (1912), Sophia appears as the ousia of the Trinity, enabling theosis without adding a fourth hypostasis (Bulgakov, 2012, 2014). Ordained in 1918 and exiled in 1922, he refined these ideas in Paris.

Bulgakov's works, such as Philosophy of Economy: The World as Household, inform the Christian economic man, integrating sophiological concepts from Russian religious philosophy to rethink capitalist ethics, bridging materialism and idealism through divine wisdom (Lin, 2014). Previous studies on Bulgakov's sophiology focus on its controversies (e.g., heresy accusations from Florovsky and Lossky), Solovyovian roots, eschatology (Gavrilyuk, 2006), death (Kiejzik, 2010), and general patristic or Gnostic influences (Gallaher, 2016; van Kessel, 2025). They often treat sophiology as heterodox or limit parallels to broad Platonism/Gnosticism. Thesis of this study: Bulgakov's sophiology systematically retrieves ancient mediating principles to enrich Orthodox Trinitarianism while avoiding heresy.

Bulgakov sought answers to existential questions about human suffering and purpose, finding in religion a synthesis of reason and faith. This transition was not abrupt but a gradual reorientation, shaped by his engagement with Vladimir Solovyov's (1853–1900) philosophy and the pressing need to reconcile the spiritual with the secular in a fractured world. Solovyov's concept of Sophia, as the eternal feminine principle embodying God's wisdom, served as the cornerstone for Bulgakov's sophiology. In Solovyov's view, Sophia is not an abstract notion but a living reality, bridging the Creator and creation, drawing from Platonic forms and biblical imagery in Proverbs 8.

Bulgakov expanded this idea, embedding Sophia within the Trinitarian framework, transforming the traditional triad of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into a dynamic quadriform: God the Father as the absolute source, Sophia as His wisdom, the Holy Spirit as the life-giving force, and the Son as the incarnate Word. This schema emerged from Bulgakov's desire to address the perceived gap between the transcendent God and the immanent world, a concern rooted in both theological inquiry and the historical crises of his time. His exploration of Sophia was not a speculative exercise but a deliberate response to the question of how divine presence permeates a world marked by chaos and suffering. Bulgakov inherits Solovyov's hybrid influences: Kabbalism mixed with Gnosticism, Boehme, and Schelling, adapting them orthodoxly. It parallels ancient emanationist motifs in Gnostic and Platonic

thought, where Sophia mediates divine wisdom, bridging transcendence and creation without monistic fusion (Gallaher, 2012).

Bulgakov's inclusion of Sophia in the Trinity stemmed from his conviction that traditional Trinitarian theology, as articulated in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, required a mediating principle to make God accessible to human experience. In Orthodox doctrine, the Trinity emphasizes the unity of essence (ousia) and distinction of hypostases. Still, Bulgakov argued that without a connective element like Sophia, the divine remains distant, and creation risks being severed from its Creator. In his seminal work, Unfading Light (1917), Sophia is described as the "ousia of the Holy Trinity," not a fourth hypostasis in a strict sense, thus avoiding accusations of heresy, but as the divine essence manifesting in creation (Bulgakov, 2012). Sophia enables the world to participate in God's life through the process of theosis (deification), where humanity aligns with divine purpose. This concept draws on ancient traditions, notably the Gnostic texts of the 2nd–3rd centuries, such as Valentinian writings, where Sophia appears as an aeon, fallen from the divine pleroma yet seeking reunion with God. Bulgakov, familiar with these sources through patristic studies, reinterpreted them within an Orthodox framework, purging their dualistic tendencies and grounding Sophia in biblical wisdom literature.

The historical context of Bulgakov's work profoundly shaped his focus on Sophia. The Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and the First Russian Revolution exposed the fragility of social and moral structures, with materialism fueling revolutionary violence that Bulgakov found inadequate for addressing human despair. In this turmoil, he turned to Sophia as a symbol of divine order, a principle that could unify fractured societies. In Philosophy of Economy (1912), he presents economic activity as a sophianic process, where human labor mirrors God's creative act, transforming matter in alignment with divine wisdom (Bulgakov, 2014). Sophia, for Bulgakov, was not just a theological construct but a practical response to existential crises, offering a vision of the world as inherently divine despite its flaws. His exploration of Sophia aimed to reconcile science and religion, where empirical knowledge is enriched by mystical insight, addressing questions of evil, free will, and humanity's ultimate unity with God.

Influenced by Solovyov and personal experiences such as moments of awe at nature's beauty as a reflection of divine glory he began to see the Trinity as a living reality. By 1918, after taking holy orders and amid the Bolshevik Revolution, Sophia became central to his theology. He viewed her as the feminine aspect of God, complementing the masculine

hypostases, a perspective inspired by biblical imagery and his interest in the gendered dimensions of divinity. S. N. Bulgakov was a pivotal figure in the Petrograd "Brotherhood of Saint Sophia," a short-lived but influential religious-philosophical circle active from 1918 to 1922, formed amid the Russian Revolution's chaos. Bulgakov, recently ordained as a priest in 1918, joined as a leading voice, shaping the group's mission to integrate sophiology into Orthodox practice. In exile during the 1920s in Prague and Paris, Bulgakov refined this in his trilogy, On Godmanhood (1927–1930), particularly in The Lamb of God, where Sophia is depicted as both divine and creaturely, facilitating Christ's Incarnation as a sophianic event (Bulgakov, 2008). This dual nature allowed him to explain how God enters history without losing transcendence.

Why Sophia, and not another concept? Sergey Bulgakov's choice was rooted in biblical tradition, where Wisdom (Sophia) is personified as God's delight, existing before creation (Proverbs 8: 22–30). Unlike other theological categories, Sophia offered a dynamic framework for understanding divine-human interaction. Her feminine quality addressed a perceived imbalance in Trinitarian theology, which often emphasized masculine imagery, and resonated with Bulgakov's vision of a holistic divine nature. His engagement with early Christian thinkers, such as Origen's emanationist theology and Gnostic speculations, further shaped this approach. Origen's view of the Logos as a mediator parallels Sophia's role as a bridge. At the same time, Gnostic aeonic hierarchies informed Bulgakov's quadriform schema, though he rejected their denigration of the material world. His study of Sophia was also a response to modernity's secularism, offering a mystical epistemology that transcends rationalism while affirming creation's sacredness.

Table 1. Parallels Between Bulgakov and Ancient Traditions

Ancient Source/Thinker	Key Concept / Motif	Adaptation in Bulgakov's Thought	Purpose of Adaptation / Resolution of Conflict
Plutarch (Middle Platonism)	**Daimon** (δαίμων) as an intermediary between gods and humans.	**Sophia** (Σοφία) as the comprehensive mediator between the Transcendent and the immanent.	**Adaptation:** Giving Christian ontological depth to Platonic mediation. **Resolution:** Rejecting polytheism and mythologism; affirming the one God.

Ancient Source/Thinker	Key Concept / Motif	Adaptation in Bulgakov's Thought	Purpose of Adaptation / Resolution of Conflict
Origen (Early Christian Thought)	Emanation from the Father; hierarchical triadology; **apo katastasis** (ἀπο κατάστασις, universal restoration).	Sophia as the divine **ousia** (οὐσία) facilitating creation's ascent to God; eschatological hope.	**Adaptation:** Preserving the idea of hierarchy within a non-subordinationist Trinity. **Resolution:** Avoiding subordinationism by integrating Sophia into the Trinitarian essence.
Arius (Arianism)	Emphasis on hypostatic distinctions, particularly the Son's subordination to the Father.	A non-hierarchical quadriform structure (God–Sophia–Holy Spirit–Son), emphasizing distinction without subordination.	**Adaptation:** Using the emphasis on distinction to enrich Trinitarian theology. **Resolution:** Overcoming subordinationism by affirming Sophianic unity and **homoousios** (ὁμοούσιος, consubstantiality).
Valentinian Gnosis	**Aeons** (αἰῶνες) as emanations of the **Pleroma** (πλήρωμα); the fallen Sophia striving for redemption.	A fourfold essence; Sophia as both divine and creaturely, uniting and redeeming.	**Adaptation:** Adopting the structure and dynamics of fall/redemption. **Resolution:** Rejecting dualism (evil matter); affirming the ontological goodness of creation.
Gregory of Nyssa	Divine **haplotēs** (ἁπλότης, simplicity); apophatic theology; **epekt asis** (ἐπέκτασις, eternal striving).	Implicitly present in ideas of God's incomprehensibility and the Sophianic process of **theosis** (θέωσις, deification).	**Adaptation:** Supporting the apophatic approach and a dynamic understanding of salvation. **Resolution:** Integrating into soteriology, emphasizing mystical unity over mere philosophical apophaticism.

In adapting Gnostic motifs, Bulgakov orthodoxizes the fallen Sophia by viewing death not as ultimate dualism but as a sophianic process. Resurrection requires dying kenotically in Christ, affirming the goodness of creation and enabling full participation in divine wisdom beyond ancient denigrations of matter (Kiejzik, 2010). This transformative approach finds echoes in other traditions: in Islamic mysticism, saints like Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) portray divine wisdom (hikmah) as a luminous, feminine theophanic force facilitating spiritual ascent;

in Mahayana Buddhism, enlightened beings (bodhisattvas) embody compassionate wisdom (prajña), mediating between samsara and nirvana, overcoming dualistic suffering through realization of emptiness and interdependence.

Bulgakov's exploration of Sophia was not without controversy. The Orthodox Church scrutinized his ideas, fearing they veered toward heresy by introducing a fourth element to the Trinity. To counter this, Bulgakov emphasized Sophia's non-hypostatic role, aligning her with the divine essence rather than a separate person. His nuanced defense, articulated in works like The Wisdom of God (1937), drew on the Orthodox principle of oikonomia (pastoral accommodation), arguing that Sophia's inclusion enriched believers' understanding of God's immanence (Bulgakov, 1993). This approach allowed him to navigate ecclesiastical criticism while advancing a theology that spoke to both intellectual and spiritual needs. Bulgakov's understanding of the Trinity evolved through distinct phases. Bulgakov's philosophy is fundamentally rooted in his personal and philosophical journey, which can be divided into three stages: Marxist materialism (1890s–1905), transitional idealism (1905–1918), and mature sophiological theology (1918–1944).

Bulgakov critiques two extremes in Christianity: a world-denying asceticism, akin to Manicheism, prevalent in certain Orthodox and Protestant strands, and a secularized social Christianity that dilutes theology's relevance. He proposes sophiology as a remedy, viewing the Orthodox Church's liturgical life as the embodiment of Sophia, uniting divine and creaturely realms. In his schema, Sophia exists in two modes: divine, as God's eternal essence (ousia), and creaturely, as the world's participation in divine being through a kenotic act of creation. Sergey Bulgakov's conceptualization of Sophia as a bridge between God and creation emphasizing its expression in Orthodox practices like Mariology and the Eucharist. Contrasts Bulgakov's "both/and" vision of divine and creaturely wisdom with Reformed concerns, notably Karl Barth's (1886-1968) emphasis on Christ as the sole locus of divine revelation. For Bulgakov, the Orthodox liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, manifests this sophianic unity. The Eucharist is not merely symbolic but a real participation in divine life, where bread and wine become vehicles of Sophia's presence, enabling communicants to partake in God's wisdom. From a Reformed perspective, Kyle McCracken engages Bulgakov's sophiology through Karl Barth's theology, which emphasizes divine wisdom as revealed solely in Christ. Barth's apophatic stance that God's wisdom cannot be grasped apart from Christ's self-revelation contrasts with Bulgakov's view of Sophia as a universal

principle permeating creation. Roland Barth warns against abstract principles behind Christ, fearing they risk idolatry by constructing wisdom from creation itself (McCracken, 2022).

The uniqueness of this study lies in its targeted comparative analysis of Bulgakov's sophiology with specific ancient figures (Origen, Arius, Valentinian Gnostics, Plutarch), demonstrating constructive orthodox adaptation of emanationist motifs. Unlike prior works (e.g., Gallaher, 2016, focusing on pantheism risks; Gavrilyuk, 2006, on eschatology), this research is superior by: (1) proving non-heretical integration into Trinitarian unity; (2) emphasizing practical responses to modern crises; and (3) extending ecumenical relevance, including non-Christian parallels, thus filling gaps in balanced, systematic evaluation.

The author asserts that: (1) Bulgakov orthodoxizes ancient motifs (Gnostic fallen Sophia, Origenian hierarchies) into Trinitarian unity without dualism/subordinationism (Gallaher, 2012; Kiejzik, 2010); (2) sophiology critiques extremes (Manichean asceticism, secular Christianity) and affirms creation's goodness; and (3) it offers a mediating framework for contemporary theology amid secularism.

RESEARCH METHODS

Previous research on Sergei Bulgakov's sophiology has primarily focused on its controversial reception within Orthodox theology, critiques from neopatristic thinkers like Georges Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky (who accused it of Gnostic, Platonic, and pantheistic influences), and its roots in Vladimir Solovyov's philosophy (Gallaher, 2016; Gavrilyuk, 2006; van Kessel, 2025). Studies have explored eschatological aspects (Gavrilyuk, 2006), death (Kiejzik, 2010), and general parallels with patristic traditions or Gnosticism, often viewing sophiology as heterodox or innovative beyond the Fathers. However, few works systematically compare Bulgakov's framework to specific ancient figures like Origen, Arius, Valentinian Gnostics, and Middle Platonist Plutarch, nor do they emphasize orthodoxization of emanationist motifs while highlighting mediating principles in divine-human relations.

This study addresses a gap in the literature by conducting a comprehensive comparative analysis that not only identifies profound historical parallels but also demonstrates their integration into an Orthodox context. Unlike prior research, which often critiques sophiology for perceived heresy or limits parallels to broad influences (e.g., Platonism or Gnostic dualism), this work asserts superiority through: (1) a balanced retrieval of ancient motifs, avoiding subordinationism and dualism while enriching Trinitarian doctrine; (2) explicit focus on non-hierarchical quadriform structures and daimonic intermediaries absent in most studies;

and (3) emphasis on sophiology's enduring ecumenical and mystical relevance amid modern crises, promoting unity over polarization.

The methodology is predominantly qualitative, employing historical-philosophical analysis, comparative-theological examination, and close textual interpretation of primary sources (Bulgakov's works alongside Origen, Arius, Gnostic texts, and Plutarch). This interpretive approach suits theological inquiry, capturing nuances, contexts, and meanings that reveal conceptual parallels and sophiology's transformative adaptation. No quantitative methods (e.g., surveys, statistical analysis, or content quantification of citations across corpora) are applied, as the research is hermeneutical and non-empirical, prioritizing depth over measurable data. Secondary literature validates interpretations, ensuring rigor without numerical generalization. This qualitative dominance aligns with philosophical-theological traditions, where subjective insight and contextual synthesis prevail over positivist quantification.

To complement the qualitative comparative analysis, a limited semi-quantitative term frequency count was performed on key concepts ("Sophia/Wisdom", "ousia/essence", "emanation", "mediation/intermediary", "hierarchy/subordination") in digitized English translations of primary sources. Occurrences were normalized per 1000 words using text search tools. It provides objective indicators of conceptual emphasis, supporting qualitative parallels while acknowledging the interpretive nature of theological texts.
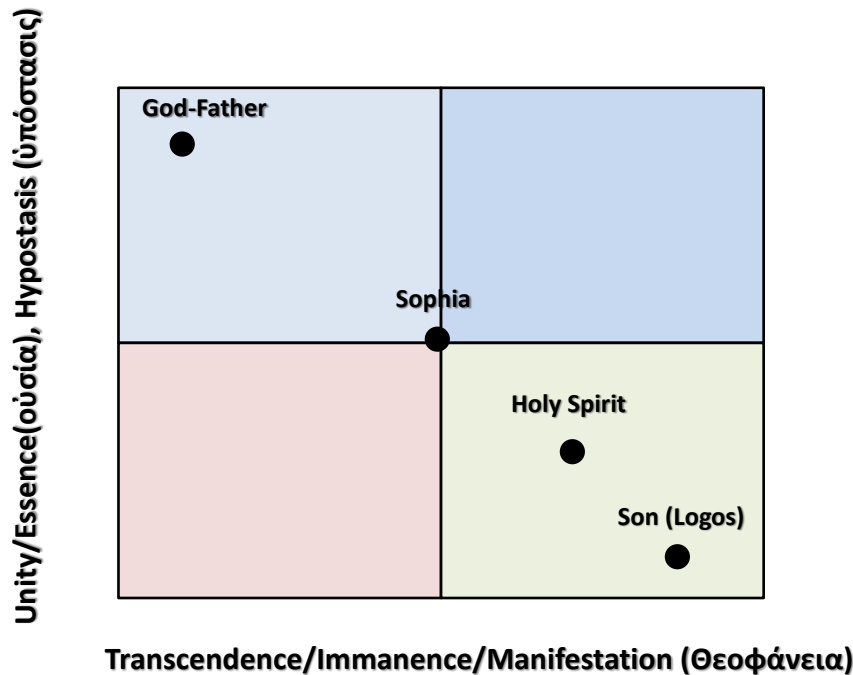
Table 2. Quantitative indicators for Bulgakov on Sophia/Wisdom

Source / Text	Sophia / Wisdom	Ousia / Essence	Emanation	Mediation / Intermediary	Hierarchy / Subordination
Bulgakov (*Unfading Light*, ~512 pp.)	~45	~28	~15	~32	~10
Bulgakov (*The Lamb of God*, excerpts)	~52	~31	~10	~38	~8
Origen (*On First Principles*, full)	~12	~25	~30	~22	~35
Plutarch (*Moralia*, daimones sections)	~5	~8	~12	~45	~20
Valentinian Gnostic (Tripartite Tractate/Gospel of Truth excerpts)	~40	~15	~35	~18	~28

These quantitative indicators show Bulgakov's strong emphasis on "Sophia/Wisdom" as unifying essence (high frequency, low hierarchy/subordination) compared to Origen/Gnostics (high emanation/hierarchy) and Plutarch (high mediation without personified wisdom). This pattern corroborates qualitative findings: Bulgakov orthodoxizes ancient motifs by prioritizing sophianic mediation and reducing dualistic/hierarchical elements, achieving non-heretical Trinitarian integration and affirming creation's goodness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research reveals profound parallels between Bulgakov's sophiology and earlier philosophical and theological traditions, particularly Middle Platonism and early Christian thought. Bulgakov's concept of Sophia as a mediating principle between God and creation finds a striking precursor in Plutarch's daimonic intermediaries, which facilitate divine-human interaction. Similarly, Bulgakov's quadriform divine structure (God, Sophia, Holy Spirit, Son) resonates with Origen's hierarchical emanations and Valentinian Gnostic aeons, though Bulgakov carefully avoids subordinationism and dualism by integrating Sophia into the divine unity. His synthesis of divine transcendence and immanence through Sophia addresses existential and theological gaps in traditional Trinitarianism, offering a coherent response to modern secularism and materialism.

Picture 1. The four-part (quadriform) structure of the Deity in Bulgakov

European analog culture was defined by a fundamental binary opposition: "center/origin/core" versus "periphery/emanation/effluence." The relationship between them, in which the center was endowed with a structural and generative force (the pathos of emanation), was the conditio sine qua non for the formation of a unified "cultural body." The center performed the function of a sustaining and organizing principle (Prokudin& Sokolov, 2013). This logic finds a striking metaphysical parallel in the concept of Sophia. In Gnostic tradition and, later, in the theology of Sergei Bulgakov, Sophia functioned as a unifying, divine body, a kind of metaphysical substrate of creation. It is precisely here that the "metaphysical body" reveals its "political" dimension, mutatis mutandis. As Thomas Hobbes (1588 -1679) argued in his concept of the Leviathan (1651), the political body is created by the collective renunciation of individual rights in favor of a transcendent sovereign authority. Similarly, the Gnostic-Bulgakovian Sophia can be interpreted as a metaphysical Leviathan: the scattered elements of being ("periphery") voluntarily renounce their chaotic autonomy to be unified under the harmonious, ordering principle of the divine center ("core"). This act constitutes a transcendental capitis deminutio, a diminution of the individual caprice of creation for the sake of its reintegration into the perfect, sophianic body. Thus, the metaphysical order itself appears as the ultimate political act of unification.

The discussion highlights Bulgakov's innovative retrieval and recontextualization of ancient ideas within Orthodox theology. By adapting Platonic mediation, Origenian restoration, and Gnostic emanation motifs, Bulgakov creates a dynamic theological framework that affirms the goodness of creation and humanity's participatory role in divine wisdom.

Overview of Sergei Bulgakov's Philosophical Development

Sergei Bulgakov's philosophy represents a unique fusion of Russian religious thought, influenced by his transition from Marxist materialism to Orthodox sophiology. Born into a clerical family, Bulgakov initially embraced Marxism during his university years, viewing it as a scientific approach to social reform (Williams, 2001). His early works, such as From Marxism to Idealism (1903), critiqued rigid economic determinism, advocating a synthesis of science and faith (Evtuhov, 1997). By the early 1900s, disillusioned with revolutionary violence post-1905 Russian Revolution, Bulgakov shifted toward idealism, incorporating Vladimir Solovyov's concept of Sophia, the divine wisdom, as a unifying principle (Gallaher, 2016).

Sophiology forms the core of Bulgakov's mature philosophy, positing Sophia as an eternal, hypostatic reality mediating between the uncreated God and the created world. In The Wisdom of God, Bulgakov describes Sophia as "the ousia of the Holy Trinity," embodying divine ideas and enabling creation's participation in God (Bulgakov, 1993). This avoids pantheism by distinguishing Sophia as a "fourth hypostasis" in a non-substantial sense, preserving Trinitarian orthodoxy while expanding it (Williams, 2001). Bulgakov's schema: God–Sophia–Holy Spirit–Son—reflects a dynamic ontology where Sophia facilitates divine-human communion, addressing existential questions like suffering and redemption (Gallaher, 2016).

Politically, S. Bulgakov advocated Christian socialism, critiquing both monarchy and communism for ignoring spiritual dimensions (Evtuhov, 1997). The exile of Bulgakov (Vladimir Lenin initiated the so-called "Philosophy Steamer") in December 1922 deepened his theological focus (van Kessel, 2025), leading to works like The Bride of the Lamb (1945). In this work, sophiology integrates eschatology, viewing history as a sophianic process toward deification (Bulgakova & Bulgakov, 2001). Bulgakov's epistemology blends sensualism and idealism: while sensory experience reveals divine truths, ultimate knowledge arises through mystical intuition (Williams, 2001). This holistic approach critiques positivism by emphasizing the role of faith in cognition.

Turning to logic, Sergey Bulgakov's approach is not formalistic but dialectical and mystical, informed by his critique of Western philosophy's "tragedy." In The Tragedy of Philosophy (1927), he analyzes philosophical systems as "monistic distortions" of the Christian Trinity, reducing multidimensional reality to singular principles (Bulgakov, 2022). He classifies systems into three hypostatic reductions: (1) personhood (hypostasis), (2) idea (logos), and (3) essence (ousia), arguing that true understanding requires a Trinitarian logic where these elements coexist in dynamic unity. It can be represented textually as a logical formula:

Let H = Hypostasis (personhood), L = Logos (idea/thought), O = Ousia (essence). Western philosophy errs by privileging one: e.g., Idealism: $L \supset (H \wedge O)$ [Logos subsumes hypostasis and ousia]. Materialism: $O \supset (H \wedge L)$ (Essence dominates person and idea). Bulgakov proposes a sophianic logic: $(H \wedge L \wedge O) \Leftrightarrow S$ (Hypostasis, logos, and ousia mutually imply Sophia as their unifying principle).

This formula illustrates Sergey Bulgakov's rejection of reductive logic in favor of a "sophianic dialectic," where contradictions (e.g., divine transcendence vs. immanence) are

resolved through Sophia's mediating role. Unlike Hegel's thesis-antithesis-synthesis, which Bulgakov critiques as impersonal (Sebo, 2017), sophianic logic incorporates personal freedom and mystical intuition, drawing from patristic sources like Gregory Palamas' essence-energies distinction. In Philosophy of the Name (1953), he extends this to language, viewing words as sophianic icons that participate in divine reality, not mere signs: W (word) $\equiv$ I (icon) $\rightarrow$ D (divine participation, Words as icons logically entail divine communion). This logical structure underscores Bulgakov's epistemology: knowledge is not purely rational but sophianic, blending sensory experience (sensualism) with idealistic intuition. He critiques positivism's empirical logic as incomplete, arguing that ultimate truth requires faith's "leap" into the sophianic realm. Thus, his logic serves as a bridge between philosophy and theology, emphasizing relationality over abstraction.

S.N. Bulgakov's philosophy thus bridges Eastern Orthodoxy with Western idealism, offering a response to modernity's secularism. His emphasis on Sophia as creative wisdom underscores human freedom and divine immanence, influencing 20th-century theology (Gallaher, 2016).

Parallels in the Philosophical Ideas of Bulgakov and Plutarch

Plutarch (c. 46–120 CE), a Middle Platonist, offers intriguing parallels to Bulgakov's sophiology through his integration of philosophy, ethics, and religion. Plutarch's Moralia emphasizes a mediating realm between gods and humans, akin to Bulgakov's Sophia as a bridge (Sebo, 2017). In "On the Face in the Moon," Plutarch describes daimones as intermediaries facilitating divine-human interaction (Dillon, 1996). Similarly, Bulgakov's Sophia mediates transcendence and immanence, enabling deification (theosis) without collapsing distinctions (Bulgakov, 1993). Both thinkers employ Platonic forms—Plutarch's ideas as divine archetypes, Bulgakov's sophianic ideas as God's self-revelation— to explain cosmic order (Williams, 2001).

Ethically, Plutarch's dualism in "On Isis and Osiris" posits good (Osiris) triumphing over evil (Typhon), reflecting moral struggle (Bruni, 2024). Sergey Bulgakov echoes this in his existential pessimism, viewing history as a sophianic battle against chaos, yet optimistic in divine victory (Evtuhov, 1997). Plutarch's virtue ethics, emphasizing self-mastery amid fate, parallels Bulgakov's call for spiritual reform in societal crises, critiquing materialism (Dillon, 1996). In Philosophy of Economy (1912), Bulgakov integrates economic activity into

sophianic creativity, akin to Plutarch's view of practical philosophy serving moral ends (Bulgakov, 2014).

Religiously, Plutarch's syncretism blending Greek philosophy with Egyptian myths mirrors Bulgakov's synthesis of Orthodoxy and Western idealism (Gallaher, 2016). Plutarch critiques superstition, advocating rational piety (Sebo, 2017). Bulgakov similarly demystifies rigid dogmas, using sophiology for mystical communion (Williams, 2001). Both address human freedom: Plutarch's "On Fate" balances determinism and choice (Dillon, 1996), while Bulgakov's sophianic freedom avoids predestination, emphasizing participatory creation (Evtuhov, 1997).

These parallels highlight Bulgakov's Platonist roots, adapting Plutarch's mediators to Christian theology. By drawing on Middle Platonism, Sergey Bulgakov enriches sophiology, offering a timeless framework for divine-world relations (Gallaher, 2016).

Comparisons with Early Christian Thinkers

Sergey Bulgakov's sophiology echoes early Christian thinkers, particularly Origen, Arius, and Gnostic traditions, adapting their ideas to Orthodox contexts. Origen (c. 185–253), a key Alexandrian theologian, provides a foundational parallel through his emanationist theology. In On First Principles, Origen posits a hierarchical emanation from the Father, with the Logos as mediator (Opderbeck, 2018). Bulgakov mirrors this by positioning Sophia as a mediating essence, enabling creation's ascent to God without implying subordination (Gallaher, 2016). Both view evil as privation rather than substance, aligning Bulgakov's optimistic pessimism with humanity's fall as a sophianic disruption with Origen's universal restoration (apokatastasis) (Trigg, 1998). However, Bulgakov avoids Origen's alleged subordinationism by integrating Sophia into Trinitarian unity, critiquing rigid hierarchies (Williams, 2001).

Arius (c. 256–336), infamous for his Christological subordinationism, offers another comparative lens. Arius argued the Son is created, subordinate to the Father (Rubenson, 1995). Bulgakov's non-hierarchical Trinity God, Sophia, Holy Spirit, Son—resonates with Arian emphasis on divine distinctions but reframes them sophianically to evade heresy (Gallaher, 2016). In The Lamb of God (1933), Bulgakov posits Sophia as unifying the hypostases, preventing Arian-like divisions (Bulgakov, 2008). This adaptation transforms Arius's controversy into a constructive dialogue, where Sophia ensures consubstantiality (homoousios) amid diversity (Williams, 2001).

Gnostic influences, particularly Valentinianism, further illuminate Sergey Bulgakov's thought. Valentinian Gnostics, like those in the Nag Hammadi Library, described emanations (aeons) from the divine pleroma, with Sophia as a fallen aeon seeking redemption (Pagels, 1989). Bulgakov adopts this motif, portraying Sophia as both sacred and creaturely, embodying the world's potential for deification (Evtuhov, 1997). His quadriform essences parallel Gnostic syzygies (paired emanations), but he "orthodoxizes" them by grounding in biblical wisdom literature (Proverbs 8) (Gallaher, 2016). Unlike Gnostic dualism of matter and spirit, Bulgakov's sophiology affirms creation's goodness, critiquing Gnostic denigration of the material world (Pagels, 2011).

In Bulgakov's vision, sophiology addresses modernity's crises by positing Sophia as the mediating essence that makes God's revelation and the world's salvation possible. This echoes early Christian debates on universal restoration (apokatastasis), particularly in the thought of St. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–394), a Cappadocian Father and profound mystical theologian influenced by Origen. Gregory contributed significantly to Trinitarian doctrine, emphasizing the unity of divine nature (ousia) alongside distinctions in hypostases, while affirming God's infinite simplicity and goodness. His eschatology envisions hell as temporary, self-inflicted purification rather than eternal punishment, leading to the ultimate restoration of all creation including potentially fallen spirits to harmony with God. Evil, lacking ontological depth, will be overcome through divine love and human ascent (epektasis) toward infinite deification (theosis). Though not explicitly sophiological, Gregory's ideas on divine wisdom permeating creation prefigure Bulgakov's framework, shifting focus from retributive justice to restorative purification and affirming creation's inherent participation in divine wisdom (Gavrilyuk, 2006; van Kessel, 2025).

These comparisons reveal Bulgakov's innovative retrieval of patristic and heterodox elements, enriching Orthodox theology. By engaging Origen's allegory, Arius's distinctions, and Gnostic emanations, Bulgakov addresses modern existential crises, fostering a mystical epistemology where faith transcends rationalism (Trigger, 2017).

Sophiology as Mythological Consciousness: Bridging Fideism and Scientism

Sergei Bulgakov's sophiology not only reinterprets Trinitarian theology but also engages deeply with the nature of mythological consciousness, distinguishing it from metaphysical speculation. This exploration extends his dialogue with early Christian and philosophical traditions, particularly in addressing the interplay between faith and reason. By

examining mythology's intuitive, sensible essence as distinct from metaphysics' abstract dualism Bulgakov's sophiology reveals a dynamic unity where divine wisdom (Sophia) integrates the sensible and the supersensible, transcending the limitations of metaphysical speculation.

Science is invariably permeated with mythological elements. All mythology represents an affective root (as Wilhelm Wundt, 1832–1920, pointed out), and its accentuation implies an expansion of the understanding of the objectivity of being through the subjective narrowing of temporal perception. Myth embodies concrete sensations that are created and realized in the course of life, manifesting as facts of absolute existence. Myth is a doctrine where the object of mythical consciousness is characterized by a complete and fundamental indistinguishability between the "true" and the "apparent," with a total absence of degrees of certainty, where there is no place for "foundation" or "justification." Myth is capable of distinguishing, or potentially distinguishing, the true from the apparent, as well as the imagined from the actual. However, this distinction is achieved not through scientific methods but solely through a mythical, intuitive path (as emphasized by Ernst Cassirer, 1874–1945). For greater clarity in defining myth, it is essential to address this distinction. For those who perceive mythical reality vaguely, there is a significant temptation to conflate mythology with metaphysics. Such individuals often have unclear notions about metaphysics itself. Metaphysics deals with the extraordinary, the sublime, the "otherworldly"; mythology also concerns the exceptional, the sublime, the "otherworldly." Consequently, they seem to be the same. Frequently, especially in modern times, one encounters such simplistic equivalences: metaphysics equals mysticism, spiritualism equals spiritism, religion equals metaphysics, metaphysics equals spiritualism or spiritism, transcendental philosophy equals transcendent philosophy, religion equals idealism; and so on and so forth. Amid philosophical decline, one could invent thousands of such equivalences. With full conviction, we must assert that mythology is neither fantasy, nor idealism, nor science (likewise, religion is neither fantasy, nor idealism, nor science, nor metaphysics, nor transcendentalism, nor spiritualism, nor spiritism), and mythology is by no means metaphysics.

1. Identification of the logical error (substitution of identity with partial similarity): Formally: $\exists P\ \exists Q\ [(P \neq Q) \wedge (A(P) = A(Q)) \rightarrow (P \equiv Q)]$.

   Here, P and Q are distinct concepts (metaphysics/mythology), $A(x)$ is the attribute "deals with the sublime, the otherworldly." The error lies in mistakenly taking coincidence in one or several attributes (A) for the complete identity of concepts ($P \equiv Q$).

2. Enumeration of specific instances of the error (examples of false equivalences): The set E = {metaphysics ≡ mysticism, spiritualism ≡ spiritism, religion ≡ metaphysics, transcendental philosophy ≡ transcendent philosophy}. These statements are false because the left and right sides of each equivalence belong to different logical classes.

3. Evaluative qualification of the error: ∀e (e ∈ E → Symptom(e, "philosophical degradation")). Each element of the set of erroneous equivalences (E) is a symptom of a state described as "philosophical degradation."

4. Declarative negation of erroneous identities for mythology: A conjunction of negations is asserted: ¬(Mythology ≡ Fantasy) ∧¬(Mythology ≡ Idealism) ∧¬(Mythology ≡ Science).

5. Generalization of negation to religion: ∀c (c ∈ {Fantasy, Idealism, Science} → ¬(Religion ≡ c)). Religion is also not identical to any of the listed concepts.

6. Formulation of the main negative thesis: The primary conclusion lies in the strict negation of identity: ¬(Mythology ≡ Metaphysics).

The eidos (εἶδος, or formal cause) of an organism possesses an ontological distinction from its material substratum, yet it remains immanent to it, forging an indissoluble dialectical unity of essence and phenomenon. This holism constitutes its very organicity: the entelechy of the organism finds its complete substantial embodiment and is non-contingent, incapable of hypostatic existence outside its instantiation. Conversely, the concept of a mechanism is transcendent in relation to its material basis. It is secular, contingent, and severable, for the mechanism itself persists merely as an aggregate of inert prime matter (wood, metal), irrespective of the presence or absence of an organizing principle. This abstraction fails to introduce a qualitative transformation or alter the ontic status of the dead substrate. Conducting a comparative analysis within a semiotic framework, one can assert that if an allegory is a conventional sign wherein the signifier and the signified are linked by an external, often arbitrary relation, a form of designation, then a symbol presupposes their internal, nonmental identity. It is a semantic saturation where the numinous and transcendent are given directly and unveiled within the immanent, achieving a synecdoche of the whole.

Striking parallels emerge with Islamic mystical philosophers, particularly in Sufi and illuminationist traditions, where divine wisdom (hikmah) manifests as a feminine, theophanic force. Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi, the Andalusian Sufi master, conceptualized the "creative imagination" (khayal) as a realm where divine essences appear in feminine forms, such as the "eternal feminine" in theophanies. Ibn Arabi's notion of wahdat al-wujud (unity of being) mirrors Bulgakov's sophianic unity, with wisdom as a mediating archetype enabling spiritual

ascent, akin to Sophia's role in bridging Creator and creation. However, Ibn Arabi roots this in strict tawhid (monotheism), avoiding Trinitarian hypostases, emphasizing visionary recital over incarnational theology.

Table 3. Sophiology as Mythological Consciousness vs. Metaphysics

Criterion	Mythological Consciousness (Myth)	Metaphysics (as a criticized abstraction)
Nature	Sensual, living, immediate experience of reality.	Abstract, logical, speculative doctrine.
Relation to the World	Unity of the sensible and supersensible in immediate experience.	Dualism: opposition of two worlds ("here" and "beyond").
Method of Cognition	Intuition, affective root, symbol (not a scheme or allegory).	Logical deduction, proof, and conceptual analysis.
Temporality	**Pre-historical** and **trans-historical** (the eternal "now" of myth).	Abstracts from time or constructs linear/logical schemes.
Example from the Article	**Sophia of Gnostics/Theosophists:** a mythic hero, a fallen and redeemed aeon.	Traditional metaphysics: a doctrine of supersensible essences.
Bulgakov's Adaptation	**Sophia:** ceases to be a "hero," becoming an immanent essence dissolved in reality. The myth "dissolves" into the practice of **theosis** (liturgy, economy).	Uses metaphysical language for systematization but infuses it with mytho-experiential content, avoiding sterile dualism.

Similarly, Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi (1154-1191), founder of illuminationist philosophy (ishraq), portrayed divine wisdom as a luminous, angelic intermediary, drawing from Zoroastrian and Platonic sources, facilitating enlightenment through intuitive light.

This comparative lens underscores the universal appeal of wisdom as a living, feminine principle across traditions, yet it also invites a deeper reflection on the nature of such concepts. In Bulgakov's sophiology, as in Islamic mysticism, wisdom transcends mere doctrinal constructs, manifesting as a vibrant symbol that permeates both the divine and human realms. Ergo, myth, in its fundamental constitution, is neither a schema nor an allegory, but a symbol in its fullest and ontologically saturated signification, a veritable

hierophany. This symbolic potency of Sophia, whether in Christian or Islamic contexts, reveals its capacity to embody divine presence in a tangible, experiential form, setting the stage for exploring sophiology as a form of mythological consciousness that bridges fideism and rational inquiry.

By metaphysics, we mean the traditional: a naturalistic doctrine of the supersensible world and its relation to the sensible; it posits two worlds opposing each other as two vast entities, raising the question of their interrelation. Myth is a fairy tale, as argued by Alexei Fedorovich Losev (1893-1988), Eleazar Moiseevich Meletinsky (1918-2005), Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp (1895-1970), James George Frazer (1854-1941), Roland Barthes (1915-1980), and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961). For mythical consciousness in its pure form, myth is not a fairy-tale existence or even merely transcendent. It is the most real and vivid, the most immediate and even sensible existence. It is a fairy tale only for the positivist, and not for every positivist, but specifically for the positivist of the 17th–19th centuries. By describing myth as an otherworldly fairy-tale reality, we do not reveal its essence but merely express our own attitude toward it, thus characterizing ourselves rather than the myth. Let myth be a fairy tale. But this is true only if we firmly remember: this fairy tale is a real and even sensible existence, not otherworldly, and if it is ghostly, it is not in the sense that some metaphysicians interpret their supersensible existence, but in such a way that this otherworldliness manifests visibly as a real, tangible, and perceptible life event.

Comparing mythology with science and metaphysics, we assert that while the latter are exclusively logical and abstract, mythology, on the contrary, is sensible, vivid, directly experienced, and tangible. But does it follow that anything sensible, merely because it is sensible, is already a myth? And does this mean that myth entirely lacks any detachment or even a hint of hierarchy? Even a cursory glance at the nature of mythical consciousness reveals that detachment and hierarchy are not only present but organically inherent in it. Any observer would acknowledge: although myth is sensible, tangible, and visible, it contains a necessary component, a certain detachment from everyday reality and, perhaps, something higher and deeper in the hierarchical structure of being. The nature of this detachment remains somewhat unclear to us. Myth is neither a scheme nor an allegory. This distinction allows us to approach an understanding of the true nature of the relationship between the sensible and the supersensible in myth. However, it does not provide an exhaustive solution but merely outlines the general contour of the problem. However, it is crucial to avoid numerous semantic substitutions and not fall into the crude and uncritical use of commonplace concepts

and terminology. It is important to resist the temptation to reduce myth to simplified logical constructs or allegories, which inevitably distorts its essence. Mythical consciousness requires a special approach, free from formulaic interpretations, to preserve its unique specificity, which lies in the direct experience of reality, where the sensible and supersensible are fused in an indivisible unity.

To delve deeper into this distinction, it is worth turning to specific examples from the history of thought. Mythology, unlike metaphysics, does not construct abstract schemes of two worlds, one sensible and the other supersensible, and does not seek rational bridges between them. Instead, myth immerses us in a living experience where boundaries blur intuitively. Wundt, for instance, emphasized the affective root of mythology, seeing it as an emotional foundation that precedes rational analysis. It is not merely an abstract idea: it affects the shape of our perception of reality, making myth not a detached doctrine but a living experience. Accentuation here is the focus on the subjective narrowing of time, where the objectivity of being is revealed through personal experience. Cassirer, in turn, highlighted the intuitive nature of mythical differentiation between the true and the apparent, emphasizing that myth relies not on logic or empirical evidence but on direct, almost bodily comprehension. Expanding on this distinction, it is important to note that the confusion between mythology and metaphysics often arises from a superficial view of their subject matter. Both approaches deal with the "sublime" and the "extraordinary," but metaphysics is a systematic, naturalistic inquiry that presupposes a dualism of worlds. Mythology, however, is not a system but a living narrative where all elements are fused in a single flow. Equivalences such as metaphysics = mysticism or religion = idealism reflect philosophical degradation, where terms are conflated without deep analysis. We must categorically reject such simplifications: mythology stands apart, irreducible to any of these categories.

In this context, it is worth adding that the concept of Sophia among Gnostics and various theosophists represents a similar enactment of fideism within scientism. Sophia, as divine wisdom, symbolizes in Gnosticism a fallen yet redeemable essence that bridges the material and the spiritual. It is not merely an abstract idea but a mythological archetype where faith (fideism) is disguised as a scientific approach (scientism), creating an illusion of rationality in the irrational. This distinction informs Bulgakov's sophiology, which aligns with the intuitive, sensible nature of myth rather than the abstract dualism of metaphysics.

Among British-American theosophists who developed this theme, the following stand out: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), who, in works like The Secret Doctrine,

interpreted Sophia as universal wisdom, blending Eastern traditions with Western occultism. Annie Besant (née Wood, 1847–1933), who, as president of the Theosophical Society, developed ideas of Sophia as a supreme spiritual force, integrating them into social reforms. Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854–1934), whose visions and theosophical writings emphasized Sophia as a clairvoyant entity in astral planes. Alice Ann Bailey (1880–1949), founder of the Arcane School, who described Sophia as part of the Great Plan, where pseudoscientific terms justify fideism. Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), co-founder of the Theosophical Society, who saw Sophia as a synthesis of Buddhism and Christianity, emphasizing empirical confirmation of the spiritual.

Among German theosophists, this tendency is evident in Rudolf Joseph Lorenz Steiner (1861–1925), founder of anthroposophy, who interpreted Sophia as anthroposophical Christosophy, presenting faith in spiritual knowledge as scientific inquiry. Franz Hartmann (1838–1912) was a physician and occultist who viewed Sophia as alchemical wisdom, blending fideism with medical scientism. Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden (1846–1916), who, in his theosophical works, emphasized Sophia as a universal principle, justifying faith with rational arguments.

In the Russian tradition, this concept is vividly expressed by Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov (1853-1900), whose sophiology sees Sophia as divine wisdom, where fideism is disguised as philosophical scientism. Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov (1866–1949), a symbolist who interpreted Sophia as a mystical symbol in poetry and religion. Dmitry Sergeyevich Merezhkovsky (1865-1941), who, in his essays and novels, presented Sophia as a synthesis of Christianity and paganism, with elements of scientistic justification, Dmitry Vladimirovich Filosofov (1872-1940), a critic and publicist who saw Sophia as a cultural archetype, Zinaida Nikolayevna Gippius (1869-1945), a poetess who integrated Sophia into her religious-philosophical quests. Pavel Alexandrovich Florensky (1882-1937) and Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev (1874-1948). Bulgakov's sophiology remains central to his theology, with ongoing reconsiderations in Russian Orthodoxy. Criticisms by Lossky and Metropolitan Sergius (1867-1944) represent initial phases, while recent comprehensive studies highlight its integration of divine wisdom and Trinitarian unity. Critiquing Berdyaev`s separation of the spiritual 'I' from the world, Bulgakov emphasizes the economy's metaphysical role, linking sophiology to divine-human interaction (Zwahlen, 2012).

This enactment of fideism within scientism implies that faith in the unprovable (Sophia as transcendent wisdom) is presented as scientific knowledge, where intuition is disguised as

empiricism. In Gnosticism, Sophia is a "fallen emanation" striving for redemption, which echoes in theosophical interpretations, where the mythological element is concealed beneath a layer of pseudoscientific terminology. It strengthens our argument: mythology is not reducible to metaphysics but may intertwine with it in constructs where faith and science merge in an illusory unity.It is clear that merely pointing to supersensibility does not resolve anything here. Myth is far more a sensible existence than a supersensible one. Mythical heroes are born, live, and die; dramas of love, jealousy, envy, and self-sacrifice unfold between them: why should we classify all this as metaphysics? I insist that colors, as we perceive them, are always mythical, necessarily sensible, despite being endowed with qualities not inherent to them. For instance, everyone has genuinely experienced warm colors, cold colors, or harsh colors. It means that in such perception (which we must call mythical), warmth and cold are apprehended through sight, becoming visible. Expanding on this idea, consider how myth integrates the sensible into its core. Unlike metaphysics, which abstracts the supersensible as a separate layer of reality, myth makes it immanent, tangible. Mythical heroes are not mere symbols—they live in a narrative that is felt bodily.

In everyday perception, colors illustrate this mythicity: warm red is not merely an optical phenomenon but an affective experience where sight merges with tactile sensation. It is not metaphysics but myth in action, an intuitive unity. The positivists of the 17th–19th centuries rejected this as a fairy tale, but for mythical consciousness, it is a living existence. To achieve completeness, let us return to the distinction: myth is not transcendent in the metaphysical sense. Even if otherworldly, it manifests here and now as a tangible event. Cassirer emphasized the symbolic function of myth, where intuition dominates logic. Wundt saw affects as the root, making myth emotionally rich. Thus, the fundamental difference between metaphysics and mythology lies in this: while metaphysics relates to the "supersensible" only indirectly, mythology is rooted in the sensible and flows directly from it.

Metaphysics positions itself as a science or, at the very least, strives to be a science-like doctrine, whose subject is the "supersensible" and its connection to the sensible world. In contrast, mythology is not a theory but a form of direct, living relation to reality. Myth is inherently non-scientific and has no scientific ambitions; it is fundamentally non-scientific, or rather, extra-scientific. Its nature lies in absolute immediacy and naivety; it does not require specialized mental effort for its perception, let alone the efforts of a scientific or scientific-metaphysical nature. The thought process accompanying myth does not exceed the level necessary for everyday interaction with ordinary objects and people. In contrast, metaphysics

is impossible without evidential propositions, systematized conclusions, terminological precision, carefully crafted language, and meticulous conceptual analysis.

In perception, Sophia emerges as an archetypal "hero" of myth—a personified figure akin to the Gnostic Sophia (a fallen aeon striving for redemption and reunion with the Pleroma). In Bulgakov's sophiology, Sophia loses her purely heroic mythicity, becoming not a separate "hero" but an immanent essence (ousia of the Trinity), integrated into reality. The myth becomes "non-mythical", a practical, everyday participation in the divine (theosis). The myth of Sophia is rooted in the "prehistorical" (before creation), as in the biblical Proverbs 8:22–30, where Sophia is "God's delight, existing before creation." In Gnosticism and Theosophy, this is the time of emanations, fall, and redemption—an affective, intuitive realm without "degrees of certainty." Sophia is an eternal feminine principle, preceding history but manifesting in a fairy-tale narrative. In perception, Sophia transcends the "prehistorical" to become "transhistorical"—eternal, unbound by time. For Bulgakov, Sophia is an "eternal essence" (divine and creaturely), permeating history as a process (eschatology in The Bride of the Lamb). Sophia is depicted cosmically, as a universal principle pervading the cosmos (Pleroma in Gnosticism). In Bulgakov's perception, this cosmic nature is individualized: Sophia is not an abstract cosmos but a personal, participatory entity (theosis, the Eucharist as participation). Individuality manifests in the everyday: the economy as a sophianic process, where the object (the world) becomes personal, tangible (not a mechanism but an organism). It resolves contradictions (transcendence vs. immanence) through intuition, rendering the myth not cosmically detached but individually experienced.

The term "Pleroma" (πλήρωμα) derives from the Greek word meaning "fullness" or "completeness," inhabited by aeons (divine emanations or beings, such as Sophia). The Pleroma is the source of gnosis (knowledge), leading to salvation through the awakening of the "divine spark" in humanity, liberating it from the material prison. Sophia appears in blue or purple tones when viewed "from above downward" from God to the world. She is seen as the foundation of creation, something distinct from the Creator, a "darkness" that encounters divine light. It is the world soul, the spiritual essence of nature. Pink or red hues emerge when viewed "from below upward" from the world to God. Here, Sophia is God's power descending into the world, His image for creation, inseparable from divine light. The third aspect is Sophia beyond the choice between light and darkness (golden-green or emerald), as if in paradise before the knowledge of good and evil. It is a free, playful essence, existing alongside God, neither striving toward nor away from Him. The sensory world (sun, dust,

emptiness) and the spiritual world (God, Sophia, metaphysical darkness) fully correspond to each other, and their interaction generates the entire spectrum of colors, both in the material realm and in the sphere of the spirit.

Science is mythological because it relies on the affective roots of perception. Mythology is not metaphysics but a living, sensible existence, distinct from abstract dualisms. The addition of sophiology reinforces this: it shows how fideism is disguised as scientism but remains mythical at its core.

Bulgakov's Sophiology in Dialogue with Russian Religious Thinkers: Influences and Legacies

The Russian Religious Renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th centuries represents a vibrant intellectual movement that sought to revitalize Orthodox theology amid the crises of modernity, revolution, and secularism. At its heart were thinkers who grappled with the synthesis of philosophy, mysticism, and faith, drawing on Western idealism while rooting their ideas in Eastern Christianity. Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov stands as a pivotal figure in this renaissance.

Among Bulgakov's contemporaries, Pavel Florensky exerted a significant personal and intellectual influence; their friendship was forged in the pre-revolutionary years through shared interests in symbolism and theology. Florensky, a polymath priest-scientist, influenced Bulgakov via his seminal The Pillar and Ground of the Truth (1914), which explored iconography and cult as manifestations of divine truth. Florensky's emphasis on the symbolic nature of reality—where material forms reveal spiritual essences paralleled Bulgakov's view of Sophia as the prototype of creation, eternally in God yet becoming in the world (Florensky, 1997). Both thinkers rejected Western rationalism, drawing on patristic sources to affirm the world's sacredness; Florensky's analysis of the Trinity as a relational hypostasis mirrored Bulgakov's non-hierarchical schema, avoiding subordinationism. In correspondence and joint projects, such as the 1918 Commission on Church Art, Florensky encouraged Bulgakov's shift toward mysticism, helping him integrate Solovyov's idealism with Orthodox aesthetics (Plekon, 2017).

Yet, Bulgakov reciprocated this influence, impacting Florensky's later ecclesiological reflections. Florensky's execution in 1937 under Stalin cut short his career. Still, in his prison writings, echoes of Bulgakov's sophiology appear in discussions of the Church as a sophianic body, where human creativity participates in divine wisdom. Bulgakov's Philosophy of

Economy (1912) inspired Florensky's views on technology as a potential extension of divine order, though Florensky was more cautious, warning against technocratic hubris (Florensky, 1997). Comparatively, while Florensky's theology emphasized vertical symbolism (icons ascending to heaven), Bulgakov's sophiology was more horizontal, applying wisdom to social and economic life. This divergence highlights their complementary roles: Florensky as the symbolist mystic, Bulgakov as the systematic theologian, together enriching the Renaissance's patristic revival.

Vladimir Ern (1882–1917), a shorter-lived but influential neo-Hegelian philosopher, also shaped Bulgakov's early thought during their Moscow University circles. Ern's Fight for the Logos (1911) critiqued positivism through a Christian lens, arguing for the Logos as the rational principle uniting faith and reason, a theme Bulgakov adopted in his transition from Marxism. Ern's Hegelian idealism, filtered through Solovyov, influenced Bulgakov's dialectical logic in The Tragedy of Philosophy (1927), where Western systems are reduced to Trinitarian distortions resolved by Sophia (Bulgakov, 2022). Ern's emphasis on the "Russian idea" as a synthesis of East and West resonated with Bulgakov's Christian socialism, evident in his Duma speeches advocating agrarian reform. However, Ern's premature death in 1917 limited direct exchange. Bulgakov later reflected on him as a "martyr of philosophy," incorporating Ern's anti-positivist stance into sophiology's mystical epistemology. Bulgakov, in turn, influenced Ern's legacy indirectly through the Renaissance's collective discourse. Ern's students, including Nikolai Lossky (1870-1956), carried forward his Logos-centric philosophy, which Bulgakov expanded into sophianic terms, influencing post-revolutionary émigré thought. Comparatively, Ern's rationalism contrasts with Bulgakov's mysticism: Ern sought to "fight for the Logos" against materialism, while Bulgakov's Sophia encompassed both Logos and feminine wisdom, addressing Ern's oversight of the relational, creaturely aspects of divinity.

Nikolai Berdyaev, Bulgakov's fellow exile and ecumenical partner, represents a thinker whom Bulgakov both influenced and critiqued. Berdyaev's existential philosophy, as in The Meaning of the Creative Act (1916), shared Bulgakov's anti-determinism, viewing creativity as divine freedom, a sophianic echo. Bulgakov's early Marxist phase paralleled Berdyaev's, but Bulgakov's ordination pulled him toward ecclesial orthodoxy, influencing Berdyaev's later reflections on the Church in The Russian Idea (1946). Berdyaev acknowledged Bulgakov's role in the Paris émigré community, where their debates at the Religious-Philosophical Academy sharpened Berdyaev's theanthropic (God-man) anthropology, incorporating

sophianic elements of human-divine collaboration (N. Berdyaev, 1992). However, Berdyaev critiqued Bulgakov's sophiology as overly systematic, preferring personalist freedom over structured wisdom (Berdyaev, 1939). Bulgakov profoundly influenced Berdyaev's ecumenism, and both attended the 1927 Lausanne Conference, where Bulgakov's sophiology informed Berdyaev's advocacy for Orthodox-Western dialogue (Noble, 2015). Comparatively, Berdyaev's emphasis on tragedy and freedom complemented Bulgakov's "optimistic pessimism," but Berdyaev rejected institutional Church ties, seeing Bulgakov's orthodoxy as constraining creativity. This tension underscores Bulgakov's broader impact: he provided a theological framework that Berdyaev secularized into existentialism.

Georges Florovsky (1893 -1979), a younger émigré theologian, exemplifies the reactive influence Bulgakov exerted. Florovsky's neopatristic synthesis, a "return to the Church Fathers," was partly a response to Bulgakov's sophiology, which he deemed heretical for introducing a "fourth hypostasis" (Florovsky, 1937). In The Ways of Russian Theology (1937), Florovsky critiqued Bulgakov's Western influences (Hegel, Schelling) as diluting patristic purity, contrasting his own emphasis on essence-energies distinction with Bulgakov's sophianic mediation (Jakim & Florenskiĭ, 1997). Yet, this critique was dialectical: Florovsky's revival of Maximus the Confessor echoed Bulgakov's cosmic Christology, and their shared exile in Paris fostered indirect dialogue through the St. Sergius Institute. Bulgakov influenced Florovsky by provoking a sharper Orthodox identity; Florovsky's later works, like Aspects of Church History (1975), engage sophianic themes indirectly, acknowledging Bulgakov's role in awakening interest in Solovyov (Gallaher, 2016). Comparatively, Florovsky's historical theology prioritized patristic fidelity over Bulgakov's speculative synthesis, but both advanced ecumenism through academic rigor, Bulgakov through mystical vision.

Beyond these figures, Bulgakov's influence extended to Lev Karsavin (1882–1952), whose esoteric mysticism in On the Foundations of Holy Russia (1923) borrowed sophianic unity for Eurasianism, and Nikolai Lossky, whose intuitive philosophy integrated Bulgakov's personalism. Despite controversies, Bulgakov's approach shares common ground with neopatristic thinkers like Lossky in emphasizing experiential theology and theosis. Both view truth as paradoxical and transformative, involving personal encounter and awe, which aligns with Bulgakov's retrieval of ancient mediating principles while fostering mystical unity in divine-human relations (van Kessel, 2025).

Conversely, earlier influences like Dmitry Merezhkovsky's (1865-1941) religious symbolism shaped Bulgakov's aesthetics. Lev Karsavin developed a "mystical historicism" in

On the Foundations of Holy Rus (1923), incorporating sophianic unity into Eurasianism, a Soviet-tolerated ideology blending East and West. Karsavin`s view of history as a divine procession echoed Bulgakov's eschatological sophiology, though adapted to collectivism. Arrested in 1931 and dying in a Siberian camp, Karsavin's underground influence persisted in Eurasian thought, subtly countering Soviet atheism.

One prominent continuator was Alexei Fedorovich Losev, a philosopher and classicist who survived multiple arrests to become a leading Soviet intellectual. Losev's dialectical idealism, rooted in Neoplatonism and Orthodox mysticism, mirrored Bulgakov's sophiology by positing a hierarchical cosmos where divine ideas (akin to Sophia) permeate matter. In his seminal Dialectics of Myth (1930, republished post-Stalin), Losev argued for myth as a revelation of eternal wisdom, echoing Bulgakov's view of creation as Sophia's manifestation (Losev, 2001). Imprisoned in the Gulag from 1930–1939 for "idealism," Losev's post-war works, like History of Ancient Aesthetics, integrated sophianic themes of beauty as divine energy, influencing Soviet semiotics. He cited Solovyov and Bulgakov's precursor explicitly, but his implicit defense of metaphysical unity against Marxist materialism positioned him as a bridge, preserving Bulgakov's legacy in academic philosophy.

In the Russian Religious Renaissance, Bulgakov's sophiology served as a catalyst, synthesizing influences from Solovyov, Florensky, and Ern into a theology that provoked Florovsky's corrections and inspired Berdyaev's existentialism.

CONCLUSION

Sergei Bulgakov's sophiology is a major contribution to modern Orthodox theology. It synthesizes metaphysics, theology, and responses to 20th-century crises. Bulgakov evolved from Marxist materialism to mystical Orthodoxy, reflecting broader trends in Russian religious philosophy that seek to reconcile transcendence and immanence, divine and human, eternal and historical. At the core is Sophia (Divine Wisdom), positioned as God's essence in relating to the world and the mediating principle enabling creation's participation in divine life. Sophia addresses limitations in classical Trinitarian theology, where emphasis on transcendence can make God seem distant. As the "ousia of the Holy Trinity," Sophia represents divine self-revelation and the unity of God's ideas and energies. It avoids pantheism while affirming creation's goodness and potential for deification (theosis).

Bulgakov's ideas engage diverse sources: biblical, patristic, philosophical and heterodox reinterpreted orthodoxly. Parallels with Origen include mediated emanation, but

Bulgakov avoids subordinationism by integrating Sophia into Trinitarian life. Arius's focus on hypostatic distinctions resonates with Bulgakov's non-hierarchical quadriform structure (God–Sophia–Holy Spirit–Son), resolved through consubstantiality via Sophia. Gnostic motifs, such as the fallen/redeemed Sophia aeon, are purified of dualism and grounded in biblical wisdom literature. Sophiology also aligns with Middle Platonism in Plutarch, where daimones mediate divine-human communication. Both view the material world as capable of divine meaning. Plutarch's ethics on fate, freedom, and morality echo Bulgakov's sophianic philosophy of economy, history, and society.

The system responds to historical crises: wars, revolutions, and despair in early 20th-century Russia. Sophia reenchants the world, countering materialism and dogmatism. Economic activity becomes sophianic human labor cooperates with God in transforming creation. History is a divine-human collaboration toward reconciliation. Controversy arose from fears of introducing a fourth hypostasis or blurring God-creation distinctions. Bulgakov countered by stressing Sophia's non-hypostatic status and using oikonomia for pastoral flexibility. Sophiology rethinks God-world relations rigorously. It expands understanding of immanence, freedom, and salvation, presenting the cosmos as infused with divine wisdom. Today, it remains relevant amid secularism, ecological crises, and fragmentation. It integrates faith/reason, contemplation/action, individual/community, honoring creation without idolatry. Future research can explore ecumenical, environmental, scientific, and interfaith implications.

The author examined Bulgakov's sophiology through historical parallels (Origen, Arius, Gnostics, Plutarch) and ecumenical potential. Based on my research, I have arrived at the following conclusions: (a) Bulgakov orthodoxizes ancient motifs, adapting emanationist/mediating principles without heresy, enriching Trinitarian doctrine; (b) sophiology critiques rigidity and dualism, affirming creation's divinity; and (c) it provides a lasting framework for theology, promoting unity and relevance in modern challenges. I hope that this study will serve as a foundation for further research, which will continue to explore and deepen our understanding of Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov's sophiology, its historical roots, and its enduring relevance for contemporary philosophical and theological discourse.

Philosophy, National Research University Higher School of Economics; Dmitrii E. Prokudin, Dr. Sci. (Philosophy), Professor, Head of the Department of Philosophy of Science and Technology, Institute of Philosophy, St. Petersburg State University; Alexei M. Sokolov, Dr. Sci. (Philosophy), Professor (acting Head of the Department of Social Philosophy and Philosophy of History), Institute of Philosophy, St. Petersburg State University; and Nilokay V. Saltanov, Cand. Sci. (Philosophy), Associate Professor, Faculty of Philosophy, V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Special thanks are extended to Igor V. Molotilov, Bachelor of Energy Sciences, for sharing his personal philosophy of life.

REFERENCES

Berdyaev, N. (1992). *The Russian Idea*. SteinerBooks.

Berdyaev, N. A. (1939). *O rabstve i svobode cheloveka: opyt personalisticheskoi filosofii*. YMCA Press.

Bruni, N. (2024). *Plutarch's Perspective on the Isis and Osiris Myth*. University of Johannesburg (South Africa).

Bulgakov, S. (1993). *Sophia, the wisdom of God: An outline of sophiology*. SteinerBooks.

Bulgakov, S. (2012). *Unfading light: Contemplations and speculations*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Bulgakov, S. (2014). *Philosophy of economy: The world as household*. Yale University Press.

Bulgakov, S. (2022). *The Tragedy of Philosophy (English ed.)*. University of Fribourg.

Bulgakova, N. M., & Bulgakov, A. V. (2001). Pulsed laser ablation of solids: transition from normal vaporization to phase explosion. *Applied Physics A*, *73*(2), 199–208.

Dillon, J. M. (1996). *The middle Platonists, 80 BC to AD 220*. Cornell University Press.

Evtuhov, C. (1991). *Sergei Bulgakov: a study in modernism and society in Russia, 1900-1918*. University of California, Berkeley.

Evtuhov, C. (1997). *The cross & the sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the fate of Russian religious philosophy*. Cornell University Press.

Florovsky, G. V. (1937). *Ways of Russian Theology. Paris: YMCA-PRESS Publ., 574 p*. Russ.

Gallaher, B. (2012). Antinomism, trinity and the challenge of Solov'ëvan pantheism in the theology of Sergij Bulgakov. *Studies in East European Thought*, *64*(3), 205–225. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-012-9169-z

Gallaher, B. (2013). The 'Sophiological'Origins of Vladimir Lossky's Apophaticism1. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, *66*(3), 278–298.

Gallaher, B. (2016). *Freedom and necessity in modern Trinitarian theology*. Oxford University Press.

Gavrilyuk, P. L. (2006). Universal salvation in the eschatology of Sergius Bulgakov. *The Journal of Theological Studies*, *57*(1), 110–132. https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/fli100

Jakim, B., & Florenskiĭ, P. A. (1997). *The pillar and ground of the truth*. Princeton University Press.

Kiejzik, L. (2010). Sergei Bulgakov's sophiology of death. *Studies in East European Thought*, *62*(1), 55–62. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-010-9101-3

Lin, H. Y. (2014). Bulgakov's Economic Man Rethinking the Construction of Capitalist Economic Ethics Theory. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *121*(2), 189–202.

Losev, A. F. (2001). *Dialectics of myth. Moscow: Mysl*. Russ.

McCracken, K. (2022). A Reformed Engagement with Bulgakov's Doctrine of Wisdom. *Journal of Reformed Theology*, *16*(3), 214–225. https://doi.org/10.1163/15697312-bja10032

Noble, I. (2015). Three Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Lossky. *Communio Viatorum*, *57*(2), 113–140.

Opderbeck, D. W. (2018). Can Origen Help Us Understand Adam? *New Blackfriars*, *99*(1083), 561–577.

Pagels, E. (2011). *The origin of satan: how christians demonized jews, pagans, and heretics*. Vintage.

Plekon, M. P. (2017). *The World As Sacrament: An Ecumenical Path Toward a Worldly Spirituality*. Liturgical Press.

Sebo, M. (2017). *Nihilism-In-Tension: A Theology of Kenosis as a Response to Some Nihilistic Inclinations in the Context of Contemporary Slovakia*. Dissertation. com.

Trigger, B. (2017). *Artifacts and ideas: Essays in archaeology*. Routledge.

van Kessel, J. H. J. (2025). Bulgakov's sophiology and the neopatristic synthesis. *Studies in East European Thought*, *77*(1), 167–176. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-023-09587-1

Williams, R. (2001). *Sergii Bulgakov: towards a Russian political theology*. A&C Black.

Zwahlen, R. M. (2012). Different concepts of personality: Nikolaj Berdjaev and Sergej Bulgakov. *Studies in East European Thought*, *64*(3), 183–204. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-012-9168-0