

National Research University  
Higher School of Economics

As a manuscript

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**Philosophy and Faith in Religious Metaphysics of Sergius Bulgakov**

Dissertation Summary  
for the purpose of obtaining academic degree  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

Academic supervisor:  
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Moscow  
2022

## Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Research Relevance.....	15
Object, Subject, Purpose and Objectives of the Study .....	23
Extent of Prior Research into the Problem.....	25
Novelty of Research.....	33
Main Arguments to Be Defended.....	34
Methodological Base.....	35
Thesis Structure.....	36
Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Research.....	37
<b>The Main Content of the Dissertation .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Approbation of Research Results.....</b>	<b>52</b>

## Introduction

“These are the glory days of Sergii Bulgakov!”, Antoine Arjakovsky, a French expert on Russian émigré thought of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote in 2009, noting the growing interest in Bulgakov in Western academic circles<sup>1</sup>. More than a decade after these words, one can claim that Bulgakov’s “glory days” not only have not passed, but, on the contrary, have acquired an even greater scale, both in his homeland and abroad. In a formal sense, this is confirmed not only by the abundance of forthcoming academic literature<sup>2</sup>, but also by the accompanying work of research centers and groups<sup>3</sup> studying Bulgakov, and the results of this work: numerous

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<sup>1</sup> Antoine Arjakovsky, “Commentary,” in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, eds. Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Farnham / Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 86.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, only in Russian in 2020–2021 three significant collections and a translation of the fundamental monograph have been published: (1) A. P. Kozyrev, ed., *Sergej Nikolaevich Bulgakov (Filosofija Rossii pervoj poloviny XX veka)* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2020); (2) Sergej Bulgakov, *Chasha Graalja. Sofiologija stradanija*, ed. and comp. Savva Mazhuko (Moscow: Nikeya, 2021); (3) Ekaterina Evtuhova, *Serp i krest: Sergej Bulgakov i sud’by ruskoj religioznoj filosofii (1890–1920)* (Saint-Petersburg: Academic Studies Press / Bibliorossika, 2021); (4) Mefodiy Zinkovskiy et al., ed., *S. N. Bulgakov: pro et contra, antologija* (Saint-Petersburg: RHGA, 2021). At the same time, despite the apparent external significance of this “corpus”, it is necessary to take into account the context, which largely reflects the situational nature of publishing books “around Bulgakov” in Russia: three books were published as part of larger publishing projects or series; the fourth was compiled by an enthusiastic Bulgakov scholar. The great anniversary of Bulgakov (his 150<sup>th</sup> birthday), which was celebrated in 2021, also played a role (for example, the trilogy “On Godmanhood” in modern Russia was published once in the mid-2000s and has long become a bibliographic rarity).

An up-to-date list of studies in other languages (since 2000) can be found on the website of the Bulgakov Research Center at the University of Friborg: <https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/forschung/forschungsliteratur/> (accessed February 14, 2022). Also for selected bibliographies of works on Bulgakov see Kozyrev, *Sergej Nikolaevich Bulgakov*, 578–619, and Sergij Bulgakov, *Bibliographie. Werke, Briefwechsel und Übersetzungen* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2017), 131–135. Separately, I just want to note that in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, published in 2020, in addition to two personal chapters (which, besides him, only Berdyaev was awarded), Bulgakov received significant (and somewhere key) attention in 9 (!) chapters out of 40 (see ch. 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 25, 27, 28, 31, 38, 39).

<sup>3</sup> About them see Evtuhova, *Serp i krest*, 12–16, and Kateřina Bauerová, “Sofija i sofiologija segodnja”, in Zinkovskiy et al., *S. N. Bulgakov: pro et contra*, 832–840.

translations of Bulgakov's works into other languages<sup>4</sup>, academic conferences<sup>5</sup> and doctoral dissertations<sup>6</sup>.

Moreover, it should be noted that the creative heritage of the Russian economist-philosopher-theologian not only becomes the subject of analysis within the framework of purely historical-philosophical or historical-theological studies, but often plays an important foundational and methodological role in current theoretical research projects. Analyzing Russian academia<sup>7</sup>, one can mention the name of Sergey S. Khoruzhiy, who developed his original project of synergic anthropology in a strong engagement (both positive and critical) with the metaphysics of all-unity and sophiology. Secondly, one can recall that at the Faculty

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<sup>4</sup> In English all the significant works of Bulgakov were published in 2000–2010s, and recently the turn has come to much less well-known texts. For the period 2019–22 were published *The Apocalypse of John*, *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, *The Sophiology of Death* (a collection of individual articles), *The Eucharistic Sacrifice*, and *The Spiritual Diary*. A collection of Bulgakov's "catholic" articles from 1921–1923 is being prepared for publication. Since 2014, the aforementioned center of the University of Fribourg has been publishing complete works in German (6 volumes have been published so far). See more on this in Regula Zwahlen, "Eine Flaschenpost für das 21. Jahrhundert? Zum 150. Geburtstag von Vater Sergij Bulgakov," *Istoriko-filosofskij ezhegodnik* 36 (2021): 196–220; Aleksandr Cygankov, "Bulgakov v Shvejarii: sovremennye issledovanija filosofii Sergeja Bulgakova v Friburge," *Vestnik RHGA* 16, no. 4 (2015): 315–332.

<sup>5</sup> A big event was the international conference "Building the House of Wisdom", held in 2021 in Fribourg. One can also mention the 2014 conference in Saint-Serge "Père Serge Boulgakov, un père de l'Église modern" and the 2019 conference "Unfading Light: Conference on creativity and prayer in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Russian Orthodoxy" at the University of Oxford. The papers of the Paris conference were published in *Le Messager Orthodoxe*, no. 158 (2015). In Russia, a number of significant conferences dedicated to the anniversary took place in 2021–2022. Among them are (1) "Filosofskoe i bogoslovskoe nasledie S. N. Bulgakova v sovremennom mire" (Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences); (2) "Krasota — Sofija — Cerkov'" (Saint Philaret Institute); (3) "Sad rashodjashhihsja trop 2021" (Russian State University for Humanities).

<sup>6</sup> For the period 2019–2021, for example, the following dissertations were defended: (1) Josephien Van Kessel, *Sophiology and Modern Society. Sergei Bulgakov's Conceptualization of an Alternative Modern Society* (PhD diss., Radboud University, 2020); (2) Roberto De La Noval, *The Theological Condemnations of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov: Sophiology in Suspension* (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2020); (3) Gleb S Tikhon Vasilyev, *Christian angelology in pseudo-Dionysius and Sergius Bulgakov* (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2019). In January 2021, the Bulgakov Center in Fribourg organized an international online workshop for graduate students writing dissertations on Bulgakov, where the author of this study was among the participants. The program of the online workshop is available here: [https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/assets/public/files/Forschung/2020%20Tagung%20FR/Program%20Online-Seminar%20January\\_2021\\_new.pdf](https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/assets/public/files/Forschung/2020%20Tagung%20FR/Program%20Online-Seminar%20January_2021_new.pdf) (accessed February 14, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> For ecclesial reception of Bulgakov in Russia see Dimitri Sizonenko, "L'héritage du père Serge Boulgakov dans la Russie actuelle," *Le Messager Orthodoxe* 203 (2015): 37–44.

of Economics of Lomonosov State University in Moscow, for many years there has been the *Laboratory of Philosophy of Economy* under the leadership of Yury M. Osipov, that tries to apply the ideas of Bulgakov's *Philosophy of Economy* to the analysis of the economic sphere<sup>8</sup>.

In the Western academia, the genuine appeal to Bulgakov mainly occurs, of course, in the field of theology<sup>9</sup>. For instance, Aristotle Papanikolaou, relying on the political and theological ideas of Solovyov and Bulgakov, develops a project of Orthodox political theology that would be compatible with liberal democracy<sup>10</sup>. One can also mention a recent attempt to use the religious metaphysics of Bulgakov and Florensky, interpreted in terms of social justice, in relation to the debate about same-

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<sup>8</sup> For more information about their activities, see their website: <https://www.econ.msu.ru/departments/lfh/> (accessed April 25, 2022). The *Philosophy of Economy* was translated into Japanese in 1928 and, as Alexey Kozyrev notes, managed to “interest the Japanese in the 1930s, who were looking for a ‘third way’ between capitalism and communism”. A. P. Kozyrev, “Ot redaktora,” in *Sergej Nikolaevich Bulgakov (Filosofija Rossii pervoj poloviny XX veka)*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> On the western reception of Bulgakov in contemporary (mainly Catholic and Protestant) theology, see Richard May, “Between God and the world: a critical appraisal of the sophiology of Sergius Bulgakov,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74 (2021): 67–84; Lubomir Žak, “L’attualità della teologia di Bulgakov in dialogo con l’Occidente,” in *La teologia ortodossa e l’Occidente nel XX secolo. Storia di un incontro*, ed. Adriano Dell’Asta (Bergamo: La Casa di Matrona, 2005), 92–111; Antoine Arjakovsky, “The Sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov and Contemporary Western Theology,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 49, no. 1/2 (2005): 219–235; Jonathan R. Seiling, “Assessments of the Recent Russian Sophiological Tradition,” *Landshaft* 2 (2008): 1–17; Bauerová, “Sofija i sofilogija segodnja”. For a more general comparative overview of the “repulsions and attractions” of Russian religious thought and Western theology, see Paul Valliere, “The Influence of Russian Religious Thought on Western Theology in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, eds. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, and Randall A. Poole (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 660–676.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, *The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012). Interestingly, Papanikolaou positions his book as polemical against the theological and political project of the “radical orthodox” John Milbank (hence the title of the book), who is also one of the main admirers of Bulgakov in the Western academy, which will be discussed later. On this subject, see also an important dissertation: Nathaniel K. Wood, *Deifying Democracy: Liberalism and the Politics of Theosis* (PhD diss. New York: Fordham University, 2017). For an overview of the arguments of the parties and critiques of the discussion from the standpoint of their use of Bulgakov’s ideas, see James R. Wood, “Neither Radical nor Liberal: The Ecclesial Humanism of Sergei Bulgakov,” *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 60, no. 1–4 (2019): 9–41.

sex marriages that has recently been shaking American society<sup>11</sup>. Celia Deane-Drummond, who works at the intersection of theology and evolutionary biology, turns to Bulgakov's sophiology as one of the main resources in constructing a new version of Christian cosmology that would take into account the latest achievements of the natural sciences<sup>12</sup>. Finally, Bulgakov's sophiology is quite popular among the so-called contextual theologies, such as feminist<sup>13</sup>, eco-<sup>14</sup>, and liberation theology<sup>15</sup>.

But the most substantial for our theme is the “Bulgakovian turn” of an intellectual movement, the main intention of which could be described as “the struggle for the return of classical Christian metaphysics”. Theologians and religious philosophers carrying out this task, such as John Milbank (founder of Radical Orthodoxy) and David Bentley Hart (leading figure in contemporary theo-

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<sup>11</sup> Alfred K. Siewers, “Traditional Christian Marriage as an Expression of Social Justice: Identity and Society in the Writings of Florensky and Bulgakov,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 16, no. 2 (2013): 569–586.

<sup>12</sup> Celia Deane-Drummond, *Creation through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003). Some irony here is that Bulgakov himself was hostile to evolutionary theory (and “neo-Darwinists”), in contrast to many Western theologians influenced by Teilhard de Chardin.

<sup>13</sup> Brenda Meehan, “Wisdom/Sophia, Russian Identity and Western Feminist Theology,” *Cross Currents* 46, no. 2 (1996): 149–168; Sarah Livick-Moses, “The Kenotic Iconicity of Sergii Bulgakov's Divine-Humanity: A Feminist Retrieval,” paper presented at the conference “Building the House of Wisdom”, manuscript) (Video recordings of this conference are available at: <https://www.unifr.ch/sergij-bulgakov/de/forschung/konferenzen/bulgakov-conference-2021/> (accessed April 25, 2022)).

<sup>14</sup> Bruce V. Foltz, *The Noetics of Nature. Environmental Philosophy and the Holy Beauty of the Visible* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), esp. 88–112; Austin Holmes, “A Proposal for Bulgakovian Ecology,” paper presented at the conference “Building the House of Wisdom”, manuscript; Johan Buitendag, Corneliu C. Simut, “Emerging Religious Consciousness — A Cosmotheandric Understanding of Reality in the Light of Sophiology of Some Russian Theologians towards an Eco-Theology,” *Religions* 13, no. 4 (2022): 296, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13040296> (accessed May 18, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Graham McGeoch, “Ships in the theological night? Sergius Bulgakov and Latin American Liberation Theology,” paper presented at the conference “Building the House of Wisdom”, manuscript. On the influence of Bulgakov on the trinitarian theology of the classic liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, see: Mihail Aksenov-Meerson, *Sozercaniem Troicy Svjatoj... Paradigma ljubvi v russkoj filosofii troichnosti* (Kyiv: DUH I LITERA, 2007), 54–58, 288–289 [English original: Michael Aksionov Meerson, *The Trinity of Love in Modern Russian Theology* (Quincy, Il.: Franciscan Press, 1998)].

aesthetics)<sup>16</sup> rely on Bulgakov in their metaphysical works and give him extremely complimentary assessments, naming the sophiological line of Solovyov—Florensky—Bulgakov “the most significant theology of the two preceding centuries” and “the new theological horizon”<sup>17</sup>, and Bulgakov himself—the only modern “truly accomplished Orthodox metaphysician”<sup>18</sup>. From the historical-philosophical perspective, these views are supplemented by the book of the German researcher Michael Frensch, translated by Natalia Bonetskaya<sup>19</sup>, that argues that “the formation of the idea of freedom in European philosophy, according to its author, as a kind of peak, led to Russian sophiology”<sup>20</sup>. Frensch singles out two main lines in the history of European metaphysical thought—the line of the metaphysics of essence, stemming from Plato and Aristotle, and the line of the metaphysics of freedom, that gradually replaces the former and which originated in nominalism and culminated in the writings of Nietzsche—and, considering necessary their deep reconciliation, finds an example of such a harmonious combination in Russian sophiology.

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<sup>16</sup> In the Russian-speaking theological space, one can mention the works of Oleg Davydov. See O. B. Davydov, *Otkrovenie Ljubvi. Trinitarnaja istina bytija* (Moscow: BBI, 2020); Idem., *Sijanie formy. Jetjudy o krasote, blage i istine* (Moscow: BBI, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> John Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon,” in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, 45. See also Idem., “Foreword. From Grammar to Wisdom,” in Sergii Bulgakov, *The Tragedy of Philosophy (Philosophy and Dogma)* (Angelico Press, 2020), ix–xxxiii. For a more detailed account of Milbank’s vision, see Michael Martin, *The Submerged Reality: Sophiology and the Turn to a Poetic Metaphysics* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015). See also Aaron Riches, “Eleusa: Secularism, Post-Secularism, and Russian Sophiology,” in *Beyond Modernity: Russian Religious Philosophy and Post-Secularism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 59–85.

<sup>18</sup> David Bentley Hart, “Orthodox Theology and the Inevitability of Metaphysics,” in *Theology and Philosophy in Eastern Orthodoxy: Essays on Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought*, ed. Cristoph Schneider (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 95–96. See also Idem., “Martin and Gallaher on Bulgakov,” in *Theological Territories: A David Bentley Hart Digest* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 55–64; Idem., “Foreword,” in Sergii Bulgakov, *The Sophiology of Death: Essays on Eschatology: Personal, Political, Universal* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), ix–xii.

<sup>19</sup> Mihael French, *Lik Premudrosti. Dilemma filosofii i perspektiva sofiologii* (Saint-Petersburg: Rostok, 2015) [German original: Michael Frensch, *Weisheit in Person: das Dilemma der Philosophie und die Perspektive der Sophiologie* (Schaffhausen: Novalis, 2000)]. Frensch, however, is inclined to put Solovyov above his two younger followers.

<sup>20</sup> N. K. Boneckaja, “K istokam sofiologii,” in French, *Lik Premudrosti*, 15.

Such an increased attention of contemporary religious metaphysicians to the Russian sophiological tradition and to Bulgakov, in particular, is based, among other things, on the conviction that within the framework of this line of thought it became possible to restore the unity of spirit and thought, faith and reason, theology and philosophy lost in modern European philosophy. This loss, as it is commonly believed today, occurs in European thought during the era of the nominalistic turn in early scholasticism, due to a series of dubious theological decisions<sup>21</sup> that firmly fixed the distinction between the natural (*natura*) and the supernatural (*gratia*), which in turn leads to the emergence of an autonomous philosophy, on the one hand, and rationalistic natural theology that ignores the data of personal religious experience, on the other<sup>22</sup>.

Subsequently, it becomes natural for rational thinking about religion (be it autonomous secular philosophy or natural theology), whose classical expressions are characteristic of the Enlightenment, to be based on two basic laws of classical rationality—the law of sufficient reason and the law of identity—which apply to thinking *regardless of whether we are talking about immanent or transcendent reality*<sup>23</sup>: the talk about God and being (that starts to gradually take the place of God) is to be conducted *univocally*. However, being criticized by Kant and Heidegger<sup>24</sup> (as well as by Nietzsche), these laws undergo de-absolutization in the postmodern

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<sup>21</sup> For example, the notion of the univocity of being in Duns Scotus, the prioritization of the will over the intellect in Ockham, the distinction between natural and supernatural human goals in Suarez, and so on. For classic developments of this view, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press, 2007); Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Michael Martin uses an interesting term “left-brain theology”. See Martin, *The Submerged Reality*, *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> See Cristoph Schneider, “Faith and Reason in Russian Religious Thought: Sergei Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky and the contemporary debate about ontotheology and fideism,” *Analogia* 8 (2020): 131–142.

<sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Martin Heidegger, “Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik,” in *Identität und Differenz* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006), 51–79.



and post-metaphysical thinking of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; religious rationalism eventually turns more and more into religious agnosticism. Moreover, as Quentin Meillassoux argues, the critique of metaphysics provokes the emergence of other, fideistic forms of religiosity, making the world even more religious (and even religious-fanatic): “our abolition of metaphysics will only have served to resuscitate religiosity in all its forms, including the most menacing ones”<sup>25</sup>.

The state of de-absolutized rationality, opening up from within towards the religious, prompts theorists and philosophers to turn to a wide variety of resources in their quest for methodological tools, including those that were considered moribund and/or obscurantist in the days of the “progress of reason”<sup>26</sup>. Under these conditions, Bulgakov’s sophiologically oriented religious metaphysics, which, among other things, has become an attempt to reconcile the personal experience of faith and the postulates of secular rationality, is considered by scholars as a “new metaphysics” (M. Frensch), capable of presenting a viable alternative strategy among post-non-classical philosophical paradigms. It is new because, based in its “negative” aspect on the criticism of the extreme forms of religious transcendence and immanentism<sup>27</sup>, which flourished in religious and philosophical thought at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Bulgakov’s religious metaphysics is an attempt to find a *via media*— a third way in thinking on religion lying between

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<sup>25</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude. An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 82. See Schneider, “Faith and Reason”. However, many scholars claim the return of faith under the conditions of the end of metaphysics. See, for example, Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Roles of Religious Belief in Theories*, Revised edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> The term “immanentism” can be understood in two senses, narrow and broad. In the narrow sense, it means a certain school in German philosophy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (W. Schuppe, R. Schubert-Soldern, M. Kaufmann, J. Rehmke, and others). Broadly, it means a rationalistic, “appropriating”, or objectifying way of thinking about the Divine. Bulgakov uses the term both in a narrow and in a broad sense (and sometimes commentators, for example, V. V. Sapov in *The Unfading Light*, attribute narrow sense immanentism to passages where Bulgakov clearly meant a broad sense. See, for example, S. N. Bulgakov, *Svet Nevechernij. Sozercanija i umozrenija*, prep. and comm. by V. V. Sapov, foreword by K. M. Dolgov (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), 366, note 9. Throughout this thesis “immanentism” is used only in the broad sense of an umbrella term, as is “onto-theology”, which within this text is synonymous with it.

the extreme discursive strategies, on which it would be possible to substantiate the unity of the world and its inseparable connection with God the Creator, without compromising at the same time the absolute essential transcendence of the Latter.

The innovative nature of this metaphysics can be expressed, in my opinion, through the concept of *metaxologicality*, which seems to me an integral feature of Bulgakov's thinking. Μεταξύ is a term<sup>28</sup> that Bulgakov borrows from Plato's *Symposium* and uses to characterize Sophia as a substantiated boundary between God and the world. Metaxologicality thus means a thinking in terms of retaining two realities, the transcendent and the immanent, with substantiation of some third, "boundary" mediator reality, which does not sublimate them in a dialectical synthesis, but refers to both poles, being both their connection and difference<sup>29</sup>. Thus, we are talking about the correct understanding of mediation and the middle path by which it can lead to a true perception and thinking about the transcendent, which is revealed in the immanent. In general, metaxology, in my opinion, should be inherent in any Christian philosopher, given that the two main dogmas of Christianity—the Trinity and the Incarnation—are expressed in the "boundary" concepts of "triunity" and "God-man".

Bulgakov's sophiological oeuvre itself also has a metaxological nature, eluding unambiguous thematization under the headings of *either philosophy or theology*, which has been noticed by leading Bulgakov scholars for a long time.

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<sup>28</sup> From Ancient Greek "in-between", or "in the mediastinum". Bulgakov uses this term in relation to Sophia in *The Unfading Light* (Bulgakov, *Svet Nevechernij*, 186). In contemporary philosophy, the "between" as a philosophical concept is associated with William Desmond, who, like the aforementioned Milbank and Hart, belongs to the defenders of classical Christian metaphysics. See his seminal trilogy: *Being and The Between*, *Ethics and The Between*, and *God and The Between*. It seems that the comparisons between sophiology and Desmond's metaxology are growing. For a relatively extended comparison of the sophiological and metaxological projects, see Josephien van Kessel, "Transcendence in Metaxology and Sophiology," in *William Desmond's Philosophy between Metaphysics, Religion, Ethics, and Aesthetics*, ed. Dennis Vanden Auweele (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 243–256. Interestingly, Desmond positions his metaxology as an intermediate philosophical position "between Solovyov and Shestov". This also, as will be shown in the dissertation, can be largely attributed to Bulgakov. See William Desmond, "God Beyond the Whole: Between Solov'ev and Shestov," in *Is There Sabbath for Thought? Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 167–199.

<sup>29</sup> Because of the tendency to retain both poles, metaxologicality differs from dialectics, and because of the substantivized *tertium*, it differs from antinomy.

Thus, Alexey Kozyrev, posing the question “Is sophiology a theologeme or philosopheme?”, comes to the conclusion that sophiology is an enterprise on two paths, and a poetic text that is rich in metaphors can become a *tertium* between philosophy and theology<sup>30</sup>. Barbara Hallensleben says the same thing: “Sophia is a theological and philosophical concept that reminds us of this mystery [of the incomprehensibility of God — I. I.]”<sup>31</sup>. Anna Reznichenko concludes about Bulgakov’s “trinitarian philosophy” that it “is based on the discovery, or, more precisely, the construction, of a metaphysical space on the border of two discourses: theological [...] and philosophical”<sup>32</sup> and comes to the conclusion that “whenever we are trying to reduce Bulgakov’s thought to one thing, we inevitably fall into a contradiction”<sup>33</sup>. An insensitivity to this “boundary” nature of Bulgakov’s thought often led his critics to one-sided opposite conclusions, when philosophers criticize Bulgakov for dogmatic constraint, and theologians criticize him for free-thinking<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> A. P. Kozyrev, “Sofiologija o. Sergija Bulgakova: ‘filosofema’ ili ‘teologema?’” in *Sergej Nikolaevich Bulgakov (Filosofija Rossii pervoj poloviny XX veka)*, 321. Natalia Vaganova also treats Sophia as theologeme–philosopheme–mythologeme: N. A. Vaganova, *Sofiologija protoiereja Sergija Bulgakova* (Moscow: PSTGU, 2011). John Milbank has correlating reflections about imagination as a “third” for reason and faith, and about literature as a supplement to philosophy and theology. See John Milbank, “Faith, Reason, and Imagination,” in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 316–335.

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Hallensleben, “Kto sub’ekt istorii?” *Obshhestvennye nauki i sovremennost’* 2 (1996): 130–133. Hallensleben concludes (p. 133): “Neither the ‘World Spirit’ (Hegel), nor ‘Being’ (Heidegger), nor nature (the natural sciences), nor history (Gadamer), nor language—none of this series, taken separately, can be called the subject of history. But in all these subjects Sophia is present as a free union between God and humanity and shows her creative energy. And we are invited to participate in this creative work”.

<sup>32</sup> A. I. Reznichenko, “Predislovie,” in S. N. Bulgakov, *Trudy o Troichnosti* (Moscow: OGI, 2001), 15.

<sup>33</sup> A. I. Reznichenko, “‘Vse vremennoe est’ splav iz nicta i vechnosti’: eshhe raz o trinitarnoj ontologii prof. prot. Sergija Bulgakova (k 150-letiju so dnja rozhdenija),” *Vestnik RGGU. Serija ‘Filosofija. Sociologija. Iskusstvovedenie’* 4 (2021), 14.

<sup>34</sup> On this point many examples could be cited, beginning with the well-known characterization of sophiology as “capricious theology” given by Fr. A. Schmemmann. I will confine myself to two recent assessments (the first one being from philosophical camp, the second one being from the theological one): (1) “...all rational reasoning in *The Unfading Light* acquires a kind of “optionality”: where Bulgakov needs to substantiate his non-traditional interpretation of dogmas, he uses reason, but as soon as his reasoning approaches a dangerous line, beyond which a contradiction may arise between the conclusions of philosophical interpretation and the canon, he announces an “antinomy” and proposes to take it for granted. It is clear that with the help of such a method it is possible to carry out any arbitrary constructions, while a priori depriving criticism

In a more ordinary sense, this feature of Bulgakov's thought also means avoiding extremes. It was to the extremes of thinking that Bulgakov was always critical, already in his early metaphysics defining them in terms of various Christian heresies (let us recall that originally *αἵρεσις* meant “choice” or “school / direction”): hence the “modern Arianism” in *Quiet Thoughts*, “Arian Monophysitism” and “Western-type Khlystism” in *The Unfading Light*, “monistic modalism” in *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, and so on. Returning to the metaphor of the middle path introduced above, it is necessary to indicate how this path should run.

*Theologically*, Bulgakov's metaxological thinking is an attempt “to bypass the Scylla of pantheism with the danger of plunging the world into the ocean of the Divine, and the Charybdis of abstract cosmism, in which the being of the world loses its connection with the Divine”<sup>35</sup>. *Ontologically*, it is again an attempt to avoid “the Scylla of falling into a ‘depersonalized’ substantial ontology and the Charybdis of a ‘desubstantialized’ personalism”<sup>36</sup>. *Philosophically*, it is also a position that passes between idealism and materialism<sup>37</sup>. *Epistemologically*, it is an attempt to avoid both religious rationalism and onto-theology, which “inscribe” God, understood as *causa sui*, into being, and fideism à la Lev Shestov, who affirms the complete incompatibility of faith and reason<sup>38</sup>.

All of the above brings us to the core of this research project. The main intuition that determines the idea of the dissertation is the **hypothesis** that at the basis

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of any ground”. (I. I. Evlampiev, *Istorija ruskoj metafiziki v XIX–XX vekah. Russkaja filosofija v poiskah Absoluta*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Saint-Petersburg: RHGA, 2020), 860); (2) “Defining for his theological approach is the freedom of his thought, which knew no limit [...] He was more a philosopher than a theologian, and [...] his ‘sophiology’, as a system, contradicts his theological intuitions” (Joost van Rossum, “Vzaimodejstvie bogoslovija i filosofii v pravoslavnom bogoslovii: svt. Grigorij Palama i prot. Sergij Bulgakov,” in *Sofiologija i neopatrističeskij sintez: dva bogoslovskih itoga filofsokogo razvitija*, eds. K. M. Antonov and N. A. Vaganova (Moscow: PSTGU, 2013), 124).

<sup>35</sup> Sergij Bulgakov, *Nevesta Agnca* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1945), 41.

<sup>36</sup> French, *Lik Premudrosti*, 198.

<sup>37</sup> Graziano Lingua, *Kenosis di Dio e santità della materia: La Sofiologia di Sergej N. Bulgakov* (Napoli: ESI, 2000), 191: “In Bulgakov's rereading, the Orthodox tradition does not recognize the Western distinction between spirit and matter and the prejudice that nature is heterogeneous to the spiritual dimension”.

<sup>38</sup> Schneider, “Faith and Reason”, 136–139.

of Bulgakov's metaphysics, which has the described metaxological character, *there is a special understanding of the relationship between faith and reason*—a relationship that, according to Bulgakov, should not ultimately be conceived in terms of an absolutized binary opposition, entrenched in modern European philosophy. Such a non-dialectical understanding, closely related to Bulgakov's attentive attitude to another opposition, that of transcendent/immanent<sup>39</sup>, and with his consistent upholding of the real transcendence of God, allows Bulgakov, as will be shown in the course of the study, to show *the non-absolute nature* of the indicated binary opposition and to think of faith and reason not as irreconcilable (fideism) or merging (religious rationalism) realities, but as interdependent and complementary phenomena that ultimately have a single beginning and are united by a common goal. Their distinction, which, admittedly, is often held by Bulgakov as a contrast, *is ultimately technical, and not essential*, and will be removed in an eschatological perspective.

But in what way are this complementarity and this interdependence being ensured? The main historical-philosophical part of the study will be devoted to a detailed answer to this question, but for now I can schematically outline the following. The discursive mind must be occupied with the knowledge of empirically given reality and its phenomena; and it is obvious that this knowledge can be carried out only up to certain limits. Upon approaching them, the mind must recognize its non-absoluteness and thereby perform an ascetic act of self-restraint, enabling faith to supplement its discoveries. Faith also guides consciousness in its cognition to a certain extent, driven by the desire for the transcendent, and supplementing the data of experience with “new experience, expansion and transformation of experience, assuming, of course, that our cosmic nature recognizes the region of another world with a special, completely indefinable and irreducible feeling”<sup>40</sup>. Another world,

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<sup>39</sup> For a useful historiography of the rise of this binary opposition and its use in the philosophy of religion, see J. Zachhuber, “Transcendence and Immanence,” in Daniel Whistler, ed., *The Edinburgh Critical History of Nineteenth-Century Christian Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 164–181.

<sup>40</sup> Bulgakov, *Svet Nevechernij*, 23.

i.e., in fact, the world of entities, universals, transcendentals, or, in the language of Bulgakov himself, the Prototype (*Pervoobraz*), is transcendent for us, as the philosopher emphasizes, only epistemologically, but not ontologically. But when the mind approaches the real essential otherness, a moment comes when faith must also perform an act of self-restraint, i.e., move from an active/acting state to a receptive one. This receptive state, being on top of the active path of “ascent”, opens up a possibility of the revelation of the transcendent, of a meeting with it.

Only with such a double kenotic act of self-limitation is true knowledge of ultimate reality possible, since only in this way God is not only theoretically conceived in his otherness—as present in the mind, but can be revealed in a certain *unio mystica*, such as He is in His own deepest being<sup>41</sup>. At the same time, on the way to this mystical union with God, consciousness deepens in the knowledge of the world, gaining access no longer to the level of individual phenomena, but to the *ideal* world, the world under the sign of Sophia.

At the theoretical level, the described complementarity is highlighted through the self-determination of philosophy and religion in correlation with each other as with their “proper Other”. Philosophy, according to Bulgakov, turns out to be essentially inseparable from religion, since it has the same foundations—in particular, we are talking about the rootedness of human consciousness in the Absolute. Religion, on the other hand, cannot do without philosophy, since its mystical and religious content needs a rational interpretation.

Using a metaphor of M. Frensch, one can thus say that in his metaxological project, Bulgakov tried in some way to restore the “medieval cathedral of cognition” (*mittelalterliche Erkenntniskathedrale*) destroyed by nominalism—a metaphor for the “architecture” of integral human cognition, uniting the cognition of the sensual and the transcendent (*Sensus—Ratio—Intellectus—Deus*)<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> French, *Lik Premudrosti*, 223.

<sup>42</sup> French, *Lik Premudrosti*, 201 ff.

## Research Relevance

The innovative nature of Bulgakov's religious metaphysics and its relevance in contemporary academic discourse are obvious, but how can this relevance be explained? What is the relevance of Bulgakov's complex, contradictory and in many ways still, unfortunately, esoteric for today's oeuvre, as well as reflections on the nature of religious faith and experience, rationality, knowledge and philosophy that make up a noticeable part of it?

In my opinion, an appeal to Bulgakov's religious metaphysics in the aforementioned loci can be useful and relevant in several aspects. **First**, it can contribute to *actual philosophical reflection on its own nature*. Here I will allow myself to rely on the thoughts of Vladimir N. Porus, who in a recent publication already argued in this direction in regard to Bulgakov<sup>43</sup>. Analyzing Bulgakov's "tragedy of philosophy", Porus writes:

The call to merge philosophy and theology has not found support in most trends of contemporary philosophy. The very concept of the "tragedy of philosophy" is perceived as excessive pathos or a symptom of neurosis. Philosophy does not want to be aware of any tragedy of its existence; in its postmodernist trends, metaphysical quests are subject to ironic neglect. At the same time, the cultural status of philosophy is becoming increasingly problematic. Therefore, the discussion of Bulgakov's concept remains relevant<sup>44</sup>.

The "cultural status of philosophy" or, in other words, the public consensus regarding its role in society, is indeed undergoing tectonic shifts today. Science today is pragmatic, utilitarian and practice-oriented<sup>45</sup>, in connection with which the

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<sup>43</sup> V. N. Porus, "Vozvrashhajas' k Bulgakovu: tragedija filosofii ili postmodernistskij happy-end?" *Vestnik Russkoj Hristianskoj Gumanitarnoj Akademii* 21, no. 3 (2020): 132–144. See also Idem., "Tragedija filosofii i filosofija tragedii (S. N. Bulgakov i L. I. Shestov)," in *Russkoe bogoslovie v evropejskom kontekste. S. N. Bulgakov i zapadnaja religiozno-filosofskaja mysl'* (Moscow: BBI, 2006), 181–198.

<sup>44</sup> Porus, "Vozvrashhajas' k Bulgakovu", 132.

<sup>45</sup> With regard to Bulgakov, see Natalia Danilkina, "Immanuel Kant and the Pragmatic Turn of Science Through the Prism of Sergei Bulgakov's Metaphysics," *Studia z historii filozofii* 11, no. 2 (2020): 33–46.

“necessity” of philosophy ceases to be self-evident. Many today—even within philosophy itself—believe that philosophy can only remain relevant today in the perspective of interdisciplinarity, with a strong emphasis on integration with contexts external to philosophy. Thus, it is believed that philosophy will not seem like speculation, but will make a positive contribution to the development of world science. A similar methodological “modesty” in comparison with the pre-modern understanding of the tasks of philosophy can already be found in the late Wittgenstein, according to whom philosophy can no longer make ontological statements. It only performs a therapeutic function and helps us to identify and overcome our metaphysical illusions about knowledge, truth and how language relates to the world: “All that philosophy can do is destroy idols. And that means not creating a new one—for instance as in ‘the absence of an idol’<sup>46</sup>”.

However, philosophy stubbornly refuses to be reduced to methodology or therapy, and that is why it constantly needs to revisit its own foundations and nature. The transcendent and mythological roots of philosophy, which Bulgakov described in such detail, turn out to be irremovable, which is expressed, for example, in the “ontological turn” and the return of metaphysics to philosophy<sup>47</sup>. Along with this, being continues to announce its own tragedy, expressed “in the forms of tragic experience, in catastrophic forecasts that come true, in the attitudes of millions of people”<sup>48</sup>. In this regard, the existential question arises again and again: “Is philosophy, which has lost tragic self-consciousness, capable of mastering this subject [the tragedy of being — I. I.], capturing its essence and expressing it in its own language, not borrowed from theology or science? Essentially, this is a question about the present and future of philosophy. [...] This question is perhaps even more topical today than a hundred years ago.”<sup>49</sup> Obviously, in such an interpretation,

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<sup>46</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions. 1912–1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 171.

<sup>47</sup> In Russian, see about this, for example, the recently released collective volume: I. I. Blauberg, A. M. Gaginskij, eds., *Metafizika i postmetafizicheskoe myshlenie* (Moscow: Akademicheskij proekt, 2020).

<sup>48</sup> Porus, “Vozvrashhajas’ k Bulgakovu”, 142.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 142–143.



Bulgakov's reflections on the nature of philosophy and its boundaries do not lose their relevance; it is possible and necessary to return to them in the current cultural context.

**Secondly**, the return of the metaphysics is closely connected with the return of religious, which prompts us to indicate the relevance of addressing Bulgakov's religious metaphysics in yet another aspect—in relation to the modern cultural situation and what is commonly called the *state of post-secularity*<sup>50</sup>. No matter how religion is buried, it seems that it is not going to die at all<sup>51</sup>. In the context of observing the growth of religious beliefs and the increasing representation of the religious in the public space, the project outlined by Habermas to find grounds for a dialogue between a society still based on the postulates of classical rationality and believers remains relevant<sup>52</sup>.

This applies not only to society, but also to science. For at least three decades, there has been a revival of interest in religion in phenomenology<sup>53</sup>, and in philosophy in general, both continental and analytic<sup>54</sup>. In addition, peculiar “theological turns”

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<sup>50</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 1–25. For an overview of post-secular concepts, see, for example: D. Uzlaner, *Postsekuljarnyj povorot. Kak myslit' o religii v XXI veke* (Moscow: Izd-vo Instituta Gajdara, 2020). See also A. Bodrov and M. Tolstoluzhenko, eds., *Religioznoe soznanie v postsekuljarnom obshhestve* (Moscow: BBI, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: The Resurgence of Religion in World Politics* (Washington; Grand Rapids, MI: Ethics and Public Policy Center; Eerdmans, 1999). For sociological data see, for example: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Growth\\_of\\_religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Growth_of_religion) (accessed June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022).

<sup>52</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology and the “theological turn”: the French debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000); Idem, *Phenomenology Wide Open: After the French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> I mean here the works of thinkers such as Alain Badiou, Giovanni Vattimo, Slavoj Žižek, Giorgio Agamben, etc. For the analytic tradition, see Oliver D. Crisp, “Analytic Philosophy,” in *Theology and Philosophy: Faith and Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 171–185.

were noted in other areas, for example, in economics<sup>55</sup> and entrepreneurship<sup>56</sup> (which would undoubtedly please Bulgakov if he lived to this day<sup>57</sup>). In the aspect of theory, these “turns” are supplemented by “genealogical analyzes” of the implicit and explicit theological foundations of modern and postmodern concepts, ideas and attitudes<sup>58</sup>. In this regard, Bulgakov’s religious and philosophical thought, in which an attempt is made to combine the achievements of secular thought and rationality with the classical content of Christian dogma, is of undoubted interest and has relevance.

In order not to be unfounded, I will give one possible example of a post-secular “use” of Bulgakov, which is directly related to this work. In the second chapter of the dissertation, it will be shown that Bulgakov, through criticism of German idealism (primarily Fichte) and an appeal to *vestigia trinitatis*, the speculative theological practice of analogous perception of the triune nature of the Holy Trinity in the structure of the world, comes to a reformulation of the concept of the subject, which he understands not in the spirit of modern European philosophy as an autonomous self-sufficient carrier of action, but conciliarly, i.e. as an I open

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<sup>55</sup> Mitchell Dean, “What is Economic Theology? A New Governmental-Political Paradigm?” *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 3 (2019): 3–26; Idem, “Governmentality meets theology: ‘The king reigns, but he does not govern’,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 29, no. 3 (2012): 145–158.

<sup>56</sup> Brett R. Smith, Jeffery S. McMullen, Melissa S. Cardon, “Toward a theological turn in entrepreneurship: How religion could enable transformative research in our field,” *Journal of Business Venturing* 36, no. 5 (2021): 106–139.

<sup>57</sup> A few years ago a conference was held in Fribourg dedicated to the *Philosophy of Economy* that brought together both theologians and economy scholars. The organizer, Prof. Barbara Hallensleben, notes that the conference participants „eine unerwartete Dialogebene zwischen Ökonomie und Theologie entdeckt“ (<https://www.kath.ch/newsd/warum-der-ex-marxist-sergij-bulgakov-auch-den-alterzbischof-von-canterbury-fasziniert/>; accessed June 1, 2022). See Regula M. Zwahlen, Barbara Hallensleben, eds., *Sergij Bulgakovs Philosophie der Wirtschaft im interdisziplinären Gespräch* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2014).

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*; Taylor, *A Secular Age*; Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford University Press, 2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Stanford University Press, 2011); Michael Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008); Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity. An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993). Generally speaking, this theme is currently undergoing considerable development in Western academia. For example, in 2021, the online conference “Theological Genealogies of Modernity” was held, organized by the Oxford and Australian Catholic Universities.

and turned towards another I; as *us*. The third chapter of the study will also deal with the openness of the Self to the Other, this time to the Divine Other: it will be shown that Bulgakov understands religious experience as a decentering experience that shifts a person from a central position in his relationship with God and the world and thereby “makes room” to discover the transcendent in the immanent. Sociologist of religion Kristina Stöckl believes that such an understanding of a decentered and open self and conciliar subjectivity, grounded in religious experience, may have political implications and have the potential for post-secular political theory. Stöckl, in a sense, continues the line of criticism of the concept of an autonomous personality and “pure subjectivity”, laid down in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the theorists of the Frankfurt School, M. Walzer, C. Taylor, A. McIntyre and others, who, however, led it rather in the mainstream of critique of ideology. But critique of an autonomous personality from the standpoint of taking into account religious experience and practice? What might be its content?

Stöckl believes that “the reconfiguration of subjectivity in the light of the reality of religious experience” and the revision of the classical anthropological paradigm of the subject can constitute an alternative to the “art of separation” accepted in liberal political theory (M. Walzer<sup>59</sup>), which, by separating religious and civil identity, does not allow to do justice to the situation post-secularity, in which “democracy means equal treatment of religious and non-religious citizens; democratic theory, according to its own rules, must be able to accommodate religious arguments”<sup>60</sup>. In other words, the post-secular understanding of the presence of believers in the political space, formed by liberal political philosophers such as Habermas and Rawls, still proceeds from the fundamental immanence of this space and does not take into account that “the religious citizen lives in a world that does not fit within the limits of immanence, and that through his life ‘in the light

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<sup>59</sup> Michael Walzer, “Liberalism and the Art of Separation,” *Political Theory* 12 (1984): 315–330.

<sup>60</sup> Shtjokl’, “Postsekuljarnaja sub’ektivnost’”, 266.

of faith' *he acquires a point of view on the world, society and politics, which can be seriously different from a non-religious, secular position*"<sup>61</sup>. Stöckl claims:

As soon as we take seriously the anthropological reality of mystical experience and spiritual practice, we must inevitably reconsider the classical anthropological paradigm according to which man is an autonomous, self-centered subject<sup>62</sup>.

A revision of this paradigm by post-secular political philosophy could be based on taking into account the importance of religious experience, the calling of Christians to ascetic love and self-restraint, as well as the eschatological orientation of their being in the world. Bulgakov's approach to subjectivity, carried out exactly from these positions, can be a significant resource for political dialogue between believers and non-believers, and this topic seems promising for further research.

It should be noted that the heuristic potential of Russian religious philosophy, of which Bulgakov is a significant representative, in the field of solving problems related to post-secularity, has been actively studied recently<sup>63</sup>. The religious metaphysics of Russian thinkers, considered from these positions, seems to be an alternative to both secular modernity and nihilistic and pluralistic postmodernity, and the religious and philosophical approaches to understanding the phenomena of culture and history, indicated by Russian philosophers, according to Olga A. Zhukova, "may well fit into the modern trend of constructing new conceptual models of philosophical knowledge in the field of metaphysics, onto-

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 267. My emphasis.

<sup>62</sup> Shtjokl', "Postsekuljarnaja sub'ektivnost'", 272.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example: Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, and Paweł Rojek, eds., *Beyond Modernity: Russian Religious Philosophy and Post-secularism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016); K. M. Antonov, "Kak vozmozhna religija?": *Filosofija religii i filosofskie problemy bogoslovija v russkoj religioznoj mysli XIX–XX vekov*, 2 Pts (Moscow: PSTGU, 2020), Pt. 2, 316–352; Idem, "Postmetafizicheskoe myshlenie, teologija i russkaja religioznaja mysl'. Rec. na: Konachaeva S. A. Bog posle Boga. Puti postmetafizicheskogo myshlenija. M.: RGGU, 2019. 242 s.," *Vestnik PSTGU. Serija 1: Bogoslovie. Filosofija* 93 (2021): 133–138; K. J. M'jor, "Russkaja religioznaja filosofija v sekuljarnyj vek," *Istoriko-filosofskij ezhegodnik* 35 (2020): 263–282; I. I. Pavlov, *Vlijanie sekuljarnyh i antisekuljarnyh aspektov «novogo religioznogo soznaniya» na stanovlenie metafiziki N. A. Berdjajeva* (Diss. ... kand. filos. nauk, Moscow, 2021).

epistemological theory, updating the topics and methodology of cultural-philosophical and historiosophical research”<sup>64</sup>.

This dissertation is in some way a continuation of the aforementioned research paradigm. I share the opinion inherent in many researchers that Russian religious philosophy, represented by its most significant representatives—Solovyov, Bulgakov, Florensky, Berdyaev, Frank, and others—was able to embody a sound combination of tradition and innovation. Having come to the conclusion about the logical inconsistency of the main intellectual currents of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries—positivism, materialism, Marxism, monism—they declared the need to renew the “positive” consciousness, which was to be supplemented with hitherto ignored facts of personal faith and religious revelation. Russian religious thinkers (here, first of all, I mean sophiologists) were able to distinguish the “wheat from the chaff”, that is, while responding to specifically modern problems and, accordingly, striving to update the traditional ontologically and cosmologically focused mode of thinking, they criticized or rethought what what did not seem so indisputable to them in modernity—for example, the alleged normativity of the turn towards the individual cognizing subject and the primacy of epistemology and representation after Descartes and Kant<sup>65</sup>. As John Milbank notes in this regard in relation to sophiology, its “modern and postmodern relevance” is seen “in that it foregrounds the instability and uncertainty of understanding, the question of technology and the human relation to nature, together with the question of sexual difference and the preponderance of evil in finite reality.”<sup>66</sup>

At the same time, Bulgakov, who united, among other things, in his works at the level of concepts and scientific apparatus, the contemporary German sociological school and the holy fathers of Greek patristics, like many other Russian philosophers, faced the basic theoretical question about the very nature of such a

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<sup>64</sup> Olga Zhukova, *Filosofija russkoj kul'tury. Metafizicheskaja perspektiva cheloveka i istorii* (Moscow: Soglasie, 2017), 10.

<sup>65</sup> John Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon,” in Pabst and Schneider, *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

combination<sup>67</sup>—the nature of the union between science, metaphysics, and religion. This connection, which has already been mentioned above, was criticized by many, and, as usual, from different camps. From a philosophical position, typical in this regard is the assessment of Igor I. Evlampiev, who believes that Bulgakov “has gone very far from the ideas of humanism, from the idea of the absolute significance of the human person—returning to the ‘medieval worldview’ with his idea of the undivided dominance of God over man and *creative impotence of man*”<sup>68</sup>. Without commenting on certain aspects of this and similar invectives (the dissertation will show both the importance of personalism for Bulgakov and his emphasis on the dignity of the individual and the importance of creativity), I just want to note that Bulgakov, unlike his critics, perfectly understood the impossibility of simply abolishing humanism and a direct return to the “medieval worldview”. It is impossible to simply state divine truths without thinking about the fact that these truths were given, including those given to me and perceived by me in a certain way. This feature of the Bulgakov method (“learning”, representing the “philosophical study” “passed through the Kantian art”, as Irina B. Rodnyanskaya put it) was outlined by Andrew Louth in relation to his “great” trilogy (but I see no reason why this cannot be attributed to earlier, “philosophical” works):

On the one hand, Bulgakov remains traditional in giving a systematic account of the objective truths of revelation—the way things are, seen in the light of revelation. On the other hand, he is concerned with the root question of the anthropological approach: how do we know any of this? and also: how does this make sense of my human experience?<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Catherine Evtuhov read an interesting paper on Bulgakov’s sources: Ekaterina Evtukhova, “O snoskah Bulgakova (idejnyj kontekst ‘Filosofii hozjajstva’),” in *S. N. Bulgakov: Religiozno-filosofskij put’: Mezhdunarodnaja nauchnaja konferencija, posvjashhennaja 130-letiju so dnja rozhdenija*, eds. A. P. Kozyrev and M. A. Vasilyeva (Moscow: Russkij put’, 2003), 140–154.

<sup>68</sup> I. I. Evlampiev, “Religioznyj idealizm S. N. Bulgakova: ‘za’ i ‘protiv»’,” in *S. N. Bulgakov: pro et contra*, Vol. 1., ed. I. I. Evlampiev (Saint-Petersburg: RHGI), 25. Evlampiev’s emphasis. For an extended critique of this view see: V. N. Porus, “Neizbyvnaja aktual’nost’ predosterezhenij S. N. Bulgakova,” in *Russkoe bogoslovie v evropejskom kontekste. S. N. Bulgakov i zapadnaja religiozno-filosofskaja mysl’*, ed. V. N. Porus (Moscow: BBI, 2006), 9–27.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Louth, “Sergii Bulgakov and the Task of Theology,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74 (2009), 252. My emphasis.

Understood in such a broad formulation, the question of the relationship between faith and reason, philosophy and theology, thus occupies one of the main, if not the main, places in Bulgakov's oeuvre. In an attempt to describe and analyze this topic, it becomes necessary to analyze the basic constants of Bulgakov's thought, his metaontology and, in part, the metaphilosophy of consciousness. The dissertation is thus devoted to Bulgakov's religious metaphysics, or rather, to the clarification of its metaphilosophical foundations. The thesis discusses how Bulgakov understood philosophy, its methodology, problematic field and boundaries, as well as how he defined religion and its most important aspect—faith, which, according to the Russian thinker, “comes into action” when philosophy naturally rests within the bounds of classical rationality. From this arises the subsequent need to study not only the classical problem of faith and reason, but also the topics of the religious “unity of life”—the absolute interconnectedness of being, in which Bulgakov's interest results in an attempt to build a Christian philosophy of God, the world and man on the basis of the idea of Sophia. The dissertation, among other things, seeks to trace how Bulgakov answers the following questions: how is the unity of the world and the possibility of knowing it ensured? How is the relative connected with the absolute, and how is the plural grounded by the one? On what grounds is it possible to meet the transcendent with the immanent in the consciousness of an individual? How is the reliability of the knowledge of the Absolute in the individual religious consciousness justified? How is faith and religious experience possible? What is their epistemological status?

### **Object, Subject, Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

**The object** of the dissertation is the religious metaphysics of Sergey Bulgakov, expounded by him, in particular, mainly in the “great” works of the 1910s–1920s: *Philosophy of Economy*, *The Unfading Light*, *Philosophy of Name*, and *The Tragedy of Philosophy*. The introduction of such limitations is caused not so much by the need to define a reasonable chronological and textual framework for the dissertation, but by the fact that, in my opinion, having formed his views on philosophy and religion in the 1910–1920s, Bulgakov hardly changed them later,

which is confirmed by a late essay on the philosophy of Lev Shestov (1939), where he, arguing at length about the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem, formulates positions that practically do not differ from those of *The Unfading Light* and *The Tragedy of Philosophy*. However, this limitation is not absolute: the study contains citations and references to later works, which was considered appropriate in the framework of illustrating the research theses. In addition, the first chapter of the study stands apart in this regard—there I mainly turn to Bulgakov’s earlier works, trying to trace *how* his religious metaphysics is formed.

**The subject** of the study is philosophy (as well as rationality and discursive thinking), theology, religion and religious categories (faith, prayer, religious consciousness, religious experience, dogma, revelation) in the form in which they are presented, revealed and justified in Bulgakov’s metaphysics.

**The purpose** of the dissertation is to identify the scope and content of the concepts of philosophy and religion/theology in the interpretation of Sergey Bulgakov, to clarify his views on their relationship and difference, to specify his method of substantiating religious intuitions through philosophical methodology. The real goal is to clarify the status of faith, religious consciousness and religious experience on the paths of discursive knowledge, which is a key problem of the thinker’s philosophical heritage.

This goal is achieved by solving the following **tasks**:

1. Conceptualizing the idea of Bulgakov’s religious metaphysics in his creative heritage, and identifying its main content and theoretical foundations.
2. Specifying Bulgakov’s definition of philosophy: its methodology, problematic field and boundaries; religion, its purpose and functions; as well as the problem of the relationship between reason and faith, rationality and revelation, philosophy and theology.
3. Determining the status and functionality of religious categories (faith, prayer, religious consciousness, religious experience, dogma, revelation) in Bulgakov’s metaphysics.



4. Identifying and analyzing the philosophical arguments by which Bulgakov substantiates and describes the aforementioned religious categories.

### **Extent of Prior Research into the Problem**

Despite the above-mentioned surge of interest in Bulgakov in Russia and in the West, the research literature about him is still mostly fragmentary: economists deal with Bulgakov-the-Marxist, historians of philosophy deal with Bulgakov-the-idealist, theologians deal with Bulgakov-the-sophiologist. Their interest, therefore, concentrates on certain areas, among which Bulgakov's religious metaphysics and philosophy of religion, which have a "borderline" character, still very rarely fall<sup>70</sup>. There is no separate study that would consider in detail the topic of the relationship between discursive knowledge and religious faith in Bulgakov's work, which is the leitmotif of this dissertation, neither in domestic nor in world historical and philosophical science today, although many aspects of this topic have already been (some repeatedly) disclosed. This study seeks to fill this gap.

The fundamental nature of Bulgakov's religious metaphysics was obvious even to his contemporaries (for all their disagreement with certain ideas), which is emphasized in their classic works on the history of Russian philosophy and theology by N. Lossky, Zenkovsky, Zernov, Florovsky, as well as Berdyaev (*Russian Idea*) and others. Its subsequent study has its own stages, identified and disclosed by Alexey Kozyrev: worn until the early 1990s episodic in nature, in the nineties the study is gaining momentum, accompanied by "the study of the texts of the philosopher, the identification of their contexts, the publication of the epistolary"<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Konstantin Antonov, a specialist in Bulgakov's philosophy of religion, notes that "the literature about Bulgakov is quite large, but it is centered mainly on either socio-political, or sophiological, or narrow-theological themes." K. M. Antonov, *'Kak vozmozhna religija?': Filosofija religii i filosofskie problemy bogoslovija v ruskoj religioznoj mysli XIX–XX vekov*. 2 Pts. (Moscow: PSTGU, 2020), Pt. 1, 373, note 2.

<sup>71</sup> Kozyrev, "Ot redaktora", 6.

A holistic view of the creative evolution of Bulgakov can be obtained from the four intellectual biographies available today: the fundamental two-volume book by Lev Zander<sup>72</sup>, the book of Sister Elena Kazimirchak-Polonskaya<sup>73</sup>, a small book by Dmitry Krylov<sup>74</sup> and the work of Catherine Evtuhov<sup>75</sup>, which mainly covers the Russian period of Bulgakov. Books about Bulgakov, which are broad in scope, but not systematic in nature, are also adjacent here—these are the books of Antoine Arjakovsky<sup>76</sup>, Rowan Williams<sup>77</sup>, and Piero Coda<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> L. A. Zander, *Bog i mir (mirosozercanie otca Sergija Bulgakova)*, 2 vols (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1948). For the purposes of our study, it should be noted that in the context of sophiological controversy, as well as an anti-Western position in theology (Florovsky), Zander was interested in presenting Bulgakov's thought as orthodox as possible. In this regard, Zander's exposition obscures the importance and scope of the presence and use of German idealism in Bulgakov's corpus. See *Lingua*, *Kénosis di Dio*, 200; Jonathan R. Seiling, *From Antinomy to Sophiology: Modern Russian Religious Consciousness and Sergei N. Bulgakov's Critical Appropriation of German Idealism* (PhD diss., University of St Michael's College, 2008), 39, n. 70.

<sup>73</sup> Monahinja Elena [Kazimirchak-Polonskaja], *Professor protoierej Sergij Bulgakov 1871–1944. Lichnost', zhizn', tvorcheskoe sluzhenie, osijanie favorskim svetom* (Moscow: OPU, 2003). It should be noted that sister Elena, like Zander, was a close student of Bulgakov, so the absence of a critical eye in the book should be taken into account.

<sup>74</sup> D. A. Krylov, *Sergej Bulgakov* (Saint-Petersburg: Nauka, 2016).

<sup>75</sup> Evtukhova, *Serp i krest* (English original: Catherine Evtuhov, *The Cross & the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997)).

<sup>76</sup> Antoine Arjakovsky, *Essai sur le père Serge Boulgakov (1871–1944) : philosophe et théologien chrétien* (Paris: Éd. Parole et Silence, 2006). Although Arjakovsky is better known in Russia as a historian of Russian emigration—the author of a monograph on the journal *The Way* (Antuan Arzhakovskij, *Zhurnal Put' (1925–1940). Pokolenie russkih religioznych myslitelej v jemigracii* (Kyiv: Feniks, 2000))—he is in many ways can be considered a student of Bulgakov and the (only?) direct successor of his sophiology. So, for example, Arjakovsky argues the need for methodological application of sophiology not only to the sphere of ecumenical relations, but also to the sphere of secular politics. See, for example, his recent report “Sophiology and personalism, pillars of a new political science for the XXI<sup>st</sup> century” at conference “Building the House of Wisdom”, and Antoine Arjakovsky, “Glorification of the name and grammar of wisdom: Sergii Bulgakov and Jean-Marc Ferry”, in Pabst and Schneider, *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*, 29–43.

<sup>77</sup> Rowan Williams, ed. and transl., *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology* (Edinburgh: International Clark, 1999).

<sup>78</sup> Piero Coda, *Sergej Bulgakov* (Brescia: Morcelliana 2003); Idem, *L'altro di Dio: Rivelazione e Kenosi in Sergej Bulgakov* (Roma: Città Nuova, 1998).

A number of important monographs and dissertations are devoted to certain aspects of Bulgakov's oeuvre: of course, his sophiology<sup>79</sup>, anthropology<sup>80</sup>, philosophy of history<sup>81</sup>, philosophy of name and language<sup>82</sup>, social views<sup>83</sup>,

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<sup>79</sup> N. A. Vaganova, *Sofiologija protoiereja Sergija Bulgakova* (Moscow: PSTGU, 2011); D. A. Krylov, *Evharištičeskaja chasha. Sofijnje nachala* (Moscow: KomKniga, 2006); *Lingua, Kénosis di Dio*; Mihail Sergeev, *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy: Solov'ev, Bulgakov, Losskii, and Berdiaev* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

<sup>80</sup> Regula Zwahlen, *Das Revolutionäre Ebenbild Gottes: Anthropologien der Menschenwürde bei Nikolaj A. Berdjaev und Sergej N. Bulgakov* (Wien; Berlin; Münster: LIT, 2010); A. F. Upravitelev, *Konstruirovanie sub'ektnosti v antropologii S. N. Bulgakova* (Barnaul: Izdatel'stvo Altajskogo universiteta, 2001).

<sup>81</sup> Morgan W. Stark, *The Philosophy of Time and History in the Thought of Sergei Bulgakov and Nikolai Berdiaev* (PhD diss., University College London, 2013).

<sup>82</sup> A. I. Reznichenko, *O smyslah imen. Bulgakov, Losev, Florenskij, Frank i dii minores* (Moscow: REGNUM, 2012); N. K. Boneckaja, *Mezhdru Logosom i Sofiej* (Moscow; Saint-Petersburg: Centr gumanitarnyh iniciativ, 2018). Interestingly, Reznichenko and Bonetskaja hold opposing views on two very important issues: (1) whether the "triad" of philosophers of name can be viewed as a school, and (2) whether it is acceptable to consider philosophy of name as a variation of the philosophy of language. On the first question, Bonetskaja believes that "All three studies of language — Florensky, Bulgakov, Losev — [...] constitute a unity whose name is school" (432), while according to Reznichenko "we can easily we discover a holistic tradition of philosophizing about language, a tradition that never took shape in a school" (13). Regarding the second question, Bonetskaja believes that "it is not too legitimate to talk about the philosophy of language in connection with the Florensky school" (435, note 5). Based on the first pages of Reznichenko's book, where she correlates the philosophy of the name with the corresponding discussions about language in the European philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (13–14), I conclude that she considers the philosophy of the name to be a version of the philosophy of language, although she makes all the necessary reservations that "reducing the philosophy of the name only to its semiotic connotations loses sight, in my opinion, of the main thing: that ontological core, dating back to Plato, the Areopagitics and Palamas, without which the philosophy of the name—as a set of truly original and independent concepts—is not only incomprehensible, but also unthinkable" (14, footnote 1). For my part, I think that it is perfectly acceptable to speak of philosophers of name as a school, just as it is permissible to speak of the philosophy of the name as a kind of philosophy of language. Recently, Schneider tried to present Florensky's and Bulgakov's philosophy of name as an alternative to existing approaches in the philosophy of language that fall into reductionism. Cristoph Schneider, "Orthodoxy and Philosophy of Language," in *Theology and Philosophy in Eastern Orthodoxy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2019), 166–187. Schneider comes to the conclusion that "Florensky's and Bulgakov's approaches transcend the traditional division between realism and idealism" (185).

<sup>83</sup> D. A. Alonceva, *Gosudarstvenno-pravovye vzgljady S. N. Bulgakova* (Moscow: Prospekt, 2019); Van Kessel, *Sophiology and Modern Society*; Scott van Lingenfelter, *Tradition and Modernity: Sergei Bulgakov's Quest for a Christian Civil Society in Later Imperial Russia* (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2005).

ecumenical activities<sup>84</sup>, as well as special theological loci: trinitarian theology<sup>85</sup>, ecclesiology<sup>86</sup>, mariology<sup>87</sup>, angelology<sup>88</sup>, eschatology<sup>89</sup>, etc. There are also two *systematic* introductions to Bulgakov's theological thought by Robert Slesinski<sup>90</sup> and Aidan Nichols<sup>91</sup>.

At the same time, it should be noted again that most of the historical and theological studies devoted to Bulgakov's theology (especially domestic ones) for the most part do not sufficiently take into account (at the level of conceptual analysis, and not a simple statement or personal assessment) the philosophical foundation of Bulgakov's theological oeuvre<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> Bryn Geffert, *Eastern Orthodox and Anglicans: Diplomacy, Theology, and the Politics of Interwar Ecumenism* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2010); Scott A. Sharman, *The Hour is Coming, and is Now Come: Sergei Bulgakov and the Search for the Ecumenical Future* (PhD diss., University of St Michael's College, 2014).

<sup>85</sup> Katy Leamy, *A Comparison of the Kenotic Trinitarian Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Sergei Bulgakov* (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2012).

<sup>86</sup> Stanislaw Swierkosz, *L'église visible selon Serge Bulgakov: structure hiérarchique et sacramentelle* (Rome: Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1980); Miguel de Salis Amaral, *Dos Visões Ortodoxas de la Iglesia: Bulgakov y Florovsky* (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2003); Sergei V. Nikolaev, *Church and reunion in the theology of Sergii Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky, 1918–1940* (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 2007).

<sup>87</sup> Walter Nunzio Sisto, *The Mother of God in the Theology of Sergius Bulgakov. The Soul of the World* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>88</sup> Vasilyev, *Christian angelology in pseudo-Dionysius and Sergius Bulgakov*. In turn, on Bulgakov's satanology see Justin S. Coyle, "On Mangodhood: Satan after Schelling," paper presented at the conference "Building the House of Wisdom", manuscript.

<sup>89</sup> Natalino Valentini, *Memoria e Risurrezione in Florenskij e Bulgakov* (Verucchio: Pazzini, 1997); Arvydas Ramonas, *L'attesa del regno: eschaton e apocalisse in Sergej Bulgakov* (Roma: Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1999).

<sup>90</sup> Robert F. Slesinski, *The Theology of Sergius Bulgakov* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017).

<sup>91</sup> Aidan Nichols, *Wisdom from Above: A Primer in the Theology of Father Sergei Bulgakov* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2005).

<sup>92</sup> An exception worthy of mention is the work of Fr. Pavel Khondzinsky. See, for example, P. Hondzinskij, "Na jazyke sofiologii": kritika o. Sergiem Bulgakovym triadologii blazhennogo Avgustina," *Vestnik PSTGU. Serija I: Bogoslovie. Filosofija. Religiovedenie* 83 (2019): 11–25; Idem, "Problema jazykov bogoslovija v 'Bol'shoj trilogii' o. Sergija Bulgakova," *Gosudarstvo, religija, cerkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 38, no. 1 (2020): 177–200; Idem., "Triadologija i sofičnost': ot V. S. Solov'eva k o. Sergiju Bulgakovu," in *Sergej Nikolaevich Bulgakov*, 322–333.

In addition to the mentioned authors, Alexey P. Kozyrev<sup>93</sup>, Modest A. Kolerov<sup>94</sup>, Barbara Hallensleben<sup>95</sup>, Regula Zwahlen<sup>96</sup>, and Paul L. Gavriilyuk<sup>97</sup> made a great contribution to the development and understanding of Bulgakov's philosophical and theological heritage.

Approaching directly to the subject of our study, it should be noted that the topic "Bulgakov and Philosophy" in the research literature is much more reflected than the topic "Bulgakov and Religious Faith". Thus, in general terms, Bulgakov's views on philosophy were explicitly described by Khoruzhiy<sup>98</sup>, Rodnyanskaya<sup>99</sup>,

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<sup>93</sup> A. P. Kozyrev, "Ipostas' protiv individual'nosti. Lichnost' u S. N. Bulgakova," in *Sub'ektivnost' i identichnost'*, ed. A. V. Mikhailovskiy (Moscow: VSHE, 2012), 168–181; Idem., "Ob odnom antropologicheskom aspekte filosofii S. N. Bulgakova," *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. Filosofija. Psihologija. Sociologija* 4 (2012): 9–14; Idem., "Nizhegorodskaja Sivilla," *Istorija filosofii* 6 (2000), 62–84; Idem., "Sergij Bulgakov i Ju. N. Rejtlinger: k istorii duhovnogo romana," in *Filosofskie jemanacii ljubvi*, ed. Yu. Sineokaja (Moscow: Izdatel'skij dom JASK, 2018), 148–170; Idem., "Otec Sergij Bulgakov: dva goda v Prage," *Filosoficheskie pis'ma. Russko-evropejskij dialog* 3, no. 4 (2020): 30–47.

<sup>94</sup> M. A. Kolerov, *Arheologija ruskogo politicheskogo idealizma: 1900–1927. Oчерki i dokumenty* (Moscow: Common Place, 2018); Idem., *Ot marksizma k idealizmu i cerkvi (1897–1927): Issledovanija, materialy, ukazateli* (Moscow: Ciolkovskij, 2017).

<sup>95</sup> Barbara Hallensleben, "Ökonomie Und Heilsökonomie: Sergij Bulgakov Als Vordenker Neuer ökumenischer Aufgaben," in *Wachsam in Liebe* (Kisslegg: Fe-Medienverlag, 2008), 131–145; Idem., "Vom Griechischen Russentum Zur Universalen Kirche: Sergij N. Bulgakov," in *Russische Religionsphilosophie Und Theologie Um 1900* (Marburg: Elwert, 2005), 109–120; Idem., "Spiritual Intercommunion between the East and the West: The Russian Orthodox Theologian Sergij N. Bulgakov (1871–1944)," in *Sapere Teologico E Unità Della Fede. Studi in onore del Prof. J. Wicks* (Roma, 2004), 409–433; Idem., "Kto sub'ekt istorii?"

<sup>96</sup> Regula M. Zwahlen, "Sergii Bulgakov's Reinvention of Theocracy for a Democratic Age," *Journal of Orthodox Christian Thought* 3, no. 2 (2020): 175–194; Idem., "Sergij Bulgakov und Vasilij Kandinskij 'über das Geistige in der Kunst'," in *Veni, Sancte Spiritus!*, eds. G. Vergauwen, A. Steingruber (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2018), 684–698; Idem., "Thomas Carlyle, source d'inspiration pour l'œuvre de Serge Boulgakov," *Le Messenger Orthodoxe* 158 (2015): 55–67; Idem., "Sergei Bulgakov's Concept of Human Dignity," in *Orthodox Christianity and Human Rights* (Leuven: Brepols, 2012), 169–186.

<sup>97</sup> Paul L. Gavriilyuk, "Bulgakov's Account of Creation: Neglected Aspects, Critics and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 4 (2015): 450–463; Idem., "Universal Salvation in the Eschatology of Sergius Bulgakov," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 57, no. 1 (2006): 110–132; Idem., "The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005): 251–269.

<sup>98</sup> S. S. Horuzhij, "Sofija — Kosmos — materija: ustoi filosofskoj mysli otca Sergija Bulgakova," in *Sergej Nikolaevich Bulgakov*, 9–45.

<sup>99</sup> I. B. Rodnjanskaja, "Chitatel' i tolmach zamysla o mire," in S. N. Bulgakov, *Pervoobraz i obraz*, 2 Vols., Vol. 1 (Moscow; Saint-Petersburg: Iskusstvo; INAPRESS, 1999), 5–16; Idem., "Sergej Nikolaevich Bulgakov — otec Sergij: stil' mysli i formy mysli," in *S. N. Bulgakov: Religiozno-filosofskij put'*, 29–43.

Porus<sup>100</sup>, Valliere<sup>101</sup>, Faritov<sup>102</sup>, Garadzha<sup>103</sup>, Netrebskaya<sup>104</sup>, Chernosvitova<sup>105</sup>, Mrówczyński-Van Allen and Montiel Gomez<sup>106</sup>, and van Rossum<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> V. N. Porus, “Tragedija filosofii i filosofija tragedii (S. N. Bulgakov i L. I. Shestov),” in *Russkoe bogoslovie v evropejskom kontekste. S. N. Bulgakov i zapadnaja religiozno-filosofskaja mysl'*, 181–198; Idem., “Vozvrashhajas' k Bulgakovu”; Idem., “Neizbyvnaja aktual'nost' predosterezhenij S. N. Bulgakova,” in *Russkoe bogoslovie v evropejskom kontekste. S. N. Bulgakov i zapadnaja religiozno-filosofskaja mysl'*, 9–27.

<sup>101</sup> Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov. Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000); Idem., “A Russian Cosmodycy: Sergei Bulgakov's Religious Philosophy,” in *A History of Russian Philosophy, 1830–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 171–189.

<sup>102</sup> V. T. Faritov, “Puti russoj religioznoj filosofii v svete krizisa evropejskoj metafiziki: S. N. Bulgakov i F. Nicshe,” *Filosofskaja mysl'* 3 (2019): 8–19; Idem., “Krizis evropejskoj metafiziki v zerkale russoj religioznoj filosofii (V. S. Solov'jov i S. N. Bulgakov),” in *Metafizika i postmetafizicheskoe myshlenie* (Moscow: Akademicheskij proekt, 2020).

<sup>103</sup> N. V. Garadzha, *S. N. Bulgakov o prirode filosofskogo poznaniya* (Diss. ... kand. filos. nauk, Moscow, 2003).

<sup>104</sup> O. N. Netrebskaja, *S. N. Bulgakov o “tragedii” filosofii* (Diss. ... kand. filos. nauk, Moscow, 2008).

<sup>105</sup> I. A. Chernosvitova, *Sootnoshenie very i znaniya v russoj religioznoj filosofii nachala XX veka: S. N. Bulgakov, S. L. Frank, N. A. Berdjaev* (Diss. ... kand. filos. nauk, Belgorod, 2006).

<sup>106</sup> Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen and Sebastián Montiel Gómez, “Aspects of the Russian Tradition of Philosophical-Theological Synthesis in the Post-Secular Context. Georges Florovsky, Sergey Bulgakov, Alain Badiou, and the Theology dwarf,” in *Beyond Modernity: Russian Religious Philosophy and Post-Secularism*, 13–24.

<sup>107</sup> Joost van Rossum, “Vzaimodejstvie bogoslovija i filosofii v pravoslavnom bogoslovii: svt. Grigorij Palama i prot. Sergij Bulgakov,” in *Sofiologija i neopatristskij sintez: dva bogoslovskih itoga filosofskogo razvitija*, 199–210.

Particularly about Bulgakov's attitude to Kant and German idealism wrote Vaganova<sup>108</sup>, Vasilyev<sup>109</sup>, Krasicki<sup>110</sup>, Seiling<sup>111</sup>, Milbank<sup>112</sup>, Heath<sup>113</sup>, Khokhlova<sup>114</sup>, and Coyle<sup>115</sup>.

The theme of Bulgakov's antinomianism was revealed in detail by Gevorkyan<sup>116</sup>, Astapov<sup>117</sup>, and Gallaher<sup>118</sup>. The philosophy of trinity was described

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<sup>108</sup> N. A. Vaganova, "Transcendental'nyj ideal Kanta i sofiologija Bulgakova," in *Sofiologija i neopatristskij sintez*, 65–85; Idem., "Tainstvo, dogmat i antinomija v sofiologii prot. S. Bulgakova," *Vestnik PSTGU. Ser. 1: Bogoslovie. Filosofija* 48, no. 4 (2013): 40–51.

<sup>109</sup> Tikhon Vasilyev, "Aspects of Schelling's Influence on Sergius Bulgakov and Other Thinkers of the Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 80, no. 1/2 (2019): 143–159; Idem., "Bogoslovie i filosofija v trudah otca Sergija Bulgakova," in *S. N. Bulgakov: pro et contra, antologija*, 904–922.

<sup>110</sup> Jan Krasicki, "'The tragedy' of German philosophy. Remarks on reception of German philosophy in the Russian religious thought (of S. Bulgakov and others)," *Studies in East European Thought* 62, no. 1 (2010): 63–70.

<sup>111</sup> Seiling, *From Antinomy to Sophiology*; Idem., "'Tret'ja antinomija' Kanta i 'Substancija' Spinozy v sofiologii Florenskogo i Bulgakova," in *Na puti k sinteticheskomu edinstvu evropejskoj kul'tury: filosofsko-bogoslovskoe nasledie P. A. Florenskogo i sovremennost'*, ed. V. N. Porus (Moscow: BBI, 2006), 40–52.

<sup>112</sup> Milbank, "Sophiology and Theurgy"; Idem., "From Grammar to Wisdom" in Sergii Bulgakov, *The Tragedy of Philosophy (Philosophy and Dogma)* (Angelico Press, 2020), ix–xxxiii.

<sup>113</sup> Joshua Heath, "On Sergii Bulgakov's Tragedy of Philosophy," *Modern Theology* 37, no. 3 (2021): 805–823.

<sup>114</sup> E. I. Hohlova, *Genezis religioznoj filosofii S. N. Bulgakova* (Diss. ... kand. filos. nauk, Oryol, 1998).

<sup>115</sup> Justin S. Coyle, "Heterodox Hegels: heresiology in de Lubac and Bulgakov," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 73 (2020): 31–42.

<sup>116</sup> A. R. Gevorkjan, *Uchenie ob antinomizme P. Florenskogo i S. Bulgakova* (Moscow: Hristianskoe izdatel'stvo, 1999).

<sup>117</sup> S. N. Astapov, *Antinomizm kak sposob reprezentacii religioznogo soznanija (na materiale ruskoj religioznoj filosofii pervoj poloviny HH veka)* (Diss. ... dokt. filos. nauk, Rostov n/D., 2010).

<sup>118</sup> Brandon Gallaher, *Freedom and Necessity in Modern Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Idem., "'...Tam svoboda': problema Bozhestvennoj svobody i neobhodimosti ljubvi u K. Barta i S. Bulgakova," in *Russkoe bogoslovie v evropejskom kontekste. S. N. Bulgakov i zapadnaja religiozno-filosofskaja mysl'* (Moscow: BBI, 2006), 40–80.

in detail by Reznichenko<sup>119</sup>, Heath<sup>120</sup>, Zwahlen<sup>121</sup>, and Aksenov-Meerson<sup>122</sup>, also chronologically closer to Bulgakov, Pierre Hadot<sup>123</sup> and Giuseppe Lo Verde<sup>124</sup> touched on this topic.

The topic “Bulgakov and Religious Faith”, as already mentioned, was developed much less, finding special reflection in the works of Antonov<sup>125</sup> and Schneider<sup>126</sup>. More often, Bulgakov’s epistemology of religion is briefly analyzed within the framework of more general studies on the topic of faith and religious experience in Russian religious philosophy. Here we can mention monographs and

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<sup>119</sup> Reznichenko, *O smyslah imjon*; Idem., *Genezis i artikuljacionnye formy jazyka russkoj filosofii* (S. L. Frank, S. N. Bulgakov, A. S. Glinka-Volzhsnij, P. P. Percov, S. N. Durylin): *Istoriko-filosofskij analiz* (Diss. ... dokt. filos. n., Moscow, 2013); Idem., “‘Vse vremennoe est’ splav iz nitchto i vechnosti”. In general, the topic of trinitarian ontology is now experiencing a new flowering in “philosophizing” theology. In 2019, a very large-scale conference “New Trinitarian Ontologies” was held at the University of Cambridge, where several papers were devoted to Bulgakov.

<sup>120</sup> Joshua Heath, “Sergii Bulgakov’s Linguistic Trinity,” *Modern Theology* 37, no. 4 (2021): 888–912.

<sup>121</sup> Regula Zwahlen, “Trinitarnaja koncepcija lichnosti u Nikolaja Berdjaeva i Sergeja Bulgakova,” *Istorija filosofii* 21, no. 1 (2016): 151–159.

<sup>122</sup> Aksenov-Meerson, *Sozercaniem Troicy Svjatoj*.

<sup>123</sup> Pierre Hadot, “La philosophie comme hérésie trinitaire. A propos du livre de Serge Boulgakov : « La tragédie de la philosophie »,” *Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses* 37, no. 3 (1957): 236–251.

<sup>124</sup> Giuseppe Lo Verde, “La filosofia della Trinità di S. Bulgakov,” *Logos* (Roma) 1938, Luglio–Settembre. Anno XXI, II della Nuova Serie, Fascicolo 3, 414–427.

<sup>125</sup> Antonov, “*Kak vozmozhna religija?*”, 373–401.

<sup>126</sup> Schneider, “Faith and Reason”; Idem., “Experiential Doctrine and Doctrinal Experience in the Religious Epistemologies of Pavel Florensky and Sergei Bulgakov,” in *Unfading Light. Studies Subsidiary to Sobornost’* (forthcoming).



articles by Gavriilyuk<sup>127</sup>, Obolevich<sup>128</sup>, Nizhnikov<sup>129</sup>, Pivovarov<sup>130</sup>, Evlampiev<sup>131</sup>, Špidlík<sup>132</sup>, Akulinin<sup>133</sup>, and Gshwandtner<sup>134</sup>.

Finally, another group of studies that should be mentioned separately is the “corpus” of collective collections on Bulgakov that has developed today, uniting most of the topics and authors listed<sup>135</sup>.

### Research Novelty

In the presented dissertation for the first time:

1. The thesis about the importance of the metaxological understanding of the binary opposition transcendent/immanent, characteristic of Bulgakov and necessary for the correct interpretation of his religious metaphysics, is substantiated and revealed. Such an understanding does not completely merge and does not absolutely separate the poles of the opposition, nor does it reconcile them in a dialectical synthesis. Instead, it seeks to keep the oppositions, focusing on the nature of the

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<sup>127</sup> Paul L. Gavriilyuk, “Modern Orthodox Thinkers,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology of Theology*, eds. William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 579–589.

<sup>128</sup> Teresa Obolevitch, *Faith and Science in Russian Religious Thought* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Teresa Obolevitch, Pawel Rojek, eds., *Faith and Reason in Russian Thought* (Krakow: Copernicus Center Press, 2015).

<sup>129</sup> S. A. Nizhnikov, *Metafizika very v russkoj filosofii* (Moscow: INFRA-M, 2017).

<sup>130</sup> D. V. Pivovarov, *Religija v poiskah istiny, znaniya i very: opyt religioznyj i opyt nauchnyj* (Saint-Petersburg: Aleteia, 2017).

<sup>131</sup> I. I. Evlampiev, *Istorija russkoj metafiziki v XIX–XX vekah. Russkaja filosofija v poiskah Absoluta*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Saint-Petersburg: RHGA, 2020).

<sup>132</sup> Tomáš Špidlík, *L'idée russe: une autre vision de l'homme* (Troyes: Ed. Fates, 1994).

<sup>133</sup> V. N. Akulinin, *Filosofija vseidinstva: ot V. S. Solov'eva k P. A. Florenskomu* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1990).

<sup>134</sup> Christina M. Gshwandtner, “The Category of Experience: Orthodox Theology and Contemporary Philosophy,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 69, no. 1–2 (2017): 181–221.

<sup>135</sup> (1) *Sergej Nikolaevich Bulgakov (Filosofija Rossii pervoj poloviny XX veka)*; (2) *S. N. Bulgakov: Religiozno-filosofskij put': Mezhdunarodnaja nauchnaja konferencija, posvjashhennaja 130-letiju so dnja rozhdenija* (Moscow: Russkij put', 2003); (3) *Russkoe bogoslovie v evropejskom kontekste. S. N. Bulgakov i zapadnaja religiozno-filosofskaja mysl'*; (4) *Sofiologija*, ed. V. N. Porus (Moscow: BBI, 2010); (5) *S. N. Bulgakov: pro et contra. Vol. 1*; (6) *S. N. Bulgakov: pro et contra, antologija*; (7) *Sofiologija i neopatristscheskij sintez: dva bogoslovskih itoga filosofskogo razvitija*. Also a collection of papers from the 2021 conference in Fribourg is forthcoming in 2023.

boundary between them and on the dual moment of the meeting, when the transcendent is revealed in the immanent, and the imminent self-transcends.

2. The correlation of faith and knowledge in Bulgakov's religious metaphysics is revealed, understood not as an immanent unity and not as an absolute opposition, but as a strictly technical distinction in the light of the coming eschatological unity.

3. Some important issues of Bulgakov's "philosophical comparative studies" are considered in detail, which allow revealing his deep metaphysical intuitions in relation to other philosophical and religious-philosophical positions: Bulgakov's attitude to the nihilism of Nietzsche, criticism by him and Florensky of the ontotheological thinking of Solovyov, the influence on the philosophy of religion and the phenomenology of Bulgakov's religious experience of Ivanov's symbolism.

4. A detailed analysis of Bulgakov's understanding of prayer and the act of naming the Deity in prayer, presented in the book *Unfading Light*, is carried out.

5. The theme of subjectivity in Bulgakov is comprehended in the light of the two-aspect "kenotic opening" of the Self revealed in his works both on the paths of philosophy (reconfiguration of the modern European subject through the loci of catholicity and unity) and on the paths of religious experience (preservation of divine transcendence through ascetic self-deprecation).

6. Not only the theoretical justification for the reunification of Christian thinking and life, presented in the works of Bulgakov, is described, but also the practical presence of this unity in his writings, i.e., the performative and reflective nature of his works.

### **Main Arguments to Be Defended**

1. Bulgakov's religious metaphysics reflects the dynamic unity of discursive and non-discursive elements that make up the content of religious consciousness, manifested in the antinomic religious-philosophical discourse. The antinomic character of thinking is a necessary condition for maintaining a correct understanding of divine transcendence.

2. For Bulgakov, religious experience and Christian faith always have a cognitive character and a linguistically articulated dogmatic content. Living

religious experience is considered by Bulgakov as the only way to know God. In this regard, he opposes rational proofs of the existence of God, as well as against dogmatism and the reduction of religious experience strictly to the sphere of the emotional. With the course of history, religious experience is fixed as dogmas. At the same time, both religious experience and dogmas need to be interpreted in the language of the present time. This interpretive function is carried out by religious philosophy.

3. In view of this, Christian philosophy for Bulgakov is possible, but it is only a private interpretative understanding of theological dogmas. A single philosophical system that would become an absolute expression of the fullness of truth is impossible. At the same time, philosophy is necessary as a rational understanding of the truths of revelation.

4. Faith and knowledge are understood by Bulgakov as phenomena that complement each other, not merging and not opposing each other, whose even purely technical opposition will be removed in eschatological unity. Within this life, they represent qualitatively different realities, where one is directed towards an empirically given reality, and the second towards the transcendent.

5. Philosophy and theology, like any knowledge in general, have a personal, subjective character, and therefore should be characterized not only by a “neutral” representation of the states of things, but also by the ascetic effort of the subject to live a true life, which is characterized by love for the Other, whether Divine or human Other.

### **Methodological Base**

In an effort to most adequately capture and present the metaxological nature of Bulgakov’s religious metaphysics, this study itself has an interdisciplinary character, located on the border between the history of philosophy and the philosophy of religion. To solve historical and philosophical problems in the dissertation, methods traditional for this genre are used: the *descriptive* method is used to describe the positions of Bulgakov and other thinkers on certain issues; methods of *system analysis* and *historical and philosophical reconstruction* make it

possible to present the teaching scattered in different places of Bulgakov's works on a particular issue in a whole form; the *contextual* method is used to identify the degree of mediation of certain Bulgakov's ideas both by the general philosophical field of the era and by the personality of their author; the *comparative* method is used to compare Bulgakov's ideas with those of other philosophers (Solovyov, Florensky, Ivanov, Nietzsche, etc.); Finally, the *hermeneutical* method is necessary to reveal the hidden meanings of Bulgakov's text.

These methods allow us to consider the problems of the dissertation in a historical and philosophical context, and also make it possible to trace the connections and patterns in the development of certain Bulgakov's ideas depending on the context and the corresponding development of the philosophical concepts of the period under consideration.

The *phenomenological* method is also used to reflect the philosophical and religious content of the study. It makes it possible to represent and describe the content of religious consciousness and religious experience.

### **Thesis Structure**

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography.

The first chapter "Ideals, Sophia and Religious Consciousness: Bulgakov in the Context of the Philosophical Searches of the Silver Age" is introductory and seeks to highlight two topics—(1) Bulgakov's "idealistic turn" to ethics, metaphysics and Christianity, viewed through a number of private historical and philosophical plots, and (2) the influence of Solovyov and Florensky on the constants of Bulgakov's thinking that are important for research—the limitedness of discursive thinking and antinomianism, as well as the actual unity of the world in the aspect of preserving divine transcendence. In the second chapter "Religious philosophy and the experience of its constitution by Sergey Bulgakov", through Bulgakov's analysis of the nature of philosophy, the necessary personal nature of all knowledge is argued, as well as the need for self-limitation of thinking for true knowledge. The third chapter "'The Struggle for Transcendence" in *Unfading Light*:

Bulgakov's *Metaxological Metaphysics* is devoted to the analysis of Bulgakov's philosophy of religion and analysis of his arguments about the importance of the ascetic (self-transcending) dimension of the human personality for the cognition of the divine.

The second and third chapters of the dissertation are the main ones, and they show that *both the path of discursive thinking and the path of religious experience are ultimately paths of personal knowledge and, as such, they should represent a combination of the theory of Christian thinking and the practice of Christian life.*

At the same time, Bulgakov's views on philosophy, which make up the content of the second chapter, are considered diachronically—in their development from *Philosophy of Economy* to *The Tragedy of Philosophy*, which is due to the change in Bulgakov's position (from a relatively optimistic view of philosophy to a tragic one) and the research need to articulate these changes. Bulgakov's views on religious faith, which make up the content of the third chapter, on the contrary, are considered synchronously - as they are presented in *The Unfading Light* (the presentation, therefore, chronologically goes back a little), which is due to Bulgakov's deep theoretical study of these issues in *The Unfading Light* and in general the invariance of his position in the future.

### **Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Research**

The conducted historical and philosophical research stimulates the further development of the philosophical and theological problems of Bulgakov's creativity in domestic and foreign research practice, and can also be taken as the basis for pedagogical activity and the creation of a series of lectures, a special course or an elective course for undergraduates and postgraduate students of philosophical, theological and religious studies departments within the framework of university education.

## **The Main Content of the Dissertation**

The first chapter of the dissertation “**Ideals, Sophia and Religious Consciousness: Bulgakov in the Context of the Philosophical Searches of the Silver Age**” is of an introductory nature, and in it we strive mainly to highlight two topics—(1) through the analysis of three separate, until now relatively little studied in the literature, historical-philosophical plots to trace and describe Bulgakov's "idealistic turn" to ethics, metaphysics and Christian faith; (2) to consider the influence of Solovyov and Florensky on the constants of Bulgakov's thinking that are important for research - the limitations of discursive thinking, as well as the emphasis on the real unity of the world in the aspect of preserving divine transcendence.

In **section 1.1.** “*Good, People and Creativity: Literary Criticism as a Source of S. N. Bulgakov’s Philosophical Ideas*” considers Bulgakov’s literary criticism of the 1900s—his analysis of the works of Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and other Russian writers. It is shown that the religious-idealistic dimension of literature is the key one for him. Analyzing Russian literature, Bulgakov comes to the conclusion that faith is necessary for human consciousness, and in Bulgakov's understanding of faith in the 1900s, he adheres to a broad interpretation of this concept: faith does not have to be faith in a divine being; it could be faith in the depersonalized Good (Chekhov), in the people (Tolstoy), in Russia (Herzen). Faith, therefore, in the first decade of the 20th century is understood by Bulgakov as the presence of ideals and metaphysical prerequisites for thinking, as a fundamental principle that justifies the view of the world as a whole. Such a broad interpretation of faith contrasts with the narrower understanding of faith as a focus on the transcendent, which Bulgakov would develop in the 1910s. (*The Unfading Light*), and which will be discussed in detail in the third chapter.

The theme of Bulgakov’s “religious anthropology” is continued in the next **section 1.2.** “*Approaching the Religious Ideal: Nietzsche as a Universal (But Absent) Opponent*”, which analyzes his relationship with Nietzsche, a philosopher

who for Bulgakov is a universal opponent, which once again leads us to the theme of affirming the religious dimension of life. This paragraph refutes the opinion that Bulgakov was not interested in the teachings of Nietzsche and did not enter into polemics with him. In fact, as shown in the study, for Bulgakov's philosophical period, Nietzsche is a significant figure. And although the Russian thinker practically did not analyze the work of the author of *Antichrist* in a special way, Nietzsche became his main opponent on the paths of comprehending the crisis of metaphysics. Bulgakov did not follow many other religious philosophers in reading Nietzsche as a herald of the renewal of Christianity. He perceived it the way Nietzsche should have perceived it, proceeding directly from his texts: as a natural result of humanistic philosophy, drawing a line under it, and wishing to build a new world on completely different foundations and values—not only explicitly, but also implicitly, non-Christian, which Bulgakov was completely alien. In this regard, we can say that Bulgakov responds to Nietzsche's challenge of the "death of God" through the construction of his own religious and metaphysical system. This system aims to restore the transcendent-immanent connection. Constructing it consistently, Bulgakov centers his religious philosophy around several themes and concepts, the key of which are the themes of Sophia, faith and God-manhood.

At the same time, it should be noted that the little-studied plot of "Bulgakov and Nietzsche" has not only intra-scientific relevance, but also relates to the post-secular issues discussed in the introduction, since it was Nietzsche who turned out to be the key figure in the process of the collapse of the secular mind. Through the "death of God", meaning the death of any absolute truths, there is a direct path to the post-secular. In this regard, it will be shown that Bulgakov ignores the post-secular pathos of Nietzsche's philosophy and does not take him as an ally against the rational-humanistic tradition of thought coming from the Enlightenment.

**Section 1.3.** "*Dostoevsky, asceticism and world-denial: 'Vekhi' discourse on religiosity*" addresses a significant problem—the topic of asceticism / asceticism in Bulgakov's article in the collection *Vekhi* (Landmarks). Drawing parallels with Bulgakov's earlier text, also addressing the topic of asceticism, *On the Economic*

Ideal (1903), we show the transformation of Bulgakov's attitude towards asceticism and how this change affects the nature of thinking. If in 1903 Bulgakov had a negative attitude towards Christian asceticism, considering it a denial of the world, then by 1909, under the influence of Dostoevsky, his worldview was changing: it is the way of existence of the Christian ascetic that is now regarded as genuine, in contrast to the way of life of the hero/intellectual. The Christian ascetic does not show “Luciferian pride”, that is, he does not take on more than he can. He is focused on inner work on himself, which ultimately allows him to be more faithful to God and His Providence, as well as to the world, history and other people. In turn, the hero/intellectual, in some respects very reminiscent of the philosopher from the later *Tragedy of Philosophy*, “as if begins history from himself”, i.e. egoistically proceeds from his own Self as from the starting point, according to which he is determined by relation to the world. This not only leads to the disintegration of society and the state, but also to disintegration at the level of the individual.

Finally, **in section 1.4.** *“The problem of Bulgakov’s religious and philosophical self-identification: Solovyov and Florensky”* makes preliminary approaches to the key Bulgakov theme “God and the world” in the aspect of divine transcendence. Here, for Bulgakov, two figures are of paramount importance—Solovyov and Florensky. If at first Bulgakov uncritically accepts Solovyov's project of unity, then under the influence of Florensky he begins to criticize it as excessively rationalistic. The study shows that this happens due to the fact that Solovyov, according to Florensky and Bulgakov, does not do justice to the divine transcendence. He deduces the relationship of God to the world, placing them in a relationship of causal dependence. Solovyov's thinking turns out to be onto-theological and “appropriating”, in which God is “inscribed” in discursive schemes of thinking on the terms of the latter. Florensky and Bulgakov are forced to look for alternative ways of religious philosophizing, which will be expressed later in the use of antinomies and the denial of a broad understanding of faith.

Generally speaking, in the first chapter I localize Bulgakov within the context of the corresponding era, identifying the circumstances and challenges of the time



that contributed to the formation of his religious metaphysics. A deep reading of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and other Russian writers against the backdrop of the turn of the era to the renewal of religious consciousness confirmed Bulgakov that metaphysical, ethical and religious issues are central to human life, and culture must uphold the presence of ideals. Bulgakov felt the danger of nihilism, which lies at the heart of the new European—immanentist—philosophy, which was expressed in his dispute with radical anthropocentric thinkers—Feuerbach, Stirner, but most of all with Nietzsche. At the same time, it must be admitted that Bulgakov could not discern behind the “superhuman” rhetoric of the Basel professor the intentions and intuitions that could be used by Bulgakov in his struggle against the rationalistic humanism of the Enlightenment, striving for the autonomy of man and placing him in a central place.

In addition to Russian writers and Nietzsche, Solovyov became one who also strongly influenced the formation of Bulgakov’s religious metaphysics. It has been shown that, under the influence of Florensky, Bulgakov’s almost uncritical veneration of Solovyov is replaced by a more balanced and critical one, not least due to the fact that Solovyov rationalistically deduces the creation of the world from God, thus not doing justice to the actual divine transcendence. Solovyov's thinking, according to Florensky and Bulgakov, leaves no room for mystery in God. In this regard, Bulgakov is forced to develop alternative strategies for religious philosophizing, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. First of all, we are talking about antinomies and their methodological use for the sake of preserving divine otherness, as well as a narrower understanding of religious faith than Solovyov’s, which is associated not with mystical intuition, but with a focus on the transcendent. These alternative strategies are closely intertwined with Bulgakov's assertion of asceticism as a personal attitude, which was also revealed in the first chapter. The ascetic attitude towards life, characteristic of Christian ascetics, is linked to them with the correct attitude towards thinking, history, and one’s own Self.

The second chapter “**Religious philosophy and the experience of its constitution by Bulgakov**” examines Bulgakov’s attitude to philosophy, its nature, foundations and limitations. Textologically, the chapter is mainly based on the two main philosophical works of the thinker—*The Unfading Light* and *The Tragedy of Philosophy*. In comparative terms, in relation to these texts, we fix a certain transition from theory to practice, made by Bulgakov on the way from *Light* to *Tragedy*: from clarifying the very conditions for the possibility of religious philosophy—to constructing such a project. So, if in the *Light* Bulgakov speaks of the compatibility of philosophy and theology and discusses the possibility of a specifically Christian philosophy, then in the *Tragedy* he not only continues to criticize systematic philosophy, i.e., German idealism, but also develops a project of his own “positive” philosophy à la late Schelling—philosophy of trinity.

In **section 2.1**. “*The nature of philosophy and its mythological foundations*” I analyze Bulgakov’s views on the foundations of philosophy, its nature and relationship with religion. In particular, it reveals how Bulgakov rejects the Enlightenment ideal of “pure reason”, consistently asserting not only the irreducibility of life to panlogism, but also the mythological foundations of any thinking as such. Any philosophy is mythical, and therefore religious in its most basic axioms. This means that many philosophies are possible, including Christian ones. Guided by a craving for the Transcendent, philosophy, like theology, must become ancilla religiae, i.e., engage in rational comprehension of the truths of revelation.

The limitation of discursive thinking postulated by Bulgakov, in turn, raises the question of the boundaries of philosophy, which for Bulgakov are designated by antinomies. In this regard, in **section 2.2**. “*The Boundaries of Philosophy: Autonomy versus Antinomy*” shows what transformations Bulgakov’s concept of antinomy undergoes in comparison with how it is presented by Kant and Florensky, the two most important thinkers for him in this respect, and also how important antinomism is for Bulgakov methodologically. Both Florensky and Bulgakov go further than Kant, “ontologizing” the antinomy and turning it into a fundamental property of

being. However, Bulgakov also goes further than Florensky, extending the concept of antinomy to other spheres: aesthetics, the sphere of language and the sphere of human subjectivity are saturated with antinomies. According to him, antinomies permeate both being and thinking.

Further, **section 2.3.** “*Beyond the Boundary: Philosophy as Heresy*” analyzes the theme of going beyond the boundaries established for thinking: I consider the project of Bulgakov’s heresiology—the assessment of German idealism undertaken by him in *Tragedy* from the point of view of Christian dogmatic orthodoxy. Despite the tragic verdict that he passes on the philosophy of idealism, Bulgakov appreciated the intentions that lay at the very foundation of post-Kantian idealism—the justification for the unity of being and a positive attitude towards the material, immanent world. In this respect, his further sophiological-trinitarian metaphysics must be seen as a correction and alternative to post-Kantian idealism. In this regard, it is shown how Bulgakov rethinks the Fichtean doctrine of the transcendental subject, correcting it in the spirit of Christian conciliar personalism: the transcendental subject acts as a plurality, we, and not as a monadic I. The second important point is the personal nature of any cognition: any act of cognition is in including the act of self-determination of the subject, and our knowledge of the unity of the world should not be associated with the mythical concept of “neutrality” of the totalizing view “out of nowhere”, but with the occupation of a certain place within this whole.

Finally, **section 2.4.** “Restoring Unity: The Philosophy of the Trinity” considers Bulgakov’s outline of “positive philosophy”—his philosophy of the trinity, which is a reunion of ontology, epistemology and ethics—a union that finds its logical justification in the trinitarian structure of creation. The personal principle, which is present in any cognition, must also be present in some way and expressed in the very structure of things, in ontology. For Bulgakov, this necessarily means that the unity of the world has a trinitarian nature. The revelation of God as a Trinity is equal to the revelation of God as a Person and thus means the personal-trinitarian nature of the world created in the image and likeness of God. The unity of the world

as love, as pan-unity, can only be known from within and as a manifestation of interpersonal unity-in-love, in the coincidence of catholicity and integral knowledge. It is the conditioning of knowledge by love that makes Bulgakov's union of ontology, ethics, and epistemology a distinctly trinitarian project.

In general, the second chapter shows that in understanding philosophy Bulgakov follows the path characteristic of his time and his national environment. Like other Russian philosophers, he speaks of the conditionality and limitations of any discourse. He calls philosophers who do not recognize this conditioning "philosophical" heretics, because they leave no room for the mystery of the super-rational. Modern European philosophy strove not to notice the antinomic nature of being and thinking, believing that the mind can fully comprehend reality; the culmination of this process was Hegelian panlogism. From an anthropological point of view, this process was supplemented by the formation of an independent, self-centered subject. In an attempt to formulate the problems that arise when understanding the individual as autonomous and independent, Bulgakov conducts what can be called the deconstruction of the new European subject. Turning to the main Christian doctrine—the dogma of the Holy Trinity—he shows that from the new European understanding of the subject following Kant, there is no way out into the plurality of I, into the "you", and therefore a true onto-epistemology should be built on the basis of catholicity.

Bulgakov shows that only a thought that is aware of its own limits is able to "enlighten itself" in order to become true knowledge—that is, a free comprehension of religious truths, to which any true thinking is already necessarily directed. At the same time, religious truths are only partially accessible to thinking, since at the very foundation of the world lie antinomies that permeate all spheres of being. The world as a unity can be substantiated if we take into account its trinitarian and personal prototype, which indicates that love should be the basis of human relations to the world and to each other.

The essential condition for access to such a holistic perception should remain the preservation in human consciousness of the transcendence or, to put it another

way, the essential otherness of the Divine in order to avoid immanentism and its corollary, human-godliness. This holistic perception cannot be explained within the framework of discursive thinking, but—due to the need to be founded by something—it must be founded by religious faith, which Bulgakov, in the spirit characteristic of Russian religious thought, assimilates the connotations of “feat” (*podvig*). At the same time, as a truly post-Kantian thinker, he questions the very conditions that make possible the feat of faith in human consciousness. This most important topic, which is the subject of the third chapter of the dissertation “**The Struggle for Transcendence’ in *The Unfading Light: Bulgakov’s Metaxological Metaphysics,***” turns out to be at the center of the “epistemological introduction” of the book.

The presentation in the chapter is built on the basis of a logic immanent to the presentation itself, undertaken in the introduction to *The Unfading Light*. It can be seen that the way Bulgakov affirms the onto-epistemological otherness of God can be described using the scheme of concentric circles: he consistently moves from a more general concept to a more particular one, exploring their nature in a transcendental aspect. Bulgakov begins with the broadest phenomenon, religion, which is understood as a connection with reality beyond our empirical world. Religion is centered on faith, which is our focus in **section 3.1. “*Religious Faith and the Preservation of Divine Otherness*”**. Faith is the meeting point of the transcendent and the immanent. With regard to faith, questions about its relationship with knowledge and its transformative nature become important. Faith is not in opposition to knowledge, they have a fundamentally different focus. At the same time, faith has a sacrificial and transformative character, freeing a person from selfish self-affirmation.

At the center of faith is prayer, which is the subject of **section 3.2. “*Phenomenology of Prayer and the Decentered Subject*”**. Prayer is understood as an act of human self-transcendence and as such it becomes a place where the Transcendent is really present, which is made possible by virtue of ascetic efforts aimed at liberation from egoistic self-affirmation.

And in the center of the prayer lies “imyaslaviye”—the act of naming the Deity in prayer, to which **section 3.3** “‘Intersection of Two Worlds’: The Philosophy of the Name of God” is dedicated. Imyaslavie is understood in this case by Bulgakov not as a doctrine, but as “a transcendental condition of prayer, constituting the possibility of religious experience.” Consideration of the nature of this act, only briefly outlined in *The Light*, thematically links the exposition with Bulgakov’s next big book, *The Philosophy of the Name*. Such a transcendental “deepening” analysis of religious consciousness and religious experience allows Bulgakov to show how the limitations of the discursive mind are removed in true existence, which enters the paths by which the knowledge of the Divine is achieved.

Finally, in the last **section 3.4**. “*Eschatological Epistemology*” of the dissertation, our attention is again riveted to the opposition faith/knowledge, or rather to the non-absolute nature of this opposition, which should be abolished in the eschatological perspective in view of the fact that faith will become absolute knowledge.

In general, the third chapter of the study demonstrates that in the mid-1910s. the main task that Bulgakov solved in his work was the need to defend the independent and objective nature of religion. In discussions with German and Russian thought of that time, it was important for him to show that religion cannot be reduced to any of its separate dimensions—ethical, affective, therapeutic, etc. At the same time, he already appears as a distinctly Orthodox thinker, pointing out that for genuine thinking about God, the experience of living faith becomes necessary, characterized by a synergistic nature - the revealing of the Transcendent in immanence, which is achieved through the “ascension” of a person in faith and prayer. The culmination of this experience is the naming of the Deity, which reveals the Sophian potential of man.

It can be said that the highest form of knowledge of the divine and the most direct form of expression of the divine is found in the experience of religious life, endowed with the characteristics of artistic creation and reflection. Human freedom

reaches its fullness in the “Sophianic” experience, in which the free will of man unites with the divine will in a single action that gives life to cosmic beauty.

## Conclusion

In conclusion of the study, let us summarize its main theses. For a correct understanding of Bulgakov's religious metaphysics, a necessary condition is to take into account the binary oppositions and antinomies that constitute his thinking, in particular, the fundamental opposition transcendent/immanent. Bulgakov's understanding does not fully connect and not absolutely separate the poles of the opposition, just as it does not reconcile them in some kind of consistent removal. In other words, Bulgakov's antinomies and binary oppositions are not removed in a dialectical process (Hegel) and are not reconciled in a rationalistic synthesis (Soloviev), but are affirmed and thought metaxologically—through the preservation of the opposition and the substantiation of *tertium*. Instead, Bulgakov seeks to keep the oppositions, focusing on the nature of the border between them and on the dual moment of the meeting, when the transcendent opens in the immanent, and the immanent self-transcends, guided by the thirst for the transcendent. It is the preservation of the divine transcendence (while maintaining His immanent presence in the world) that is the most important task for Bulgakov. This preservation is possible while observing both the ontological and epistemological otherness of God, for which it is necessary (1) that creation is not conditioned by Divine nature as its cause and (2) the absence of “appropriating” thinking, which considers that God can be in the world only on conditions thinking itself.

Bulgakov's initial intuition about the preservation of boundaries at the moment of the meeting of the transcendent and the immanent largely determines the metaxological nature of his metaphysics, shaping his attitude to philosophy, which finds expression, first of all, in *The Unfading Light* and *The Tragedy of Philosophy*. Its “tragedy” lies in the relationship between its immanent nature and transcendent aspirations, which are embedded in the mythological and religious foundations of any philosophizing. In other words, the immanent nature of thinking, which is always “inside” and never “outside”, conflicts with the desire to find the transcendent point of view from “God's perspective”. The personal and subjective



nature of any thinking turns out to be irremovable. In the event that human thought is not humbled by the awareness of antinomies, it becomes “Luciferian”, that is, it seeks to place a person at the center of the universe, harassing the surrounding reality from him and his characteristics.

The transcendent aspirations of philosophy testify to its inseparable relationship with theology. However, Bulgakov makes an inversion of Hegel, placing philosophy in a lower position, since it does not have access to the mystical dimension of being. By “theologizing” autonomous philosophy, Bulgakov makes it clear that for him there is no “secular” space of thought: philosophy in the end can only be directed either towards God or away from Him. Thus, the critique of modernity, which is carried out in essentially postmodern ways—through the recognition of the conditionality of any universality and the constitutive importance of the Other, leads us to premodernity: to the search for support in the supra-rational. This, however, is already post-Kantian pre-modernity, which always begins with the definition of the conditions of cognition.

“God-opposing” for Bulgakov is practically the entire modern European philosophy, aimed at the “Luciferian” assertion of the autonomy of man. Being “immanentized”, philosophy loses its holistic dimension and falls into particulars both in the methodological (various schools and trends—“heresies”) and in the disciplinary (autonomization of epistemology, ontology, ethics) aspects.

The discursiveness of true philosophy, according to Bulgakov, should be supplemented by taking into account the mystery of religious experience, in which the Transcendent, which is the main content of faith, is revealed. The content of this experience is individual, as a result of which religious philosophy becomes possible as a personal hermeneutics of the truths of revelation. At the same time, there is an objective (that is, intersubjective) “core” in experience, which allows the formation of a dogmatic component of religion and a community of believers (the Church).

Between faith and reason there is no contradiction, no epistemic hierarchy - they are different realities with a fundamentally different direction. Faith is directed to the transcendent, while knowledge remains within the boundaries of an

empirically given reality. The orientation of faith towards the transcendent is postulated by Bulgakov as a condition for its objective nature.

Awareness of the limitations of the discursive mind leads to epistemic humility. Here Bulgakov switches to the paths of the Orthodox tradition, affirming the inseparability of apophase and asceticism: our “knowledge” of God is in direct correlation with our spiritual state. The core of faith is prayer, which Bulgakov, in accordance with the tasks to be solved, also defines as a reality aimed at the transcendent (and thus at the same time directed at the self-transcendence of man), and the core of prayer is the invocation of the Name of God. This invocation is performative: God is actually present in it, responding to the call of man. Understanding the prayerful commemoration of the Name of God as a place of the real presence of God brings us to a separate complex topic, Bulgakov’s symbolist-realist philosophy of language, set forth by him in the *Philosophy of Name*, according to which language is not just a way to convey thinking about the divine, but in itself theologically relevant element, a reflection of the eternal Logos.

Bulgakov’s “struggle for transcendence” in *The Unfading Light* led him to outline an integral metaxological metaphysics that would combine the subjective and dynamic understanding of the nature of religious consciousness, inherited from German idealism, with the distinctive features of Orthodox theology, including its contradictory unity of mystical and rational-discursive aspects. Such a metaphysics, in my opinion, is able to provide conceptual tools for a truly antinomic presentation of the content of revelation and, at the same time, not fall into immanentist ways of thinking that reduce divine otherness.

Recognizing the fundamental role of faith, prayer, both general and personal, and kenotic self-transcendence, achieved in the act of prayer, for religious thinking, Bulgakov takes us back to the first centuries of Christianity, to its very nature, when religious thinking and religious practice were not separated, while at the same time trying to preserve our post-Kantian and post-modern consciousness.

In an effort to reunite speculative thinking about religion with a living experience of faith, Bulgakov symbolizes premodern spirituality, but at the same

time he anticipates many insights of postmodern philosophy with its attention to the theme of otherness and criticism of ontotheological thinking. This clearly shows how Bulgakov saw the task of thinking about God: if it is necessary to ask questions about the essence of God, then this essence must be the essence of the interlocutor. This inextricable connection between speculative thinking about religion and spirituality will find its apex later in Bulgakov's major theological writings, but is contained in nuce already in *The Unfading Light*. *This is precisely what Bulgakov comes to when he points out that the main content of religion is not the abstract "God exists", but the personal "You are"*.

## Approbation of Research Results

### Publications on the topic of the dissertation:

**Works published by the author in journals indexed in international indexing and citation databases, as well as included in the list of high-level journals of the National Research University Higher School of Economics:**

1. Ivan Ilin, “S. N. Bulgakov i ego filosofiya russkoj literatury: duhovnyj opyt pisatelej” [Sergei N. Bulgakov and His Philosophy of Russian Literature: Spiritual Experience of Writers], *Filosofskije nauki* 62 (2019): 40–55.
2. Ivan Ilin, “Religioznaya filosofiya kak opyt bogopoznaniya: S. N. Bulgakov i S. L. Frank o vzaimootnoshenii filosofii i religii” [Religious Philosophy as Experience of Knowledge of God: Sergei N. Bulgakov and Semyon L. Frank on the Relationship between Philosophy and Religion], *Istorija filosofii* 25, no. 2 (2020): 29–39.
3. Ivan Ilin, “Na puti k religioznoj metafizike: kritika nicsheanskogo nigilizma v filosofii S. N. Bulgakova” [Towards Religious Metaphysics: Overcoming Nietzschean Nihilism in Sergei N. Bulgakov’s Philosophy], *Voprosy filosofii* 10 (2021): 130–137.

### Conference Presentations:

1. “Duhovnyj opyt russkih pisatelej: S. N. Bulgakov o nacional’noj literature [Spiritual Experience of Russian Writers: Sergei Bulgakov on National Literature]”, Conference *Russkij yazyk kak osnova bytiya Rossii (ot petrovsko-pushkinskoj epohi i dalee)* (April 26, 2019, HSE University Moscow).
2. “Pomogaet li religioznaya filosofiya hristianinu na puti k Bogu?: otvet S. N. Bulgakova” [Does Religious Philosophy Help a Christian on His Way to God? Sergei Bulgakov’s Answer], Conference *Russkaya religioznaya filosofiya v epohu postsekulyarnosti* (October 18, 2019, HSE University Moscow).

3. “Nauchno-pedagogicheskaya deyatel’nost’ S. N. Bulgakova v Prage: Russkij juridicheskij fakul’tet i Bratstvo Sv. Sofii” [Sergei Bulgakov’ Scientific and Pedagogical Activities in Prague: Russian Faculty of Law and Fellowship of St Sophia], Conference *Rossijskie intellektualy-izgnanniki v 1919-1945 gg.: Praga, Sofiya, Belgrad* (October 23, 2020, HSE University Moscow).
4. “*Una Sancta*: priroda Tserkvi i vopros o hristianskom edinstve u S.N. Bulgakova” [*Una Sancta*: Nature of Church and Christian Unity in Sergei Bulgakov], Conference *Sposoby mysli, puti govorenija* (October 9, 2020, HSE University Moscow).
5. “Obshhestvennyj ideal kak problema russkoj filosofskoj i politicheskoy mysli” [Bulgakov’s Religious and Social Ideals (Philosophical Journalism of the 1900s.)] Conference *Problema obshhestvennogo ideala v russkoj filosofskoj i politicheskoy mysli* (April 21, 2021, Institute of Philosophy of Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow).
6. “Fridrih Nicshe v filosofii S. N. Bulgakova” [Nietzsche in Bulgakov’s Philosophy], Conference *Sad rashodjashhihsja trop: Florenskij, Durylin, Bulgakov, Rozanov et cetera* (May 14–15, 2021, Russian State University for Humanities, Moscow).
7. “‘Transcende te ipsum’: Faith, Prayer and Name-Worship in *The Unfading Light*”, International Conference *Building the House of Wisdom: Sergii Bulgakov – 150 Years After His Birth* (September 2–5, 2021, University of Fribourg).