

THE CHARGES OF HERESY AGAINST SERGII BULGAKOV

THE MAJORITY AND MINORITY REPORTS OF EVLOGII'S COMMISSION AND THE FINAL REPORT OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

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Most scholars with even a cursory interest in Russian émigré history know something about Metropolitan Sergii's and the Karlovatskii Synod's condemnation of Sergii Bulgakov's *sofiology* in 1935, and Metropolitan Evlogii's decision in the face of these accusations to appoint a commission to investigate the charges against his favorite professor at the St Sergius Theological Institute in Paris.¹ Yet accounts of the affair in English are rather brief and sparse. Paul Valliere has recently provided a short account,² and Andrew Blane—through interviews with Georges Florovskii—has recounted Florovskii's reluctance to serve on the commission and

1 The text of the Karlovatskii Synod's condemnation of 1935 is available as "Opređenje Arkhiereiskogo Sobora Russkoi protoiereia Sergiia Bulgakova o Sofii-Premudrosti Bozhiei," in *Ekumenizm: put' vedushchii k pogibelii*, ed. Liudmila Perepelkina (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo-poligraficheskii tsentr "Revers," 1992), 56–73. Citing Bulgakov's *Sviet Nevechernii*, *Kupina Neopalimaia*, *Agnets Bozhii*, *Ipostas' i ipostasnost'*, and *Drug Zhenika*, the Synod argued that Bulgakov's work was insufficiently grounded in Holy Scripture and the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and that it was influenced by gnosticism and Kabbalism (pp. 56–57). The document ends with a six-point declaration: 1) Bulgakov's teaching is heretical; 2) the Synod should inform Evlogii of its conclusions and request that he admonish Bulgakov for his "heretical teaching on Sofia" and then notify the Synod; 3) the heads of all autocephalous churches should be informed if Bulgakov is unrepentant; 4) the Synod should continue to fight against Bulgakov's "sofiological heresy" and "other such errors"; 5) others should be charged with refuting the "false teaching" of Bulgakov; and 6) the Synod should express its gratitude to Serafim, upon whose report it based its conclusions.

2 Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology, Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov: Orthodox Theology in a New Key* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 287–89.

eventual decision not to endorse the commission's report.³ Rowan Williams and Aidan Nichols have discussed the affair briefly (Williams draws his account mostly from Blane).⁴ Fuller accounts in Russian can be found in a brochure by Igumen Genadii,⁵ and a recently published piece by Alexis Klimoff.⁶

Although distressed by the accusations against Bulgakov, Evlogii felt compelled to consider the charges,⁷ and appointed seven members of the Russian Orthodox émigré community in Paris to an investigative commission: Iakov Smirnov, chair (senior priest of the Kafedralnyi Cathedral in Paris); Sergii Chetverikov (a professor at St Sergius who became chair after Smirnov's death); Archimandrite Kassian; Anton Kartashev; Vasilii Zenkovskii; Georges Florovskii; and B. I. Sove (a professor of the Old Testament at St Sergius). The members divvied up their work: Kartashev and Sove agreed to consider references to Sofia in the Old Testament. Kassian examined the New Testament. Zenkovskii considered the charges of "gnosticism," as well as Bulgakov's understanding of Sofia as a "third being" between God and the world.⁸ (A posthumously published account

3 Andrew Blane, *Georges Florovsky: Russian Intellectual and Orthodox Churchman* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1933), 65–68.

4 Rowan Williams, ed., *Sergii Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 175.

5 Igumen Gennadii, *Delo prot. Sergiia Bulgakova: istoricheskaia kanva spora o Sofii* (San-Frantsisko: Globus Publishers, 1980).

6 A. E. Klimoff, "G. V. Florovskii i S. N. Bulgakov: Istoriia vsaimootnoshenii v svete sporov o sofologii," in S. N. Bulgakov: *Religiozno-filosofskii put'*, ed. M. A. Vasil'eva (Moskva: Russkii put', 2003), 86–114. [An English translation of a revised version of this article appears below – Ed.] I am grateful to Professor Klimoff for alerting me to a number of sources concerning the affair, and for sharing an early version of his article with me. This essay is a fascinating study of Florovskii's role, and his attitude towards Bulgakov's sofiology generally. Examining Florovskii's writings on Sofia both before and after the affair, and making use of Florovskii's correspondence on Sofia with Anglican and Orthodox colleagues, Klimoff concludes that John Meyendorff was correct in asserting that Florovskii's opposition to sofiology constituted a major motivating force much of his own work. See I. Meiendorf, "Predislovie." In *Georgii Florovskii, Puti russkogo bogoslovii*, 4th ed. (Paris: YMCA Press, 1988), vi–vii.

7 The Karlovatskii Synod asked Evlogii to admonish Bulgakov.

8 V. V. Zenkovskii, "Delo ob obvinenii o. Sergiia Bulgakova v eresi," *Vestnik Russkago*

of the incident by Zenkovskii asserts that Florovskii attended the commission's first meeting and never showed up again.⁹)

The majority—Kassian, Kartashev, Zenkovskii, and Sove—cleared Bulgakov of the charges of heresy, but Chetverikov and Florovskii produced a dissenting, minority report. (Florovskii seems to have played no part in actually writing the minority report: Klimoff's research among Florovskii's papers at Princeton University has unearthed three letters from Chetverikov begging Florovskii to share his thoughts or at least to comment upon the report that Chetverikov was drafting, apparently to no avail.¹⁰)

Accounts of the incident in English largely ignore these reports. Nichols mentions neither.¹¹ Blane and Williams mention the majority report in passing (Valliere does not) and all three mention the minority report, yet none reference the reports, quote from them, or show any familiarity with their contents. Indeed, it is not clear from these studies whether copies of the reports survived. In fact, they did. Klimoff has found copies of the originals in Florovskii's papers at Princeton University,¹² and I stumbled across translations in English,¹³ tucked away in a file cabinet at the Oxford offices of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius among letters and reports relating to Bulgakov's proposal for intercommunion. The provenance of these translations (probably done by A. F. Dobbie-Bateman, an active member of the Fellowship of

Khristianskogo dvizheniia, 49 (1987): 61–65.

9 Ibid.

10 Klimoff, "G. V. Florovskii i S. N. Bulgakov," 97.

11 Aidan Nichols, "Bulgakov and Sofiology," *Sobornost* 13.2 (1992): 17–31.

12 They will be published with a number of other documents relating to the Sofia affair in a forthcoming edition of *Pro et Contra* devoted to Bulgakov.

13 Gennadii received a copy of the minority report, translated into English, from Kliment Naumov, a former student of Bulgakov who published a bibliography of Bulgakov's work: *Bibliographie des Œuvres de Serge Boulgakov* (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1984). Gennadii translated the English version back into Russian (never having seen the original version in Russian), and included it as an appendix to his study of the affair. I assume that the translations I found were the ones from which Gennadii worked. Gennadii does not include a copy of the majority report, and seems never to have seen it.

St Alban and St Sergius and a friend of Florovskii¹⁴) indicates how troubled some members of the Fellowship were by questions about Bulgakov's credentials as a reliable Orthodox theologian.¹⁵

Florovskii claimed that the majority never submitted its report to Evlogii,¹⁶ though it is difficult to believe that Evlogii would not have demanded the report he commissioned. But even if Florovskii is correct, it is almost certain that Evlogii would have seen the report given Evlogii's close ties to the Fellowship and the fact that both documents are in English translation—an indication that they circulated rather widely. Whatever the case, Evlogii did refer to the work of the commission at a diocesan conference in July of 1935, mentioning that divisions had arisen among the commission's members.¹⁷

The commission's majority report cleared Bulgakov of the charges of "gnosticism" and "ditheism," argued that he made a good-faith effort to ground his theology within the Holy Tradition, and suggested that the Karlovchane were unfair in quoting from works written before his theology had reached a "definite and schematic form." Yet the report also reflects a genuine unease with aspects of Bulgakov's theology. It finds unconvincing his conflation of Sofia with ousia or the divine essence of God, characterizes his teaching on creation as theologically suspect, and worries (though providing few specifics) about "divergences from the patristic tradition."¹⁸ Still, it forgives much by classifying Bulgakov's work as "personal opinion" rather than an attempt to speak for the Church.

Florovskii and Chetverikov were not so forgiving, disturbed as

14 Klimoff discovered that Florovskii sent copies of the reports to Dobbie-Bateman; I found the translations among a good deal of other material from Dobbie-Bateman.

15 See chapter 10, "Bulgakov, the Fellowship, Intercommunion, and Sofia," in Bryn Geffert, "Anglicans & Orthodox Between the Wars" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2003).

16 Blane, *Georges Florovsky*, 67.

17 Dom C. Lialine, "Le Débat sophiologique," *Irenikon* 13.2 (1936): 704–5. Referenced in Klimoff, "G. V. Florovskii i S. N. Bulgakov," 98.

18 For a good discussion of the theology behind Bulgakov's sophiology, including some reflections on its place within the patristic tradition, see Barbara Newman, "Sergius Bulgakov and the Theology of Divine Wisdom," *SVTQ*, 22.1 (1978): 39–73.

they were by Bulgakov's interpretation of Proverbs 8:22 (a reference, in Bulgakov's mind, to Sofia), his use of sofianic thought from the second and third centuries ("when the general teaching of the Church had not, as yet, found formulation"), and a lack of clarity in his works as to whether Sofia can be considered a fourth hypostasis.¹⁹ Wrote Chetverikov, "Even if this accusation [of positing a fourth hypostasis] is not justified Fr Bulgakov himself occasions it by the obscurity of his teaching concerning the divine Sophia."

But what appears to have bothered Florovskii and Chetverikov most was the commission's willingness to grant Bulgakov leeway in the realm of "personal opinions," and its failure to acknowledge the right of "Church authority" to protect Orthodox dogma and to censure those who stray from it. "To some any sort of pronouncement whatever made by Church authority in relation to theologians seemed inadmissible, since it represents an attempt to strangle thought and quench the spirit." But such thinking "would mean that there exists no authority in the Church and that something new is always better than the old." While the condemnation by Metropolitan Sergii and the Karlovchane was "premature and hasty," nevertheless "authorities in the Church have not only the right, but also the duty to preserve and guard the purity of the faith."



19 Such an accusation was unfair. Granted, in *Sviet nevechernii* (*The Unfading Light*) Bulgakov did refer to Sofia as a "fourth hypostasis." Sergii Bulgakov, *Sviet nevechernii: sozertsaniia i umozrieniia* (Moskva: Put', 1917), 212. But in response to the uproar that followed, he published "Ipostas' i ipostasnost'," in which he stated, "there is no fourth hypostasis at all equally-honorable and consubstantial with the most Holy Trinity: there is not and there cannot be; the threesome is self-enclosed and allows no addition at all." "Sophia can not have her own hypostasis for that would indicate an original existence similar to the three hypostases, introducing a fourth into the Trinity." Is Sofia, he asked rhetorically, a "separate hypostasis?": "obviously such a question is absurd and impossible." Yet a "denial of a hypostasis in Sophia still does not indicate a rejection of hypostaticity in her, reducing Sofia to an allegory or attribute of Deity ..." Sergii Bulgakov, "Ipostas' i ipostasnost'," in *Sbornik statei, posviashchennykh Petru Berngardovichu Struve ko dniu tritsadtipiatilietii ego nauchno-publitsisticheskoi deiatel'nosti, 1890-30 ianvaria, 1925* (Praga: 1925), 361.

In the end the reports resolved nothing. Metropolitan Evlogii—disappointed by the conflicting conclusions—asked the commission to continue its work in an effort to reach a unanimous decision. It resumed its activity in the fall of 1936, and Chetverikov continued to badger Florovskii (largely unsuccessfully) to participate.²⁰ The outcome of this second go-around is unclear. Igumen Gennadii notes that a bishop's conference convoked by Metropolitan Evlogii at the end of November claimed to have reviewed reports by Fr Chetverikov and Archimadrite Kassian, from which it concluded that the charges of heresy were unfounded, but that nevertheless Bulgakov's theological views were flawed and needed correction, and that he should eliminate aspects of his theology that bother "simple souls that do not comprehend religious-philosophical thought."²¹ A copy of a final report from this commission has never been found. Bulgakov did not retract his views. He addressed a long letter to Evlogii, published in *Put'*, in which he conceded, "I don't consider myself without error," but denied all charges of "Kabbalist teaching," neoplatonism, dualism, and gnosticism. He also denied assertions that his teachings were uncanonical simply because no Ecumenical Council had ever ruled on the questions he investigated. How can one ignore the authority of the Ecumenical Councils, he asked, when investigating issues on which they have not taken a stance?²²

Finally, in 1937, Evlogii convened a conference of bishops to settle the matter. Lamenting that the commission had failed to

20 Klimoff, "G. V. Florovskii i S. N. Bulgakov," 98, 100. Chetverikov produced a report summarizing the charges made against Bulgakov by the Karlovchane. Florovskii approved of the report. *Ibid.*, 99.

21 "Akt Soveshchaniia Episkopov Pravoslavnykh Russkikh Tservei v Zapadnoi Evrope ot 26, 27 i 29 noiabria 1937 g. rassmatrivavshikh bogoslovskie mneniia prot. S. N. Bulgakova o Sv. Sofii, Premudrosti Bozhiei," in *Delo prot. Sergiia Bulgakova: istoricheskaia kanva spora o Sofii*, ed. Igumen Gennadii (San-Frantsisko: Globus Publishers, 1980), 33–35. Referenced in Klimoff, "G. V. Florovskii i S. N. Bulgakov," 101.

22 Sergii Bulgakov, "Eshcho k voprosu o Sofii, Premudrosti Bozhiei (po povodu opredeleniia Arkhiereiskago Sobora v Karlovtsakh)," *Put'*, 50 (1936): prilozhenie 1–24.

achieve "one mind," the bishops' conference issued a final report based on the commission's earlier work as well as a reports prepared by Chetverikov and Kassian.²³ The bishops' conference took a middle road, simultaneously defending Bulgakov against the charges of heresy²⁴ and gnosticism, while expressing unease about certain aspects of his theology.

The bishops' final report trod carefully around the question of theological development. It affirmed that new opinions do arise in the Church and are valuable in "clarifying" Church dogma. Yet such opinions "must be in agreement with the generally accepted [*obshchepriniatyĭ*] teaching of the Holy Church."²⁵ Bulgakov's teaching on Sofia—which, the conference acknowledged, has caused Bulgakov and the Theological Institute in Paris all kinds of trouble—does nevertheless have "its basis in Holy Scripture, both the Old and New Testament (especially the Old) and the Holy Tradition ..."²⁶

However, the bishops rejected Bulgakov's understanding of Sofia as a "third being" between God and the world, his notion a unified "creaturely" (*tvarnyi*) and "divine" (*bozhestvennyi*) Sofia, and his identification of Sofia as the divine essence (*ousia*) of God: "All these terms are foreign to the teaching of the Church and several affirm [*utverzhdai*] their dependence on western mystics and VI[adimir] Soloviev, although Professor S. Bulgakov denies that."²⁷ Bulgakov's attempt to elucidate [*raz'iasnit*] the dogma of the resurrection is "unsuccessful." Still, the conference conceded

23 The text of the conference's final report can be found as "Akt Soveshchaniia Episkopov Pravoslavnykh Russkikh Tservei v Zapadnoi Evrope ot 26, 27 i 29 noiabria 1937 g. rassmatrivavshikh bogoslovskie mneniia prot. S. N. Bulgakova o Sv. Sofii, Premudrosti Bozhiei," 33–35.

24 It rejected charges of heresy "not only because the works of [Bulgakov] have still not been sufficiently studied and because an authoritative judgment of the Church has not been issued, but also because the teaching of [Bulgakov] has still not received reached its final form." Ibid., 35.

25 Ibid., 33.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 34.

that one may find the roots [*kornia*] of Bulgakov's teaching on Sofia within biblical portrayals of the Glory of God and the Providence of God, and in Gregory of Palamas' teaching about the energy of God.

The report strove to assure its readers of Bulgakov's good intentions: his theological ideas do not stem from "haughty opposition" to the doctrines of the Church. They are, rather, "personal beliefs" and thus acceptable as "theologumena, which he submits to the court of science and the Church." His "errors and even misconceptions [*oshibki i dazhe zabluzhdenie*]" should not overshadow his major accomplishments "as an outstanding theologian."²⁸ Still, he should "reexamine" [*peresmotret*] his teaching about Sofia, "bring it nearer to Orthodox understanding" and "eliminate from it that which perturbs [*porozhdat' smushchenie*] simple souls who do not comprehend religious-philosophical thought."²⁹



Bulgakov remained devoted to his sofiological thought following the investigation,³⁰ while Florovskii claimed that his own position at St Sergius became "unpleasant" and "precarious" due to the affair.³¹ "Although they wanted to get rid of me, it was not possible to do so, because there would have been a scandal."³² Evlogii seems to have lost respect for Florovskii.³³ Yet Florovskii and Bulgakov

28 Ibid., 35.

29 Ibid.

30 Sergii Bulgakov, "Ob'iasnenie o. Protoiereia S. Bulgakova," *Tserkovnyi vestnik zapadno evropeiskoi eparkhii*, 5 (1927). Florovskii told Blane that Bulgakov recanted, but there is no evidence for such an assertion and most current scholars discount it.

31 Blane, *Georges Florovsky*, 68.

32 Ibid., 68, f.74.

33 He was quite upset with a speech Florovskii gave in 1937 at the Faith and Order Conference in Edinburgh, in which Florovskii attacked Bulgakov publicly. Evlogii was convinced that some sort of "intrigue" was being concocted against Bulgakov. Mitropolit Evlogii, *Put' moei zhizni: vospominaniia mitropolita Evlogiia* (Georgievskogo), *izlozhennye po ego rasskazam T. Manukhinoi* (Moskva: Moskovskii rabochii, Izdatel'skii otdel Vsetserkovnogo pravoslavnogo molodezhnogo dvizheniia, 1994), 543.

remained on good terms. "The only man who never became angry with me was Father Bulgakov. I think he suffered very much, but he never became an enemy, and this is the measure of the man."³⁴



The English translations of the majority and minority reports are printed below as found. My sincere thanks to Fr Stephen Platt, the General Secretary of the Fellowship of St Alban and St. Sergius, who—though unaware of the reports—graciously allowed me to dig freely through the files in which they surfaced, and spent two days patiently answering questions and even serving tea.

I decided against doing a fresh translation in the belief that it is important to have a record of the versions that circulated at the time. (No attempt has been made to correct grammatical errors or to fix awkward constructions.) Original terms and phrases that are important to understanding nuances in the documents, or that suggest an overly free translation, appear in footnotes. The original reports in Russian will appear soon in an issue of Pro et Contra devoted to Bulgakov.

34 Blane, *Georges Florovsky*, 68.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION APPOINTED TO CONSIDER THE WORKS OF THE ARCHPRIEST S. BULGAKOV

I. The Commission, having carefully studied the arguments accusing Fr Bulgakov of heresy put forward in the "Deliberation of the Episcopal Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church abroad (the Karlovtsi Synod, 17/30 Oct. 1935), concerning the new teaching of the Archpriest S. Bulgakov in relation to Sophia the Wisdom of God", finds it impossible to regard these arguments as convincing. It therefore considers that the accusation against Fr. Bulgakov of heresy not proved, and refutes it.

The Commission bases this conclusion on the following arguments:

1. "The Deliberations," when quoting extracts from Fr Bulgakov's various works, take no account of the fact that they were written at different times. After the publication of "The Lamb of God,"³⁵ in which Fr Bulgakov expresses his views in definite and schematic form, references to former works of Fr Bulgakov, though of historical interest, nevertheless cannot be used to found a definite judgment of evaluation of Fr Bulgakov's teaching.

2. As regards the substance of the argumentation of "The Deliberations" we should like to emphasise that the basic accusation of heresy directed against Fr Bulgakov consists in no more than the statement that his "teaching has Gnostic sources." Erroneously following the lead given by Archbishop Seraphim in his book—which certainly looked for the sources of Fr Bulgakov's teaching in strange places—"The Deliberations" persistently accuse Fr Bulgakov of gnosticism. This accusation, however, cannot be justified either in fact or in principle. In fact there exists not a single work of Fr. Bulgakov which reveals any influence whatsoever of any kind of gnosticism. If, on the other hand, we treat the question in principle

it will suffice to point out the following considerations:

(a) The systems of all the gnostics are *theogonic* systems (in their teaching concerning emanation or the dialectic process of Pleroma), whereas F. Bulgakov, following the teaching of the Church, everywhere categorically denies every form of theogony and firmly proclaims the dogma of consubstantiality, which excludes all theogony.

(b) In the question of the *creation of the world* the systems of the gnostics vary greatly; nevertheless they consistently separate God as the Absolute, from the Demiguros, the creator of the world. Fr Bulgakov, on the other hand, clearly follows the teaching of the Church that God, as the Absolute, is precisely the Creator of the world. Although in his teaching on Sophia, Fr Bulgakov does put forward the idea of "mediation"³⁶ between God and the world" such teaching can by no means be interpreted as resembling³⁷ gnosticism, for the idea of mediation is certainly not confined to gnosticism. (The roots of the idea of "mediation" go back to Old Testament theology, as has been brilliantly shown by Prof. Muratov in his book on Philo). So remarkably careful an historian as Bolotov finds it even possible to raise the question of whether the idea of mediation had any significance at all in the theogonic dialectic of the gnostics.

(c) Finally, as regards the accusation of "ditheism"³⁸—based on the fact that Fr Bulgakov identifies the divine Sophia with the essence of God—we can see here only a misunderstanding.³⁹ Just as the distinction between the "essence"⁴⁰ and the "tri-hypostatic being"⁴¹ God, which lies at the basis of Christian dogmatics cannot be said to be ditheism, neither can such a term be applied to Fr Bulgakov's teaching on divine Sophia. It is natural and reason-

36 *posredstvo*

37 *byt' sbližhaemo*

38 *obvineniia v dvubozhii*

39 *nedorazumenie*

40 *sushchnost'*

41 *triipostasnoe bytie*

able to hesitate before identifying the "essence" (*Ousia*) of God and the divine Sophia as Fr Bulgakov does—but certainly not on the grounds that it leads to "ditheism"—which it does not—but because it raises various theological difficulties. Having considered the arguments drawn from his alleged gnosticism on which the accusation directed against Fr Bulgakov is based, and having found them unjustified, the Commission accordingly refutes the accusation of heresy.

II. No more can the Commission admit the truth of further accusation, based on the suggestion that Fr Bulgakov's teaching is "something new" and foreign to patristic thought.⁴² According to the historical conviction and the experience⁴³ of the Orthodox Church, not every doctrine which is new or appears to be new should therefore be rejected as heresy, but only such as contradicts the essence⁴⁴ of our dogmas, which inwardly distorts them, and thus involves imperiling our salvation.⁴⁵ References to documents attesting tradition alone are insufficient for declaring a doctrine to be heretical. Any new doctrine should be the object of academic and ecclesiastical discussion and consideration in view of two possibilities—either that the doctrine in question may, possibly, be recognised as heretical, or, on the other hand, may subsequently be assimilated into the catholic tradition of the Church. The Church condemns only the contumacious presentation of individual and personal⁴⁶ opinions as infallible truths, in opposition to the declared teaching of the Church. In this particular instance the commission does not regard it as proved—either dialectically or soteriologically—that Fr Bulgakov's teaching is heretical.

III. The Commission has taken account of the fact that all the theses which Fr Bulgakov puts forward, especially in his basic book "The Lamb of God," have as their main purpose the resolution of

42 *iavliaetsia "novym" i chuzhim sviatootecheskoi mysli*

43 *po istoricheskomu opytu i ubiezhdeniiu*

44 *sushchestvo*

45 *predstavliaet' opasnost' dlia nashego spaseniia*

46 *chastnyi i lichnyi*

problems of Orthodox dogmatics considered as a system, complete in itself and dialectically organised. The Commission recognises that, in referring to the Patristic exegesis, liturgical and iconographic material and so forth, Fr Bulgakov endeavors to base his position on the material provided by Holy Tradition; it wishes to emphasise that in all his teaching he evidently desires to be in complete agreement⁴⁷ with the teaching of the Church. The Commission, nevertheless, cannot regard these historical arguments of his as finally convincing.⁴⁸ It seems to them evident from patristic and liturgical literature that the main line of the tradition of the Church, following in the steps of the Apostle Paul, has favoured the interpretation which identifies the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Logos, with Sophia or Wisdom. It is in this sense that Proverbs 8 was normally interpreted. But alongside this main stream of tradition there certainly existed another—emanating from Asia Minor, represented by St Theophilus of Antioch and St Irenaeus of Lyons, which made Wisdom the third hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. This latter opinion, however, was not accepted by the majority of the other Fathers.

IV. The Commission cannot recognise the iconographic material used by Fr Bulgakov as adequate material to bear the weight of the conclusions which he rests upon them.

V. The Commission regards it as its duty to summarise its estimate of Fr Bulgakov's teaching. The Commission considers that two problems are here of fundamental importance. First, the problem of the relationship between God and the world. Here use is made of the teaching of some of the Fathers concerning prototypes; which according to Fr Bulgakov are identified with the ideal principles of the world. This teaching, which represents a Christian interpretation of Platonism, forms a part of Christian metaphysics. From this follows another problem in regard to the so-called creaturely Sophia⁴⁹ or the Wisdom of God within the essence of God. Already in the interpretation given by St Athanasius to the

47 *vo vsem soglasovat'sia*

48 *ubieditel'nyi*

49 *tvornaia Sofia*

Wisdom of God and created wisdom⁵⁰ (which here referred to the two natures of the God-man) we observe the connection between the abovementioned problem and Christology. Later on, in the Chalcedonian definition concerning the two natures in Christ, which are unconfusedly and inseparably united in the one person of the God-man, the same problem emerges and is for ever set before Christian theology. This doctrine of the union in the God-man of the divine and the creaturely natures,⁵¹ of divine and creaturely existence,⁵² raises very acutely the question of how such a union of different natures can be achieved in the God-man. In other words theology is confronted with the task of building up a theological system in which the mystery of the union of divine and creaturely being could, though inexplicable, be yet enshrined in a system of fundamental dogmatic postulates.

If we describe the creaturely world⁵³ (of which it is said that it is "created in Wisdom" and bears within itself the image of the latter) as the creaturely Sophia, then—in so far as the ideal principles of the creaturely world are associated with its prototypes⁵⁴ in God—we are faced with the problem of the inter-relationship between the creaturely and the divine Sophia. In this setting the problem acquires an inner link with the Christological problem, which is the fundamental one for Christian dogmatics. For this reason the Commission considers the raising of such a "sophiological" problem in connection with Christology—as has been done in Fr Bulgakov's system—quite justifiable.⁵⁵

VI. The Commission considers it its duty to indicate the points in Fr Bulgakov's positions which it finds difficult to reconcile⁵⁶ with the usual interpretation of the tradition of the Church. Without going into a criticism of the *terminology* adopted by Fr Bulgakov,

50 *premudrost' sotvorennaiia*

51 *uchenie o soedinenii v Bogocheloviek bozhestvennoi i tvarnoi prirody*

52 *bozhestvennago i tvarnago bytiia*

53 *tvarnyi mir*

54 *pervoobrazy*

55 *opravdannyi*

56 *vidit' trudnosti soglasovaniia*

the Commission does not see how it is possible to identify the creaturely and the divine Sophia, or, what is the same thing, the ideal element in the creaturely world with its prototypes in God. Even less is it possible to accept the identification of the divine Sophia with Ousia, the essence of God. Such a theological hypothesis has its advantages in the elucidation⁵⁷ of the Christological dogma, but logically it leads Fr Bulgakov to teaching on the creation of the world which, in the opinion of the Commission, is disputable⁵⁸ both theologically and philosophically.

VII. In making these criticisms the Commission desires clearly to distinguish the problems which occupy Fr Bulgakov (the reality and urgency of which cannot be denied), from solutions which he suggests. At the same time the Commission wishes to emphasise the fact that while criticising Fr Bulgakov's teaching, recording its divergences⁵⁹ from patristic tradition, and the impossibility of accepting its iconographic and liturgical bases, it found that none of these findings gives ground for regarding the teaching as heretical. The disputed theses are his personal theological opinions or theologoumena, which do not infringe upon the limits of the dogmas accepted by the Orthodox Church.

The Commission likewise emphasises the fact that Fr Bulgakov himself does not pretend to interpret his teaching as recognised by the whole Church⁶⁰ but regards it only as his personal opinion⁶¹ and therefore, according to his own admission, demanding a wide, free and full consideration and discussion, which as yet it has not had. For this reason the Commission finds it wrong and harmful for the Church to make any hasty condemnation of Fr Bulgakov's opinions; still more harmful and wrong would it be for the Church to administer any administrative censure or to inflict any penalty which could only lead, not to the clarification, but to the further

57 *iz'iasnenie*

58 *sporno*

59 *raskhozhdeniia*

60 *ne vykaet' svoego ucheniia za obshchetserkovnoe*

61 *lichnoe chastnoe mnienie*

complication and exacerbation of this particular theological dispute.

VIII. The Commission, in submitting this preliminary report, would like to point out that if a more detailed account of its considerations and conclusions were required, it would ask His Grace to allow it to extend its research, which would require a considerable length of time.

Minority Report

The majority report of the Commission appointed to consider the works of the Archpriest S. Bulgakov seems to us unacceptable on the following grounds:

1. Fr Bulgakov's theological opinions *as such*⁶² cause great anxiety—not merely in view of the accusations brought forward against him in the "Deliberations" of the Karlovtsi Synod. We can detect no such anxiety⁶³ in the majority report of the Commission. It conveys rather the impression that all is well and that there is nothing to worry about.⁶⁴

2. Yet in his books Fr Bulgakov not only expounds a particular teaching on Sophia the Wisdom of God, he attempts to reconstruct the whole system of Orthodox theology on the basis of this teaching. In doing this—this is equally recognised by the majority of the Commission (see sections III and VII of the Report)—he undoubtedly diverges⁶⁵ from the "usual"⁶⁶ interpretation of the Church, namely, the teaching of the Fathers and the liturgical tradition. In such a state of things every Orthodox is naturally faced with the question: should he remain within the main stream of the general teaching of the Fathers,⁶⁷ or should he follow Fr Bulgakov?

62 *sami po sebie*

63 *trevoga*

64 *vse obstoit blagopoluchno i bezpokoit'sia ne o chem*

65 *raskhoditsia*

66 *privychnyi*

67 *pri obshchem sviatootecheskom uchenii*

It is true that Fr Bulgakov attempts to establish or confirm⁶⁸ his teaching by arguments from tradition. Nevertheless in his teaching on Sophia the Wisdom of God his references to tradition cannot be recognised as satisfactory.⁶⁹ The basic Biblical text—Proverbs 8, from St Paul onwards (1 Cor 1:24 and Col 1:15) has always been referred by the Church to the second hypostasis of the holy Trinity, to God the Son. And in this instance we are not dealing with the opinions of individual Fathers but with the “Consensus Patrum,” which has a high degree of authority in matters of faith.

The attempt to mitigate this cleavage of opinion between Fr Bulgakov and the main stream of the teaching of the Fathers,⁷⁰ by reference to the existence of another opinion in patristic literature, cannot be regarded as convincing.⁷¹ Firstly, this “other” opinion, which referred Proverbs 8, 22 to the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit, does not in any way coincide⁷² with Fr Bulgakov’s teaching; secondly, this opinion found expression only at a very early epoch of Christian theology (2nd and 3rd centuries), when the general teaching of the Church had not, as yet, found formulation.⁷³ From the 4th century onwards *all* the Fathers of the Church are unanimous in referring Proverbs 8 to God the Son. Fr Bulgakov’s references to liturgical and iconographic examples are similarly far from convincing, as has been clearly indicated by the Commission. The Churches of St. Sophia both in Byzantium and in Russia were dedicated to the pre-existent Word⁷⁴ (see the detailed account of the meetings of the Commission), Thus it is quite clear that Fr Bulgakov differs in his opinions from the tradition of the Church.

3. The freedom of “personal opinions”⁷⁵ in theology, is, at any

68 *obosnovat' ili podtverdit'*

69 *udovletvoritel'nyi*

70 *popytka smiagchit' eto razsnoglasie o. S. Bulgakova s obshchim ucheniem otsov*

71 *ubieditel'nyi*

72 *sopadaet*

73 *eshche ne bylo vyrazheno*

74 *prismosushchnoe Slovo*

75 *chastnoe mnenie*

rate, limited by conformity with the Church.⁷⁶ And the divergence of opinion between a theologian and the Church does not decrease because he happens to express his differences in the form of "personal opinions." When a theologian expresses a particular thought in the capacity of his "personal" opinion, he does so only because he is convinced of the truth of this opinion. Hence his "personal" opinion implicitly claims to be true, and as such to be recognised by *all*.⁷⁷ For this reason "personal" opinions also should be subject to consideration. Truth is always truth, even in the capacity of a "personal" opinion, and the gravity of a mistake⁷⁸ is not lessened because it is of a "personal" nature. Sometimes it is possible to show complacency⁷⁹ to a theologian, when his "personal" opinions diverge from the "usual" teaching of the Church, but particularly in such cases is it necessary to explain to him the essential inadequacy⁸⁰ of his "personal" opinions.

4. The Commission limits itself to refuting the accusation of gnosticism levelled against Fr Bulgakov's teaching on Sophia, but it fails to consider Fr Bulgakov's teaching on the essence of Sophia,⁸¹ which is interpreted as a certain living essence in God, or as Ousia (the nature) of God, which is united with God, in spite of being without a hypostasis, in a relationship of mutual, though passive and feminine, love. By this teaching Fr Bulgakov gives ground⁸² for the accusation of introducing a fourth hypostasis, as it were, into the essence of God. Even if this accusation is not justified Fr Bulgakov himself occasions it⁸³ by the obscurity⁸⁴ of his teaching concerning the divine Sophia. A whole series of other accusations which are mentioned in the "Deliberations"—such as Apoll-

76 *ogranicheno soglasiem s Tserkov'iu*

77 *I ego "chastnoe" mnenie vnutrenne pritiiaet na obsheobiazatel'nost', kak "istina"*

78 Simply *oshibka*—no equivalent for "gravity" appears in the original.

79 *sniskhozhdenie*

80 *neosnovatel'nost'*

81 *Sofii po sushchestvu*

82 *podaet povod*

83 *podaet povod*

84 *neiasnost'*

inarianism, a disdainful attitude to the Councils and the Fathers of the Church, in particular to St Cyril of Alexandria and of the Eucharistic body of our Lord, and similarly of the two natures—the Human and the Angelic—in St John the Forerunner—have all been left without consideration and without an answer.⁸⁵ While Fr Bulgakov's explanations in his "answer" are undoubtedly insufficient.⁸⁶ Of course the fact that the Commission's report is not full is partly explained by the lack of time, as the Commission only held four meetings. But in such circumstances the Commission should never have unreservedly⁸⁷ justified Fr Bulgakov's teaching on Sophia.

5. In connection with the condemnation of Fr Bulgakov our Church circles⁸⁸ have shown a lack of understanding of the most fundamental principles⁸⁹ of faith and life in the Church. To some any sort of pronouncement whatever made by Church authority in relation to theologians seemed inadmissible, since it represents an attempt to strangle thought and quench the spirit. This would mean that there exists no authority in the Church and that anything new is always better than the old.⁹⁰

In such conditions it appears to us especially necessary to explain that authorities in the Church have not only the right,⁹¹ but the duty⁹² to preserve and guard⁹³ the purity of the faith, to control theological teaching and to warn the faithful⁹⁴ of the possibility of temptation and mistakes.

Undoubtedly, the condemnation of Fr Bulgakov in Moscow and

85 *bez razsmotrieniia i otveta*

86 *nedostatochno*

87 *bezogovorochno*

88 *tserkovnoe obshchestvo*

89 *osnovy i ustoiia*

90 *Inym kazalos dazhe, chto samoe suzhdenie tserkovnoi vlasti o mneniiakh bogoslovov est uzhe pokushenie na svobody mysli i dukha, chto v Tserkvi ne mozhет byt avtoriteta, i chto novoe tiem samym uzhe luchshe starago.*

91 *pravo*

92 *obiazannost'*

93 *bliusti*

94 *predosteregat' vieruiushchikh*

at Karlovtsi was premature and hasty,⁹⁵ being made without any careful and detailed investigation and without hearing the accused, contrary to the ancient practice of the Church.

Nevertheless, quite apart from any such condemnation there is ample reason for being confused and worried⁹⁶ by Fr Bulgakov's views, both because of their divergence⁹⁷ from Church tradition, and because in connection with them there have arisen all sorts of irresponsible⁹⁸ discussions concerning dogmas of faith, which disintegrate Orthodox consciousness. We think it necessary that Fr Bulgakov's theological views should be carefully and fully considered so as to prepare the way for an authoritative pronouncement by the Church authorities.

Members of the Commission:

Fr G. Florovsky, Fr S. Tchetverikoff.⁹⁹
6.VII.36.

95 *bylo proizvedeno prezhdevremennno i toropливо*

96 *est' dostatochnyi povod smushchat'sia i trevozhit'sia*

97 *raskhozhdeniia*

98 *bezotvetsvennyiia*

99 The two names do not appear in the original.