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# Interpretation of Sophia the Wisdom of God in Russian philosophical Sophiology

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**Abstract.** The article opens a number of studies devoted to the theme of Sophia the Wisdom of God in the history of Russian Christian fine art and sacred architecture. The Cathedral of Veliky Novgorod, built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, is one of the oldest religious buildings dedicated to St. Sophia. The question about the name of the Novgorod cathedral a few centuries after its construction caused a theological discussion, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries brought to life religious and philosophical Russian trend – the tradition of Sophiology. The icon of Sophia the Wisdom, which occupies a completely unique place in the history of Russian iconography, has not yet received a generally accepted interpretation. Various philosophical theories aimed at explaining the content of this icon, as well as at reconstructing the meaning of the very name of Sophia the Wisdom, are explored in this article. For Vladimir Solovyov, Sophia is the personification of the unity of cosmos, a character in his mystical poetry and a mythological “Soul of the World” within the framework of his philosophy of unity. The priest Pavel Florensky describes Sophia as the divine nature of all living beings, the “ideal personality of the world”, often merging with the Mother of God in minds of people. Sergei Bulgakov connects Sophia with the divine essence of the Trinity, and with the highest principle of the world order, and with the angel. All these philosophers try to arbitrarily interpret the plot of the icon of St. Sophia and the name of Russian churches in honor of St. Sophia to substantiate their religious and philosophical concepts, which are far from Christian orthodoxy.

**Keywords:** Russian religious philosophy, Sophiology, St. Sophia the Wisdom of God, icon, cathedral, Vladimir Solovyov, Pavel Florensky, Sergei Bulgakov.

## Истолкование Софии Премудрости Божией в русской философской софиологии

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**Аннотация.** Статья открывает серию исследований, посвящённых теме Софии – Премудрости Божией в истории русского христианского изобразительного искусства и сакральной архитектуры. Кафедральный собор Великого Новгорода, построенный в 11 веке, является одним из древнейших религиозных сооружений, посвящённых Святой Софии. Вопрос о наименовании новгородского собора через несколько веков после его постройки послужил причиной теологической дискуссии, а в 19–20 веках вызвал к жизни целое религиозно-философское направление, характерное именно для России, – традицию софиологии. Икона Софии-Премудрости, которая занимает совершенно уникальное место в истории русской иконографии, до сих пор не получила общепринятой интерпретации. Различные философские теории, направленные на объяснение содержания этой иконы, а также на реконструкцию смысла самого имени Софии-Премудрости, исследованы в этой статье. Для Владимира Соловьёва София есть олицетворение единства космоса, персонаж его мистической поэзии и мифологическая «Душа мира» в рамках его философии всеединства. У священника Павла Флоренского София описана как божественная природа всех живых существ, «идеальная личность мира», в сознании народа зачастую сливающаяся с Богородицей. Сергей Булгаков связывает Софию то с божественной сущностью Троицы, то с высшим принципом мирового порядка, то с отдельным ангелом. Все названные философы пытаются произвольно интерпретировать сюжет иконы Святой Софии и наименование русских храмов в честь Святой Софии для аргументации своих религиозно-философских концепций, далёких от христианской ортодоксии.

**Ключевые слова:** София Премудрость Божия, икона, кафедральный собор, русская религиозная философия, софиология, Владимир Соловьёв, Павел Флоренский, Сергей Булгаков.

The name of Sophia (Wisdom) is inextricably linked with the history of Veliky Novgorod. The words of Prince Mstislav Udatny “where Sophia is, Novgorod is there”, addressed to the Novgorodians before the battle in the distant 13<sup>th</sup> century, became a concise but aphoristically accurate expression of this connection. But what does this name mean? In search of a church-traditional answer we turn to the liturgical practice of the Orthodox Church and discover that the patronal feast of the Novgorod Sophia Cathedral (fig. 1) is the Day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary,

which is among the twelve great feasts of the Orthodox Church (the so-called Twelve Great Feasts). On this day (August 15), according to the Church calendar, the church icon – the Novgorod icon of Sophia the Wisdom of God is honored. In the center of its iconographic composition there is a fire-transparent angel in royal vestment, to whom the Theotokos and John the Baptist were praying. Above the head of the Angel Sophia there is a medallion with the image of Christ blessing. The composition is crowned by a starry scroll of the heavens with the Etimasia<sup>1</sup> and the angels worshipping her (fig. 2).

The temple icon, which is still in the cathedral, dates back to the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and the oldest image of this iconography was recently discovered during the restoration work in the Novgorod Granovitaya (Vladyka) Chamber, the chambers of Archbishop Euthymius II. Researchers date it to the thirties of the 15<sup>th</sup> century [Sarabianov 2009, 128–130].



Fig. 1. Veliky Novgorod. St. Sophia Cathedral, 1045–1050. Photo: S. S. Avanesov, 2022

The enigmatic iconography, which gave rise to a number of literary monuments-interpretations<sup>2</sup>, God-given dedication of the Novgorod cathedral, laconic, and therefore more intriguing to the reader, references to the patronage of Sophia over Novgorod [Khoroshev 1998] – all this gave rise to the legitimate question: “What is Sophia the Wisdom of God?”. This is how it sounded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Novgorod theologian St. Zinovius Otensky, answering his questioners, wrote a treatise of the same name, in which he proves that the name of Sophia is applicable only to the second hypostasis of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God [Zinovius 1905]. Having learned about the

<sup>1</sup> Etimasia (Greek *ἐτοιμασία*) – prepared Throne or Throne of the Second Coming.

<sup>2</sup> We can conclude that these are *interpretations* of the icon, rather than *the source* of its composition, based on the fact that the earliest known copy (Chudovsky list 320), which is probably the protograph, is at least a quarter of a century younger than the first known examples of the Novgorod Sophia icon with a confident dating.

doubts of the townspeople concerning “what is Sophia the Wisdom of God, and in whose name is this church set up, and in whose worship is it consecrated” [ibid., 24], monk Zinovius gives the answer “not from his mind, but from the divine sources” [ibid., 25]. He refers to the most important biblical sapiential texts, the treatises of the holy fathers, and Byzantine liturgical practice expressed in the construction and dedication of the Sophia of Constantinople. We will return to his apology later.



Fig. 2. St. Sophia the Wisdom of God.  
Veliky Novgorod, St. Sophia Cathedral, 15<sup>th</sup> century

Concerning the complex of ideas associated with Holy Sophia, Divine Wisdom, many modern researchers with maximum confidence refer to the works of V. Solovyov, P. Florensky and S. Bulgakov, representing the so-called “sophiological” line in Russian religious-philosophical thought. The question of the dedication of Sophia temples in the works of the mentioned thinkers, of course, is not paramount. Moreover, it is considered by them in the broader context of the data of the church tradition related to the theme of the temple’s patronage. Such are, first of all, the iconography and hymnography of Sophia the Wisdom. The above-mentioned thinkers, as a rule, use these church monuments to confirm their own philosophical ideas. In this connection we will consider the most expressive texts of the above mentioned authors as a key representation of “Sophiology”, showing the discrepancy (and sometimes contradiction) of their interpretations to the Church Tradition and indicate the probable causes of the collision.

For V. Solovyov the image of Sophia became the inspiration for his mystical philosophy of “omnity”. For him Sophia is the center of God’s plan for the world as the Oneness of Being; it is derived from the Logos. At the same time, Sophia also appears as a kind of “Soul of the world”, as a collective consciousness of all mankind and a feminine individual (“Eternal Femininity”), devoted to God and taking form from Him [Losev 2000, 183–226].

Solovyov does not have a special study devoted to the Novgorod temple and the related icons and services, but he refers to them in his act speech “Auguste Comte’s Idea of Humanity”, given in 1898 at the St. Petersburg Philosophical Society, which celebrated the centenary of Comte’s birth [ibid., 175]. In this talk he identifies Sophia with Grand Être (Great Being), Comte’s “humanity”. Solovyov believes that “Comte’s humanity is Christian God-humanity, and this is the original faith of the Russian people, who, in contrast to the Byzantine purely ideal understanding of deity, gave a corporeal-human understanding of it, and even built Sophia temples in Novgorod and Kiev” [ibid., 203]. To confirm his concept V. Solovyov cites the Novgorod temple icon: “If Comte happened to come to an old abandoned town, which was once both New and Great, he could see with his own eyes an authentic picture of his Grand Être, more accurate and more complete than all those he had seen in the West” [Solovyov 1990, 576]. He goes on to write about the depiction of Sophia and the temples dedicated to it [ibid., 577]:

Our ancestors worshipped this mysterious figure, as the Athenians once did the ‘unknown god’, they built Sophia’s churches and cathedrals everywhere, they fixed celebrations and services, in which in an unknown way Sophia the Wisdom of God is sometimes close to Christ, sometimes to the Theotokos, thus allowing neither Him, nor Her, to be fully identified with Him, <...> This Great, royal and feminine Being, who, being neither God, nor the eternal Son of God, nor angel, nor holy man, receives veneration both from the finisher of the Old Testament and from the progenitor of the New, – who is it but true, pure and complete humanity itself, the highest and most comprehensive form and living soul of nature and the universe, eternally united and in temporal process united to Deity and uniting with Him all that is. There is no doubt that this is the full meaning of the Great Being, half felt and conscious of Comte, whole felt but not at all conscious of by our ancestors, the pious builders of the Sophia temples.

Partly in parallel and partly in direct connection with the thought of V. Solovyov, the image of Sophia captivated Russian writers and poets. For example, F. M. Dostoyevsky in his novel “Crime and Punishment” expressed in the person of Sonya (Sophia) the center of goodness and beauty, and A. Blok expressed the image of Solovyov’s “Eternal Wife” – Sophia in a poetic cycle about the Beautiful Lady [Meyendorff 1987, 401; Meyendorff 1988, 251]<sup>3</sup>.

The teaching of Solovyov got a new interpretation in Pavel Florensky’s book *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: an Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters* (1914). This work was submitted by the Moscow Theological Academy for a master’s degree in theology, which Pavel’s followers often use as an argument for his orthodoxy. But the text submitted to the Academy lacked the last four chapters. In the new edition of *The Pillar* in 1914,

<sup>3</sup> About Solovyov’s strong influence on Blok see: Mochulsky 1997, 49–53.

however, these chapters, which contain precisely Florensky's teaching on Sophia, were already included [Zenkovsky 1987, 61].

Sophia is presented by P. Florensky as "the Great Root of the whole creation, <...> by which creation goes into the intra-Trinitarian life and through which it receives Life Eternal from the One Source of Life; Sophia is the original nature of creation, God's creative love, which is 'shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us' (Rom. 5:5)" [Florensky 2004, 237]. Sophia appears here to Florensky as one in two aspects – created and non-created. "With regard to creation, Sophia is the Guardian Angel of creation, the Ideal person of the world" [ibid., 237]. In relation to God, however, Sophia is "the side of the creaturely world that faces eternity" [ibid., 249]. The Church is also Sophia. In the Church the Mother of God is closely related to Sophia: it is "Sophia *par excellence*" [Florensky 2004, 253], and through the image of the Mother of God we ascend to the Sophia divine. "The highest revelation of Sophia", writes G. Florovsky, "he [Florensky] sees in the Mother of God, whose image is somehow detached from the Divine Child and even obscures Him. <...> Surprisingly, in Florensky's 'theodicy' there is no Savior. The world is 'justified' somehow by Him" [Florovsky 1937, 497]. Florovsky further concludes: "it is not from Orthodox depths that Florensky proceeds. <...> In its inner meaning this is a very Westernized book. <...> The romantic tragedy of Western culture is closer and clearer to Florensky than the problematics of Orthodox tradition. And it is very characteristic that in his work he definitely retreated, behind Christianity, into Platonism and ancient religions, or went sideways, into the teachings of occultism and magic [ibid., 497]."

Pavel Florensky devotes a considerable part of the "Letter Ten" of his *Pillar* [Florensky 2004, 231–283] to the iconography, temples, and hymnography of Sophia. From the very beginning he notes that to prove that Sophia is the second Hypostasis would be "like breaking down an open door", but here one must have in mind "only the special *idea* of Sophia", while "what is called 'Sophia' by the holy fathers of the church in no wise always coincides with the content of this name in iconography" [ibid., 268]. Next, he proposes to examine the various types of iconography of the Holy Wisdom in Rus. On the basis of the existence of various iconographic versions (often of later date and under Western influence), Florensky concludes that in "Sophia" iconography there was genuine religious creativity, which proceeded from the soul of the people. Turning to the Novgorod icon, he gives a description of it, giving arbitrary interpretations of its individual elements. In his opinion [ibid., 270–271],

Sophia's wings clearly indicate that she has some special closeness to the world on high. The fiery character of the wings and body are an indication of fullness of spirituality. The caduceus (not a "rod with a cross" <...>) is an indication <...> of mysterious power over souls. The rolled-up scroll in the left hand, pressed to the organ of higher knowledge, the heart, indicates knowledge of shrouded mysteries. The imperial ornamentation and throne indicate imperial power. <...> Finally, the heavenly spheres, full of stars, surrounding Sophia indicate Sophia's cosmic power, her rule over the whole universe, her cosmocracy.

Further, Florensky draws attention to the clear distinction between the personalities of the Savior, Sophia, the Mother of God: "Sophia is placed below the Savior, i.e., in a subordinate position, and the Mother of God is placed before Sophia, once again

in a subordinate position. The Savior, Sophia, and the Mother of God are therefore in sequential hierarchical subordination" [ibid., 272]. It is also necessary to note that Florensky interprets even such a fact as the baptismal nimbus of Sophia (an element that appears, for example, in the icons of the Stroganov school) as "a mixing of iconographic attributes, a phenomenon of attraction" [ibid., 272]. Even though Sophia, he continues, "is an independent figure in iconography, she is clearly so closely connected with Christ and (as we will see later) with the Mother of God that she can, through attraction, adopt their attributes and thereby, almost merge with the One or the Other, so to speak" [ibid., 272]. Florensky goes on to describe the so-called Yaroslavl and the Kiev icons of Sophia. Both iconographic types are quite late. As for the Kiev image, there is a rather well-based opinion of G. Florovsky that the Catholic icon of the "Immaculate Conception" served as a source of iconography for it [Florovsky 1998, 411–412].

Florensky uses and arbitrarily interprets uncritically and selectively not only iconographic data, but also various literary works, in particular the "Word of Wisdom" and the (allegedly) anonymous Service in honor of Sophia, which he rated very highly [Florensky 2004, 280–281].

In the question of the dedication of the temples of Sophia, we again see a wandering thought. On the one hand, P. Florensky admits that "Justinian's temple of Sophia was consecrated to the Incarnate Word of God" (i.e. Christ). On the other hand, he writes about the "unquestionable <...> religious connection" between Sophia and the Mother of God, which reveals itself "in liturgical practice and in the religious worldview of our forebears" [ibid., 278]. With deep sympathy he quotes the opinion of Professor A. P. Golubtsov, who said in private conversations that "churches of the Dormition, Annunciation, etc. were originally churches of Sophia and only later <...> became associated with specific moments in the life of the Mother of God" [ibid., 558]. Trying to show that "as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, our homegrown Russian theologians failed in their attempt to give a rational definition of the idea of Sophia", Florensky cites as an example a phrase from the work of St. Zinovius Otensky "The Tale known that there is Sophia the Wisdom of God" (without mentioning the name of the author). In particular, he quotes the following: "Some say that the Church of St. Sophia was consecrated to the Most Pure Mother of God, whereas others say that this name is unknown in Russia and that one can have no knowledge of this Wisdom" [ibid., 278]. At the same time, the reader of *The Pillar* remains unaware that these words, being uttered by some "clergymen" who came with a question to St. Zinovius, are the occasion for further disclosure of a dogmatically clear teaching about Sophia as the Lord Jesus Christ – the Word of God [Zinovius 1905]. It is possible that we are presented with a kind of rhetorical device.

Further, P. Florensky writes that none of the pilgrims, Western or Russian, left any information about the dedication of Constantinople Sophia. On this occasion he even exclaims: "These are facts that can only cause astonishment!" [Florensky 2004, 559]. But to him, unfortunately, it remained unknown, that in the memory record of one of the Western pilgrims in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, there is a description of the shrines of Constantinople, in which he notes that this church "consecrated in honor of St. Sophia, holy Wisdom (sancta Sapientia) in Latin, which is the Son of God. <...> This name is of the Son of God, not of the holy woman, as some think" [Maciel Sánchez 2000, 192]. In the "Pilgrim's Book" of the Russian traveler Dobryna Jadrejnikov (the future Archbishop

Anthony of Novgorod), who visited Constantinople in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, St. Sophia is understood as “the Wisdom of the Pristine Word” [Loparev 1899, 1]. It is known that the circle of reading “Pilgrim” in Russia was quite wide [Belobrova 1974, 185]. In favor of the traditional, i.e. Christological understanding of Sophia one can give another testimony of the Italian historian Paulus Jovius Novocomensis (Paolo Giovio), bishop of Nocera de’ Pagani in Italy, author of the composition “De Legatione Basillii magni Principis Moscoviae ad Clementem VII Pontificem Max” (1525), in which information about Russia is given. In particular, in his account of Novgorod, Paolo Giovio wrote about the most ancient and highly respected by the Muscovites temple, “erected 400 years before this in competition with the Byzantine emperors in the name of St. Sophia the Son of God” [Semyonov 1836, 36–37]. This book was written on the basis of the story of Dmitry Gerasimov, sent in 1525 by Basil III to the Vatican [Kovalenko 2010, 133–134].

In general, writes Metropolitan Anthony (Melnikov), “it should be noted that in the question of the veneration of Sophia in Russia, P. Florensky was at odds with the sources. In 1912 he published ‘The Service of Sophia the Wisdom of God’, with very scanty notes, basing only on the one manuscript of the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (!). This publication could be regarded as a discovery, if A. I. Nikolsky had not published the same service in seven folios, with very thorough comments, six years earlier. Here, by the way, it was indicated that this service was first compiled by a famous writer of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (!) Semyon Ivanovich Shakhovskiy, and its conspicuous imperfections were noted” [Melnikov 1986, 70]<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, Florensky’s praise of this service, after a critical analysis by A. I. Nikolsky, is perceived as nothing more than a naive declaration: “The generally known verses and paremia of the Assumption in the service of Sophia receive a completely new light and are inserted into it not mechanically, but are in it organically” [Florensky 1912, 22].

To summarize, here are Florovsky’s observations about Florensky’s methodology in his *Pillar*: “He wished to say nothing from himself, but only to relay and retell the general, all-church thing. In reality, however, he speaks from himself and about himself all the time. <...> He himself admits that he chooses or selects his own references and examples. <...> Historical references by P. Florensky are always random and arbitrary. He weaves his theological wreath with a kind of groundless aestheticism. For him all questions of historical criticism are not important, he easily refers to knowingly unauthentic testimonies. <...> And he never investigates, but only chooses. And <...> he is silent, which is a special characteristic of him [Florovsky 1930, 103].

The influence of V. Solovyov was also decisive in the spiritual development of another outstanding representative of Russian religious-philosophical thought, Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov, who took from his predecessor the main theme of his system – the doctrine of Sophia [Florovsky 1937, 493].

Father Sergius introduces the idea of Sophia into his system for the first time in his book *Philosophy of Economy* (1912), but only as a cosmological rather than theological

<sup>4</sup> The real author of this work is N. K. Gavryushin, Professor of the Moscow Theological Academy. The reasons why Metropolitan Anthony (Melnikov) had to put his name under this work are indicated in the letters of the Metropolitan to the author, published as an Appendix in: Gavryushin 1998, 213–222. An extended version of the article was also published there under the title ‘*And the Hellenes seek wisdom*’. *Notes on Sophiology* [Gavryushin 1998, 69–115].

principle [Zenkovsky 1987, 61]. However, already in the book *Unfading Light* (1917), written and published before Bulgakov accepted the priesthood, he spreads the idea of Sophia to the field of theology and, trying to give it some independence, assimilates to it the meaning of “the fourth hypostasis”, thus clearly going beyond the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Very soon he renounces this interpretation of the concept of Sophia, and calls it not hypostasis, but “hypostaticity” (i. e. gives it a passive character) [ibid., 62]. From this doctrine Bulgakov gradually withdrew and returned to the doctrine, which was once developed by V. Solovyov. But to this new theory of Sophia as the “essence” of Godhead Bulgakov joined the former cosmological idea of Sophia, which turned out thus to be dual: it is the essence of God, but it is also the essence of the world. This is how the shadow of pantheism came close at hand over Bulgakov’s constructions [ibid., 62].

The sophiological quest of S. Bulgakov met with a deep and comprehensive refutation in the works of V. Lossky, Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), Metropolitan (later patriarch) Sergius (Stragorodsky), G. Florovsky, and others. We will not describe here in details the entire course of the polemics, as this is beyond the scale of our topic [Eneeva 2001; Preobrazhenskaya 2008, 13–31; Williams 2009, 43–73]. We will only note now that S. Bulgakov as well as P. Florensky (following V. Solovyov) make extensive use of the data of iconography and liturgical texts, trying to interpret “Sophiology” within the framework of Church Tradition.

S. Bulgakov first deals with the iconography of Sophia in his article *Hypostasis and Hypostaticity* [Bulgakov 1925], written in Russia, but printed much later (in a collection in honor of P. Struve in 1925). Thus, according to his interpretation, the Novgorod icon depicts the Divine Sophia as “the angel of the creature, the ideal soul of the world”. “There is no doubt,” he continues, “that it is not simply an angel as one of the representatives of the angelic world (the latter is placed above in the same icon). This exceptional significance is evidenced not only by its fire transparency, but also by all its attributes, beginning with the golden throne. <...> This image <...> itself does not have its own hypostasis, but only the ability to hypostasize, to become the nature and content of all hypostasis, and therefore it can only be depicted in the light of this hypostasis, as a living and personal being. In a word, the image of the fiery angel does not mean hypostasis, but hypostaticity, or Divine Sophia” [Bulgakov 1925, 369]. S. Bulgakov in his work *The Burning Bush*, published in Paris in 1927 and dedicated to the Orthodox veneration of the Mother of God, also uses iconographic material to support his statement. And, like P. Florensky, he often uses historical sources uncritically. Thus, for example, describing the above-mentioned icon of Sophia of Kiev, he calls it the most ancient and dates its origin as early as the epoch of Justinian [Bulgakov 1927, 193–196]. Also in Excursus 2, placed as an appendix to this work and devoted to the theme of Wisdom in the Old Testament, Bulgakov writes [Bulgakov 1927, 254]:

As a part of the Church tradition, there are iconographic and liturgical theology, which do not allow to understand Wisdom as a Second Hypostasis: Neither the fiery angel sitting on the throne and having a separate image of Christ above him, nor Our Lady in the icons of Sophia make it possible to understand Sophia as the Second Hypostasis. The same must be said about the content of the service of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, in which she is sometimes associated with Christ and sometimes with the Mother of God, as the bearer of

the Holy Spirit, without, however, fully identifying herself with neither one nor the other, at the same time not becoming for one moment a separate Hypostasis and not turning the Holy Trinity into a quadricinity – this blasphemy will not do!

In 1928 S. Bulgakov conducted a series of seminars on Sophia the Wisdom of God as part of the meetings of the Fraternity of St. Sophia. The theme of the 5<sup>th</sup> seminar was “The Wisdom of God in Liturgy and Iconography”. Regarding the Novgorod icon, Sergei Bulgakov states that “the Novgorod icon of Wisdom depicts a fiery angel, and this shows that by Wisdom is meant not only a creature, but also a being who is different from the Mother of God and Christ, but close to them, as well as immediately close to the Holy Trinity” [Bulgakov 2000, 127]. He notes: “The icon of Wisdom clearly depicts the Holy Trinity at the top, and under it a fiery angel, testifying about a kind of self-sufficiency, which exceeds all of creation, a kind of supreme beginning of the world. We see the same in the service of the Wisdom of God” [ibid., 140]. Pointing to the high theological content of the text of this Service, Bulgakov notes with reverence: “When it was composed and when it arose is unknown. It is as much a mystery as the mystery of Melchizedek, and the revelation of this mystery can be heeded as the Word of God” [ibid., 127].

We conclude with the words of the authoritative historian and theologian John Meyendorff about the influence of the God-given interpretation of the icon of Sophia the Wisdom (and its “service”) on 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Sophiology: “It is possible to estimate differently the basic intuition of Solovyov and his school. But we must admit that his representatives made unsuccessful and artificial use of the data of iconography and liturgics, equating the images and concepts of the Byzantine and Old Russian Christian tradition with concepts coming from quite different sources” [Meyendorff 1988, 251]. Unfortunately, the real sources of inspiration of the sophiologists, which prompted them to interpret the iconography of Sophia in this way, have not been examined in details, and a special study should certainly be devoted to filling in this gap in the future.

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