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JOURNAL OF REFORMED
THEOLOGY 16 (2022) 214–225

JOURNAL
OF REFORMED
THEOLOGY

brill.com/jrt

A Reformed Engagement with Bulgakov's Doctrine of Wisdom

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Abstract

This article engages Sergei Bulgakov's doctrine of divine wisdom with key reference to the work *Sophia the Wisdom of God*. It is proposed that Bulgakov viewed the life of the Orthodox Church as a form of living wisely within the world. Following a general overview of his doctrine of Sophia, it is shown that Bulgakov viewed Mariology and Eucharist as key indicators of the life of wisdom within the world. The article closes with a Reformed reflection.

Keywords

wisdom – Sergei Bulgakov – Sophia – Karl Barth – Mariology – Eucharist – Reformed

1 Introduction

In a recent article, Richard May pointed out that the work of the early twentieth-century Russian Orthodox theologian Sergei Bulgakov has, in recent years, been taken up by a host of significant theologians from a variety of confessional backgrounds.¹ May noted that the widespread recent embrace of Bulgakov's sophiology has come with "little if any critical discussion of Bulgakov's ideas."² In this article I hope to contribute to a clear understanding of aspects of Bulgakov's sophiology while also assuming a somewhat critical posture from a

1 Richard May, "Between God and the World: A Critical Appraisal of the Sophiology of Sergius Bulgakov," in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 74 (2021): 67–84.

2 May, "Between God and the World," 69.

Reformed perspective. Specifically, I aim to provide an interpretation of aspects of Bulgakov's theology that, on my reading, present key practices and teachings of the Orthodox Church as all-encompassing forms of wisdom in the world. I will show how Bulgakov, while critical of certain Orthodox shortcomings exhibited in strands of his own tradition, viewed the liturgy and core doctrines of his church as inherently congruent with the very nature of the divine Sophia. This task will be carried out in three consecutive stages. First, with sole reference to Bulgakov's own comments, I describe the context and hopes that gave rise to his mature account of divine Sophia. Second, I offer an account of Bulgakov's articulation of Sophia in its twofold mode, divine and creaturely, in order to show the conceptual grounding for his conviction regarding wisdom finding true liveliness in the Orthodox Church. To be sure, the Orthodox Church of Bulgakov's time was a divided entity and Bulgakov's own teaching on Sophia intensified internal controversies.³ Despite the controversy it sparked, his teaching on divine wisdom was nourished by core Orthodox teachings that arose out of the liturgical life.⁴ It is to two such areas that I finally turn, namely, Mariology and Eucharist. A brief reflection from a Reformed perspective closes the article.

2 Bulgakov's Case for Sophiology and the Future of Christianity

In his mature theological work on sophiology published in Russian in 1937 and entitled *The Wisdom of God: A Brief Summary of Sophiology*, Bulgakov expresses his distress over the conceptual poles he witnessed in the Christianity of his own time: the one extreme he characterized as "world-denying Manicheism" and the other as a mere "acceptance of the world as it is."⁵ Proponents of the former can be found, according to Bulgakov, in both "a trend of thought which

3 See Bryn Geffert, "The Charges of Heresy Against Sergii Bulgakov: The Majority and Minority Reports of Evlogii's Commission and the Final Report of the Bishop's Conference," in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49:1–2 (2005): 47–66.

4 See Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers: From the Philokalia to the Present* (London: SPCK, 2015), 97–99.

5 Sergei Bulgakov, *Sophia the Wisdom of God: An Outline of Sophiology*, trans. the Rev. P. Thompson, the Rev. O.F. Clarke, and X. Braikevitch (Hudson: Lindisfarne Books, 1993), 14–15. As Christopher Bamford notes in the foreword to the English translation of this volume, *Sophia the Wisdom of God* was written at the height of the controversy in which a host of charges ("gnosticism ... creating a fourth hypostasis," and more) were being leveled against Bulgakov. Bamford notes that while it is "by no means an apologetic work," *Sophia the Wisdom of God* is an intentionally clear and theological account of Bulgakov's "mature position" on sophiology. Bulgakov, *Sophia*, xx.

has historically prevailed in Orthodoxy” with its “pseudo-monastic” tendencies as well as in Protestant orthodoxy, which places such emphasis on God’s transcendence that it leaves the world without a trace of the divine.⁶ The opposite pole finds key expression in social Christianity, which betrays an obsessive need to “apply” Christianity, exposing a lack of conviction regarding Christian theology’s inherent relevance to the world.⁷ Bulgakov locates the remedy to such polarization in the dogmatic discipline of sophiology, which he presents as primarily concerned with the relation between God and the world.⁸ It is his conviction and hope that, once the Creator and the creation begin to be viewed through the lens of the wisdom that properly belongs to the former and is shared in the latter, Christians may return from their respective retreats into seclusion on the one hand and compromise on the other, and strive holistically toward future union with God.

We need a true Christian ascesis in relation to the world, which consists in a struggle with the world out of love for the world ... this can be accomplished only through a change in our conception of the world, and through a sophianic perception of the world in the Wisdom of God ... The future of living Christianity rests with the sophianic interpretation of the world and of its destiny.⁹

It is noteworthy, and in character with his widely acknowledged ecumenical efforts, that Bulgakov’s vision is not described as a renewed Orthodoxy but as a true Christianity that embraces the world. Therefore he offers a robust sophiology not only to those in his own tradition for the sake of their revival but also to Christians of the West. In fact, he explicitly states that his intention in writing *Sophia the Wisdom of God* is to present “the main currents” of Russian Orthodox thinking to Western readers in an “accessible” and “concise form.”¹⁰ While Bulgakov is critical of certain strands within his own circles, he formulates these critiques in conversation with his tradition, thereby showing that a sophiological interpretation of the world is most true to the essential life of Orthodoxy and therefore most appropriate for its renewal. Furthermore, by drawing from the scriptures shared by Protestants as well as from traditions

6 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 15.

7 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 16.

8 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 14.

9 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 20–21.

10 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 12.

exclusive to Orthodoxy,¹¹ Bulgakov shows Western Christians that the Orthodox Church, understood as the wisest form of engaging all of reality, ultimately contains the resources required to remedy the broader church's impoverished state.¹² Not Marxism, nor conservatism, nor national loyalty, nor monasticism, nor any combination of the previous can do what the "main currents" of Orthodoxy as a total-life orientation can do.

3 The Twofold Mode of Sophia: Divine and Creaturely

Bulgakov's conviction that, at its heart, the liturgical life of Orthodoxy is a form of wisdom requires a schema in which a creaturely life form (such as the historical Orthodox Church) can genuinely have active participation in and reflect true wisdom that belongs to God alone. Such a schema is provided in Bulgakov's doctrine of creation, which locates within the world a created wisdom that is "ontologically identical" yet modally distinct from the divine wisdom.¹³ While Bulgakov was adamant that a distinction needed to be maintained between the Creator and the creation, he was equally insistent that a divinely rooted link between the two also needed to be established in order to preserve God's existence as an existence "for another," as this is shown to be true existence by virtue of the free act of creation,¹⁴ and because, according to Bulgakov, an intermediary is logically necessary in order to preserve the Orthodox tension between a Creator-creature distinction and creaturely participation in divine being.¹⁵ Sophia provides that link between God and his world. Bulgakov writes:

The reason for ... [the world's] creation is to be found in a ... free "necessity"—the force of God's love overflowing beyond the limits of its own being to found being other than his own ... The Absolute then abides

11 Bulgakov utilizes Orthodox hymnody, liturgical texts, iconography, and architecture in formulating his doctrine of wisdom. Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 1; 114; 115; 123–124; 131–132.

12 Bulgakov is widely recognized for his ecumenical efforts and distinctive openness (while fluctuating in levels) to other denominations. For concise accounts of his ecumenical thought, see pages 123–132 in Ivana Noble, "Three Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Lossky," in *Communio Viatorum* 57, no. 2 (2015): 113–140 and Paul Ladouceur, "Two Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Sergei Bulgakov and Georges Florovsky," in *Ecumenism* 192–193 (Winter-Spring 2015): 35–39.

13 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 61; 71–72.

14 Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 95.

15 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 74.

not only within its own absoluteness, but also outside itself, so that the world finds a God in it ... It is a personal creative act of God, his voluntary self-abandonment in love *ad extra*. But in creating the world by his omnipotence from “nothing” God communicates to it something of the vigor of his own being, and, in the divine Sophia, unites the world with his own divine life.¹⁶

For Bulgakov, then, creation is a kenotic act,¹⁷ a “self-abandonment” in which God establishes “being other than his own” and yet abides within it. Sophia is that ‘*metaxu*’ (in-between) which connects God and the world, and through which God communicates not only an objective knowledge *about* himself but also the subjective “vigor,” the liveliness of his being. Through *Sophia* comes true contact that makes possible true participation and that leads to eschatological deification.¹⁸ Yet, for Bulgakov, Sophia is not only a sort of intermediary portal (neither divine nor creaturely) that connects God and the world, but is itself the ground of creation that finds its subsistence in God. It is, therefore, both divine and created. Brian Gallaher has referred to the latter as Bulgakov’s “positive both/and vision of Sophia” and notes that this is the vision that became the more dominant of the two in Bulgakov’s more mature thought.¹⁹ How might the relationship between divine and creaturely wisdom be clearly understood?

One prominent metaphor in Bulgakov’s work is that of divine Sophia as ‘prototype’ for the world. In this schema, the divine world exists eternally in God and the created world exists in a process of becoming in time. This way of speaking about Sophia follows the logic of the world as having been created *by* God *from* nothing and finds support in many church fathers who had spoken of the *παραδείγματα* (paradigms) of creation as existing eternally in God, although—Bulgakov admits—they did not associate these paradigms with the divine Wisdom.²⁰

Bulgakov’s logic in speaking of Sophia as a divine prototype for the creation can be distilled in the following points: (a) Wisdom exists eternally in God

16 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 73.

17 See Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 63–64.

18 See Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 113; 128. See also Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, 99.

19 Brian Gallaher, *Freedom and Necessity in Modern Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 52–53.

20 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 64–65. Bulgakov cites St. Athanasius, Pseudo-Dionysius, St. John of Damascus, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Augustine, and St. Gregory Nazianzen as having propounded the doctrine of the *paradeigmata* in some form or another.

and is identified with the divine *ousia*;²¹ (b) the world was created out of the resource of God's being, for no thing outside of God himself was used in creating the world;²² (c) to say that the world was created from nothing is to describe the character of its existence as nonbeing in the process of becoming;²³ (d) because the world was created from God and no new thing can be added to God, the world shares in the "source" of the same being, yet receives this being in a distinct mode;²⁴ (e) because the world receives divine being in a distinct mode and because this reception is characterized by process and incompleteness, the world exists as relative to God's existence as Absolute.²⁵ Bulgakov demarcates the respective existence of the relative to the Absolute, the creaturely to the divine, in terms of time. Concisely, he writes, "Alongside the divine and eternal world exists the world of creaturely being established by God in time."²⁶ Strikingly, he clarifies that the nature of this relationship is not one of duplication, as if the creation were a detached replica of the divine world, "for," Bulgakov writes, "nothing is doubled in God." It is more appropriate to speak of this relation in terms of "unity" and "identity." With regard to their distinction he writes, "They are distinguished, on the one hand, as the simple and simultaneous perfection of eternity, as against temporal becoming, and, on the other, as divine, as against participated being."²⁷

In sum, what Bulgakov means by wisdom in its divine mode is that wisdom which exists eternally in God's trinitarian life. Although Bulgakov goes into some detail regarding wisdom's nature and activity within the divine world, it is sufficient for our purposes to note that wisdom's divine form is identified with God's *ousia*. In contrast, wisdom in its created mode is that wisdom in time, undergirding creation, sharing in the source of the divine being, and propelling creation towards the ultimate unification of the creaturely with the divine.

The link to the *ex nihilo* doctrine and the triune life serves the purpose in Bulgakov's system of underscoring that wisdom has an all-embracing nature, permeating the world, providing the reconnection with the whole for which Bulgakov longed, yet in a way inseparable from the divine life source. Having briefly outlined Bulgakov's account of the divine and the created wisdom, we may now proceed to examine how he found the liturgical life and key doctrines

21 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 61.

22 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 61–62.

23 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 62.

24 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 63–64.

25 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 62; see pp. 73; 76–77.

26 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 61.

27 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 76.

of the Orthodox Church to be congruent with his sophiological interpretation of the world. In doing so, we will witness Bulgakov's effort to secure wisdom's uniqueness in Orthodox practice and doctrine, so as to avoid the dangerous conclusion that wisdom's all-encompassing nature renders the church unnecessary. Although Bulgakov discusses various aspects of Orthodoxy, we will confine the present discussion to two, namely, Mariology and Eucharist.

4 Mary as Wisdom's Embodiment

In *Sophia the Wisdom of God*, sophiology is presented as that which gives light to all doctrine: from the Trinity, to Christology, to Mary and the church. Throughout his chapter on Mary, Bulgakov moves *from* wisdom *to* the Holy Virgin, in order to show how sophiology illumines Mariology, and concludes that by looking to Mary one may be led back to wisdom, for she, Bulgakov argues, is created wisdom itself.

The move from Sophia to Mary is a move from speaking of Sophia within the life of God—the divine prototype—to speaking of Sophia as created. Because Sophia in the life of the Trinity is identified with both the Son and the Holy Spirit, Mary becomes a unique recipient of this divine wisdom within the creaturely realm, by bearing both persons of the Trinity. In her receptive role as a creature and in her purity, which qualified her as candidate for this task, she is “penetrated” by the divine wisdom and is thereafter glorified—exhibiting and embodying the destiny of all creation and thereby becoming created wisdom in human form. Bulgakov writes,

She is created Wisdom, for she is creation glorified. In her is realized the purpose of creation, the complete penetration of the creature by Wisdom, the full accord of the created type with its prototype, its entire accomplishment. In her creation is completely irradiated by its prototype. In her God is already all in all.²⁸

Beyond merely being an illustration of created wisdom, Bulgakov sees in Mary, quite literally, created wisdom itself, as the Holy Virgin inherits created wisdom's function as mediator, existing on behalf of all of creation. In her role of bestowing humanity on Christ, which was “the humanness of the second

28 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 126.

Adam," Mary became the mother of all humanity.²⁹ Thus, Mary's identity as created wisdom has cosmological significance; she is the paradigm and promise of all creation's destiny. To acknowledge her exalted status is to affirm God's intimate relation to and glorification of the world through Sophia.

On this account, a church that does not properly venerate the mother of God is a church unable to recognize wisdom. In one of his key works on Mary, *The Bride of the Lamb*, Bulgakov writes vis-à-vis a poor estimation of the Virgin that "[o]nly a satanic dementia remains ... insensitive to the Most Pure One." Yet, despite the demonic deception that consumes some, in the same paragraph Bulgakov writes of the human race being connected to and directed toward God and his Son through the mother.³⁰ In this view, there is yet hope for salvation of non-venerators, that is, Protestants; with regard to living wisely, however, things do not look promising. So central was Mariology for Bulgakov that he repeatedly insisted at ecumenical meetings that the key condition on which true unity with Protestant Christians could be accomplished was a shared veneration of the *Theotokos*.³¹ While for Bulgakov Reformed Christians fall short in this regard, perhaps there is hope yet for their encounter with wisdom through the Lord's Supper.

5 Eucharist as Wisdom's Way

Bulgakov's sophiological account of the Eucharist is grounded in his sophiological interpretation of Chalcedonian Christology. According to Bulgakov, the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ is founded on the twofold form of God's Wisdom: divine and created.³² The incarnation of the Son was a contradiction neither of God's sophianic nature nor of creation's, but was an affirmation of the eternal Divine-humanity of wisdom.³³ Furthermore, just as creation is an act wherein God gives of himself and gradually draws what is other toward himself, so with the incarnation, in the unification of divine

29 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 119–120.

30 Cited on p. 162 in Andrew Louth, "Bulgakov on the Mother of God," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 49, nos. 1–2 (2005): 145–164.

31 See pp. 112–115 in Walter Sisto, "Making the New Evangelization Credible: Mary in the Ecumenical Movement," *Marian Studies* 64 (2013): 110–131. Sisto notes that the primary reason Mariology was so central for Bulgakov was due to its immediate influence on Christology. Thus, for Bulgakov, a church that could not agree on the person of Mary could not agree on the person of Christ. See pp. 116–124.

32 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 95.

33 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 85.

being with human flesh, a reconciliation between God and his creation is signified and begins to be worked out. Christ's mediation on behalf of the world, in which he pleads to the Father by appealing to his sacrifice on the cross, secures the world's reconciliation to God for all time. This mediation, which takes place in the divine life and therefore outside of time, is historically realized in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist.³⁴ By eating the body and drinking the blood, human creatures are united in Christ and are gradually drawn toward their ultimate union with God. Bulgakov calls this a unity between "divine and created Wisdom," actualized in the Eucharist, which is "a progressive penetration of the world by Wisdom, bringing it gradually into conformity with its prototype Wisdom."³⁵

On this account, partaking in the sacrament of the bread and wine is to live wisely, for what is actually taking place in that moment is an encounter wherein the divine Wisdom is drawing humanity to itself through the created Wisdom. It is the affirmation and historical realization of Christ's incarnate nature as the means through which God has reconciled and is reconciling his creation to himself. In this particular area, Reformed Christians—at least, classically Reformed Christians—are not excluded from living wisely, as they affirm the real *spiritual* presence of Christ and recognize the sacrament as a historical seal of God's eternal declaration.³⁶ Although they do not speak of this encounter in sophianic terms, there is overlap with the basic christological affirmations involved, which is likely why Bulgakov famously (and controversially) encouraged shared communion with Anglican Christians in certain circumstances.³⁷

34 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 95–96.

35 Bulgakov, *Sophia*, 96.

36 Question and Answer 69 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "Q. Why then are this bread and this cup called the body and blood of Christ, or a communion with the body and blood of Christ, and a new testament? A. Because the breaking and eating of this bread and partaking of this cup are a sure pledge and sign by which Christ testifies to all of us who believe in him that as surely as we eat this bread broken for us and drink this cup passed out to us, which nourish physical and temporal life, so surely were his body broken and blood shed for us; so surely are they for us the spiritual food and drink of eternal life; and so surely do we have communion with them and share in the new testament." From Lyle D. Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 211. See also Robert Kolb and Carl R. Trueman, *Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran and Reformed Theology in Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 191–205.

37 See Noble, "Three Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Lossky," 130.

6 Reflections in a Reformed Key with the Help of Karl Barth

In the above three points, it has been my intention to present a coherent and concise presentation of Bulgakov's thought in the hopes of honoring his wishes to present what he viewed as "the main currents" of Orthodoxy to the West as all-encompassing forms of wisdom.

In his *Church Dogmatics* II.1, Karl Barth (a contemporary of Bulgakov) delineates a theology of wisdom as an attribute of God known exclusively in his self-revelation.³⁸ Barth has no 'created wisdom' category that might be analogous to divine wisdom, as it would affirm the *analogia entis* that Barth so vehemently repudiated. For Barth, 'created wisdom' would open the door to idolatry—to taking parts of the world and associating them with God.³⁹ Thus, Barth proposes the prophetic character of wisdom in Proverbs: "Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice."⁴⁰ Divine wisdom does indeed meet creatures, but the nature of this encounter is a personal confrontation wherein God speaks, rather than a subtle pull that is grounded in what has been made metaphysically possible. Drawing from Job 28, wherein Barth sees the wisdom of God as clearly being contrasted with human wisdom, he maintains that a creaturely relationship with wisdom is possible only on the grounds that God himself chooses to make it known. "In short, it cannot be possessed by man as in the last analysis all other treasures can be possessed by him."⁴¹ It is a wisdom provisional within creation and beyond human grasp.

Although Barth's emphasis on the inability to grasp divine wisdom appears to pull in an apophatic direction, his discussion is set within the context of a doctrine of God wherein God is definitively known as the One who loves in freedom. It is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that gives content to the divine attributes, including wisdom. Therefore, for Barth, there is something positive to say about God's wisdom, but that positive speech can only be uttered

38 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, ed T.F. Torrance and G.W. Bromiley; trans. G.W. Bromiley (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 423–439.

39 Question and Answer 83 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "Q. What is idolatry? A. It is to invent or have anything other than or in the place of the one, true God, who has revealed himself to us in his Word, on which our hope and trust depend; or anything that we love or fear more than him or honor contrary to his command." From Bierma, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism*, 214. In *CD* II.1, Barth regards the notion of being able to uncover God's wisdom in the world through human means as equivalent to people constructing idols from elements of the earth. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, 431.

40 Prov. 1:20 ESV.

41 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, 430–431.

in response to God's revelation in the living Christ and not known in an abstract principle *behind* Christ or *between* God and the world.⁴²

In light of this brief summary of Sophia in a Reformed light, what might be noted as an initial response to Bulgakov's account?

It may first be noted that Bulgakov and Barth both acknowledge that wisdom properly belongs to the being of God and yet initiates a relationship with creatures. But while Barth thinks wisdom is constituted in daily anticipation of confrontation by God's self-revelation, Bulgakov recognizes its familiar presence and creaturely warmth. This by no means warrants a caricature of a Barth who earnestly listens over against a Bulgakov who complacently follows the liturgy, uninterested in being confronted by God anew. Bulgakov's comments expressing a desire for renewed Christian living through an ascetical dialectic disallow any such dismissal. Further, in arguing for Orthodox doctrine and liturgy as forms of wisdom in the world, as is clear from his accounts of creation, the Eucharist, and even Mary, Bulgakov presents reality as constituted to make possible faithful response to what *God* ultimately carries out. Created wisdom is that which God has made in order to make receiving from God possible: it is God who creates with no resource other than his own being and draws the world out of nothingness; it is God's wisdom that encounters and elicits recipients of his body and blood; it is God's wisdom in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit that claims Mary and glorifies her. If the fundamental function of created wisdom is to allow creatures to receive God's grace, then perhaps Bulgakov's is not an account *completely* at odds with Reformed commitments, as classical Reformed theology affirms that there are means of grace. However, Barth's repudiation of conceiving of wisdom as an abstract principle *behind* Christ or *between* God and the world raises two points of concern with regard to Bulgakov's account.

First, Bulgakov's sophianic interpretation of Chalcedonian Christology presents Sophia as the principle of 'Divine-humanity' within God and, by extension, within the world, which is the metaphysical presupposition to the incarnate Christ, insofar as it functions as a kind of rational justification for his incarnation. From Barth's perspective, it is in the person and work of Christ that the wisdom of God is revealed, not in the sense that the incarnation points to a wisdom beyond and thus more fundamental than Jesus, but in the sense that it is within the living Nazarene himself that God's wisdom is located.

Second, Bulgakov's universalizing of the means of grace, embracing and permeating all of creation (while remaining most explicit and accessible in Ortho-

42 See Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, 427–429.

dox life), causes a Reformed Christian to wonder if the mediatory role of Christ is muffled by the creation he came to save. One wonders if the means have been transubstantiated to the point of compromising the specificity of the one who meets creatures through these means. This, indeed, is to question Bulgakov's self-professed panentheism, in sacramental language. Is the *Solus Christus* lost in Bulgakov's attempt at a theology of wisdom *solī Deo gloria*?

The thematization of such key Reformation doctrines in terms of wisdom is not a conversation that happened in evangelical theology's past—as the *solas* originally related to soteriological concerns. Bulgakov's robust vision thus invites Reformed theologians to learn their theology in a new accent, a sophiological one. More specifically, Reformed thinkers are invited to reflect on the broader sophiological question of how God relates to the world both redemptively *and* creatively.⁴³ At the same time, Barth's concerns remind Protestant theologians to do this in such a way that does not compromise the specificity of the God who creates and saves in Jesus Christ.

43 The Reformed theologian David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence* is a prime example of a work that, among other things, attempts to conceive of God's relating to the world in three distinct yet interrelated ways: creatively, redemptively, and by drawing to eschatological consummation. With primary reference to the biblical wisdom literature, Kelsey aims to give an account of God's creative relating to the world that is not bent under the narrative pressure of a history of salvation but is yet consonant with God's salvific mode of relating. See David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 2 vols. (Louisville: WJK, 2009), 1:122–131, 162, 188.