

## Building the House of Wisdom: Sergii Bulgakov – 150 Years After His Birth

Fribourg – September 2–4, 2021

International Conference hosted by the University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Paper proposal by Nikos Kouremenos, PhD (Volos Academy for Theological Studies)

**Title:** Is it all Greeks fault? Reconsidering the role of Byzantine Legacy in the “By the Walls of Kherson” of Sergii Bulgakov.

### Abstract

Although Bulgakov’s Sophiology or his intercommunion proposal represent largely discussed issues in Bulgakovian studies, few scholarly attention has been paid up to now to a less known text of the Russian religious thinker, “By the Walls of Kherson” (1922), which has been called, not inaptly, a “Roman-catholic temptation” in his spiritual and intellectual paths. Four years after his ordination and few months before his irrevocable exile from the ancestral land, while the consequences of the October Revolution were profoundly shattering Russia, fr. Sergii was temporarily settled in Crimea. It was there that he would compose the narrative of a multipart dialogue in which his troubled inner world and his critical assessment regarding the collapsing traditionalistic and Slavophilic, anti-Western, worldview are uneasily reflected. In parallel, the uncertainty of the emerging new reality led him to a reappraisal of the papal institution as a consistent factor for the smooth running of the Church. Even though repudiated soon after by Bulgakov himself, the work was conserved as a manuscript in his personal archive, since Leo Zander typewrote it in early 60’s, gaining a limited circulation. In 90’s, the work’s publication in Russian, firstly in the journal *Simvol*, and the following French and Italian translations contributed to its further dissemination and reception by a broader audience.

Some of the key topics of the text could be reassumed as following: The reception of the Christian faith *manu graeca* caused devastating effects on Russia’s spiritual development. Byzantine Christianity bequeathed to the new converts not only the Great Schism between East and West but also a controversial rhetoric alienating Russia from the universal Church. Furthermore, Byzantium handed down the political theory of caesaropapism and the subsequent Church’s subjection to the imperial authority. Dreadful consequence was the development of a *sui generis* ecclesial nationalism that led the Russian Church to an endless crisis. Source of all this evil, according to Bulgakov, was the Byzantine mentality implanted in the Russian Church. How much factual truth can be found in these approaches? Was Bulgakov’s anti-byzantine attitude original and to what extent differed from Soloviev’s one? How did Slavophiles assess the Byzantine influence upon Russian history and culture and to what degree did Bulgakov in the “Walls of Kherson” differentiate his approach? Did the rejection of the “catholic temptation” by Bulgakov led eventually to a reconsideration of his critiques towards the Byzantine heritage? These are some of the issues, I’ll attempt to approach in the present proposal, examining the extent of influence that Slavophiles or Soloviev exercised on Bulgakov’s negative perception of Byzantium.