

Building the House of Wisdom
Sergius Bulgakov – 150 Years After His Birth
Fribourg – September 2–4, 2021
Welcome address,
Dr. Pantelis Kalaitzidis,
Director, Volos Academy for Theological Studies

Your Grace Archbishop Emeritus Rowan Williams, Patron of the Conference,

Dear co-organizers of the Conference,

Dear colleagues and participants,

It is a great honor for me to welcome you to this extremely important gathering, on the occasion of the 150 years of Sergii Bulgakov's birth, organized by the Sergii Bulgakov Research Centre at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), in cooperation with the Orthodox Christian Studies Center of Fordham University (New York, USA), and the Volos Academy for Theological Studies (Greece) of which I am the director.

The recent rediscovery of Sergii Bulgakov's work has not come out of the blue. Being the founder and Dean of St. Sergius Institute in Paris, a priest of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the Russian Diaspora, a prolific thinker and politically active citizen, and a pioneer of ecumenism, as well as a widely recognized systematic author, Bulgakov soon destined to attract an unexpected, for an Orthodox theologian, but still increasing interest from the Anglophone scholarly world. With his extremely broad work (ranging from philosophy to economy and theology), opened new horizons, paved new paths in so many respects (such as anthropology, Church-state relationship and political theology, Christology and Pneumatology, eschatology etc.), without whom contemporary Orthodox theology and Church could not have or find the proper means to deal with the critical challenges our world is facing today (anthropological quests, political issues, economic and ecological crisis, etc.). Although often quite obscure in his writings, or flirting with condemned or marginalized figures of patristic tradition (with regards especially to Sophiology), as well as struggling with the demons and fears of his early unbelief (Marxism, atheism), Bulgakov, by experiencing the upheavals of his time (and especially the Bolshevik Revolution, and the two World Wars), never stopped to cope with the spirit of his era, in his efforts to find ways of giving witness, as a new Old Testament prophet, to a world which was living, and perhaps is still living in the darkness.

The above briefly described Bulgakov's agenda is not indifferent to our own vision in Volos. Since its foundation, Volos Academy has been pursuing a creative and critical discussion on the challenges the Orthodox Church is called to face today (e.g. the task and mission of Orthodox theology today, ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, the

theological dialogue with modernity/post-modernity, secularism, Church and State relations, liberal democracy, etc.). It also sought to contextualize the message of the Gospel in our time, to ensure the constructive role of Orthodoxy in the public sphere and to highlight the prophetic and eschatological dynamic of Tradition in the dialogue with the anthropological, political and other parameters of Western modernity. This is exactly why Volos Academy much welcome this event, to the degree that Bulgakov's theological vision covers many of the Volos's goals in our attempt to offer a timely Christian witness to the present secularized and globalized world.

The present well-structured to fit to Bulgakov's own agenda conference then emerged as a long awaited event, due to the urgent need of cultivating a serious, deep and overall scholarly reception and critical appreciation of Bulgakov's work, which remained for the most part of the last century either untranslated or understudied. Living again in a period of time where many of our challenges had been foreseen by him, I am confident that our eminent speakers, representing different Christian traditions and research fields, all of them specialists on Bulgakov's work, would have much to contribute to a new and constructive balanced reading of his legacy, beyond polemical anachronism and parochial condemnations, a reading useful not only to scholars, theologians or clergy but also to all those interested in the relevance of the saving word of the Gospel for our contemporary world.

With these thoughts I am happy to greet the Conference on behalf of the Volos Academy, wishing a fruitful dialogue and exchange, and expressing our sincere thanks to the co-organizers Professor Aristotle Papanikolaou, and especially Professor Barbara Hallensleben and Dr. Regula Zwahlen for the great amount of time and energy they put forth in view of the preparation and organization of this exceptional event.