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## “Sophia” Discourse from Antiquity to Christianity

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### Introduction

In ancient philosophy, the notion *Sophia* is derived from the ancient Greek word σοφία, which translation means “skill, knowledge, wisdom”. However, the mythological history of the development of this word’s meaning purports that the first it’s meaning was not the “wisdom, philosophical knowledge”, but the “skill, mastery, and prowess” in certain types of arts and crafts. In addition, archaic thinking has associated wisdom with women. S. Averinzev notes that “on the stable scheme of myth, which is widespread in different cultures of Eurasia, wisdom belongs to the virgin (or wisdom is a virgin)” (Averinzev S., 1999, p. 216).

First of all, it was realized in the Goddess-mother images. She embodied the universal world view’s attribute of all ancient cosmologies, which in each mythologically organized opposition anticipated the neutralizing element’s presents: the earth that arose from the chaos, and more broadly – the women’s creativity opposed the other side of the chaos – the sky associated with the male principle. Here rather than elsewhere was the confrontation between the good and the evil, the passive and the active, the positive and the negative, which, in modern philosophical language, was provided the sublation of these contradictions, the transition of opposites, and development.

The identification of the Mother Goddess one day with wildness (chaos), another day with culture (cosmos), is determined by the duality

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of archaic views on nature, which was presented at the same time as part of the space built by the gods and chaos. Chaos as the inert matter is the medium of the first substance, from which the ordered space is formed. Thus, water in the most mythologies appeared as a primary substance: Aphrodite is born from the spoudrift, Slavic Mokosh is associated with water and well, the Scythian goddess Api was depicted in springwater.

So, the idea of interaction and interpenetration of the male, orderly, ideal principle and of the female, chaotic, material, which in mystical communion neutralize the domination of one over the other and ensure the harmonic balance of the universe is already formed in the primeval archaic mythologies. This cosmological interpretation of the Mother Goddess image allows saying, according to S. Bulgakov, about the “maternal life’s bosom” and the “eternal feminine” is the “beginning of life” (Bulgakov S., 1994, p. 205).

Further evolution of the Mother Goddess image is associated with its personification in different world’s mythologies. Thus, in the Olympic mythology, Athena Pallas, Zeus’ daughter, his idea realized in action, was the incarnation of wisdom. She was honored as a goddess of wisdom, she is a virgin, patroness of virginhood, and, at the same time, motherhood is also her attribute. She is a votress, she guards cities, which she protects from the Zeus’ anger by the cover of her hands. Famous Solon writes about her: “Our generous patron, the virgin of Athena” (Zieliński T., 1920, p. 84). In Homer’s texts, Athena is associated with the construction and ordering of the world, performing the functions of the artist and the mistress (Homer, 1968, p. 214).

However, the most interesting in the context of our paper is the correlation of Athena to the presiding olympic deity. Born from the Zeus’ head, she is his mind, his will, his alter ego. She shares the magic aegis of her father – she, like him, is the “aegis keeper”. A. Losev points out, that she is “equivalent to Zeus” (Losev A., 1953, p. 53). So, because she is the embodiment of wisdom, she is precisely the wisdom of the presiding deity.

Plato, considering Athena as the embodiment of Zeus’ wisdom, proves the need to call her “God’s wisdom”. As we see, the pagan philosopher first comes to the phrase, which in content can be identified with the biblical “Wisdom of God”. Apparently, that was grounds for the famous sophiologist P. Florensky to call Plato “the Christian before Christ” (Florensky P., 1914, p. 5).

Ancient philosophy gave its own understanding of *Sophia-wisdom*, which corresponded to the ideas of ancient Greek thinkers, reflected the whole way of explaining the world in antiquity. Rational interpretations of wisdom completed the myth about Athena – the goddess of wisdom. If

the complete perception of the subject and object was the attribute of mythological consciousness, then, according to F. Kessidi, "rational knowledge is born from the moment of the distinction between the subjective and objective understanding of things" (Kessidi F., 1988, p. 213).

With the transition from myth to logos, the inner meaning of the *sophia* is revealed and its immanence to the world is justified. V. Toporov notes that Greek philosophy began to understand *sophia* as a "focus on itself, which represents in the ability inherent only to her, to think of itself" (Toporov V., 1973, p. 47). The philosophical schools of Platonism, Gnosticism, and Neoplatonism developed of the *sophia's* problematic in this context the most successfully.

Plato set out his understanding of *Sophia* as wisdom in recent philosophical writings (Plato, 1972, p. 470–502). For him, wisdom was the highest virtue, it was associated with reason, knowledge, mastery of which was the utmost well-doer. The basis of such high knowledge, according to Plato, is the science of numbers: a person can become wise only if he/she knows the number. No one can get "the true vision of fair, beautiful, good" without knowing the number. Should be recalled the goodness in Plato's works is immanent. It is the cause of all focused on itself.

Such representations formed the basis of the number's doctrine as the first principle of the idea. A. Losev notes that "the philosophy of Plato, reaching the culmination, ends with the doctrine of eternal and divine ideas as numbers. True philosophical wisdom is wisdom based on numbers" (Losev A., 1972, p. 638). Thus, for Plato, the *sophia* was a word that meant wisdom, the highest manifestation of which was the science of numbers.

In the Gnostics' doctrine, the knowledge was interpreted as a revelation leading to the gnosis, and the *sophia* becomes a mythological character and therefore morphs into *Sophia*. Gnosticism tends to represent a religion as a philosophy, and a philosophy – as a religion, and for this reason, their philosophy, according to A. Losev, becomes a reflective mythology (Losev A., 1991, p. 178–187). This enables the Gnostics to understand *Sophia* as animate, spiritual, as one that is most closely approximated to the world of all eons of the divine *pleroma*. This is precisely why *Sophia* begins the cosmogonic process, and "gives birth to a passion for understanding the Father's adoration" and "it becomes the reason for her falling out from the *pleroma* and the origin of the world" (Losev A., 1991, p. 196).

*Sophia* in Valentinus' doctrine, one of the most famous representatives of Gnosticism, is the last of the eons that constitute the divine *pleroma* (Posnov M., 1997, p. 149–201). She (*Sophia*) is the cause of the world's emergence, which arose as a result of her attempts to disturb the divine

subordination. As a result of her fall, *Sophia* comes out from the *pleroma*, but remains at the same time in a constant desire to return there again. Her weep for the *pleroma* materialized into the sky, earth, and people from whom the Gnostics emerged: salvation is eternally waiting only for Gnostics. "In the end, – observes A. Losev, – *Sophia*, together with the Gnostics and with the help of Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent with the news of the future remission of *Sophia*, returns to the *pleroma*, and the material world created from *Sophia's* sadness burns in the fire. The purpose of the history of the world – the remission of *Sophia* – achieved, and the world's history has come to the end" (Losev A., 1991, p. 171).

As we see, Valentinus creates a difficult historiosophical concept. According to it, *Sophia* forms the thought about the world from herself. She also generates the world from herself. Valentinus explains that the reason for this *Sophia's* creativity is in her pride and, consequently, in her protest against the last place in the *pleroma*. Separating from it, *Sophia* gives birth to a son – *Yaldabaoth*, who avowedly makes around the evil. He declares himself the one God in the world and curdles *Sophia's* blood. Therefore, trying to take off his guilt, she decides to persuade her son to give to human a spirit of divine life. Because of it *Yaldabaoth* loses this spirit and turns into the complete evil. For the final making satisfaction for her sins, *Sophia* is obligated to the human whom she brings to the divine *pleroma* through Jesus Christ. *Sophia* returns to home in the form of human souls saved by her.

Thus, on the basis of the Valentinus' concept, we can note that the Gnostic mythology, which absorbed both pagan and Christian motives, tried to revive, to make the abstract and rational space of the ancient classics more humane, dependent on human, from human's divine spirit. At the same time, such a desire of the Gnostics, despite their disagreement and even warfare with Christianity, combined these two trends in the fact that both doctrines passed the center of their attention towards the human's inner world.

That is why the Gnostics' understanding of wisdom represented in the myth – *Sophia* in this doctrine was animate, spiritual, she also had human qualities. With this mythological background, *Sophia* in the Gnostics doctrine opposed the abstract numerical wisdom of ancient philosophy. The place of *Sophia* in the hierarchy of divine being and her central role in the creation of the world testify to the importance that the Gnostics provided to resolve the contradictions between knowledge and way of life, the contradictions that appeared in Plato's system of objective idealism between the world of ideas and the world of things. Despite the fact that Gnosticism was acknowledged as Christianity as heresy, we note

that there is a significant relationship between them, namely: the first (Gnosticism), and the second (Christianity), on the background of the ancient understanding of human, that emphasize the importance of his/her inner personal world.

The reorientation of the human's attention from the external to the inner side of life at the time of early Christianity is reflected in the Neoplatonists' doctrine of the One (Plotinus) (Plotinus, 1995, p. 223–259). Plotinus understood, as A. Losev notes, that "an ideal and eternal archetype of everything that has its own consciousness and reigns over all" (Losev A., 1991, p. 399). For Plotinus, there is also "the intelligent attribute of reason in itself" (Losev A., 1991, p. 400), so the gods in his doctrine become representatives of the *sophia* being. However, in spite of its ideality, it can also act outside the ideal sphere. Therefore, this "creative-material, but at its basis – still ideally-minded and therefore internal, intelligent, or, more precisely, the substantial sphere Plotinus calls *sophia*", emphasizes A. Losev (Losev A., 1991, p. 399).

Developing the *sophia* being doctrine, Plotinus based his understanding of *sophia* (like the attribute) "on the identity and mutual influence of the ideal and the real", on the concept of "local", heavenly, perfect *Sophia* and "from around here", earthly, material *sophia*.

Following the history of the *sophia* concept in ancient philosophy, it can be that if the Gnostics created the mythological image of *Sophia* (the Greek word becomes the name), then in Neoplatonism, this word turns into a philosophical term, and therefore it can be speaking of a *sophia* doctrine – a *sophiology*. Plato monumentally responds to what is wisdom, and Plotinus speaks of the manifestations of wisdom in the ideal and real world.

Christianity, in contrast to the ancient understanding of *Sophia*, which is not a personality, is inherent in the personal understanding of *Sophia*. The doctrine of "*Sophia*, the Wisdom of God" is represented in the *Book of Scripture of the Old and New Testaments*. As P. Florensky notes: "The idea of the world-preaching *Sophia*-Wisdom, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Church in its heavenly aspect or the God's Kingdom, the Perfect Personality of the Creation, or the Guardian-Angel, is... – this idea is abundant in all the Scriptures and in the Fathers' of the Church papers" (Florensky P., 1990, p. 332).

In the *Proverbs of Solomon Book*, the first nine chapters represent a treatise on the Wisdom of God, the all-wise way of life. According to the Eastern tradition, Wisdom is personified, and it is characterized not like quality but like a person capable of speaking. There are several such speeches conducted on behalf of Wisdom. For the first time Wisdom appe-

ars in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter in verse 20: *Wisdom calls out in the street, she lifts her voice in the square, in the main concourse she cries aloud, at the city gates she makes her speech* (Proverbs 1: 20, 21). All this is written in the form of Jewish poetry, and this poetic form in some sense covers up the hidden meaning of these words. But wisdom acquires here an essential, not allegorical meaning, finding confirmation in other places of *Proverbs of Solomon*. Thus, in chapter 3 it is stated: *By wisdom, the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge, the watery depths were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew* (Proverbs 3: 19, 20).

The eighth chapter, after several previous practical teachings, begins with the 2<sup>nd</sup> speech of Wisdom: *Does not wisdom call out, and understanding raise her voice? On the heights overlooking the road, at the crossroads, she takes her stand! Beside the gates to the city, at the entrances, she cries out...* (Proverbs 8: 1-3). The analysis of the chapter's contents shows that the language of Wisdom develops in the spirit of other speeches: *I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion* (Proverbs 8: 12), etc. And again – the practical morality and teaching that, in the Eastern tradition, is carried out in an allegorical form when suddenly, without any preparation, words enter to the general text: *The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His work, before His deeds of old. From everlasting I was established, from the beginning, before the earth began* (Proverbs 8: 22) – and to verse 32, when again everything goes in the form of the usual lesson: *And so, my children, listen to me* (Proverbs 8: 32).

At the same time, the words – “beginning”, “I was born”, “I was a master at him”, have such an overall impression, which in no way gives them the opportunity to interpret them only allegorically. Even the poetic understanding of them contains a different meaning. In general, all in *Proverbs of Solomon* gives more confidence to talk about wisdom in its essential form and predetermines some intuition in the entire formulation of the question, when the words do not refer to quality, but they say about the person. S. Averinzev was writing on this subject that the essence of the biblical Wisdom of God “is carried out in an incomparably greater sensuality, touching, intimacy” which radically distinguish “Old Testamentum’s personalism” from “ancient intellectualism” (Averinzev S., 1999, p. 220).

So, Wisdom as the original, timeless wisdom is only God’s attribute. As for the human, since the times of the fall of the ancestors, it regrets people, saves and protects them. The human can get wisdom. *Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding* (Proverbs 3:13).

Thus, the acquisition of reason becomes the task of human: it is the necessary condition for receiving the gift of wisdom from God that is the life.

In non-canonical books of the *Old Testamentum*, *Sophia* is interpreted as *the breath of the God's power and the pure pouring of the Almighty's glory* (The Wisdom of Solomon, 7:25), which came out of the *Divinity's mouth* (The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, 24:3).

In the *New Testamentum*, the evangelist Luke reads: *...the wisdom of God said: 'I will send them prophets and apostles...'* (Luke 11: 49). We find a similar text in Matthew Gospeller (Matthew 23: 34). According to Luke, Wisdom speaks of itself in the First Person, and according to Matthew, Christ says these words, but such a direct identification by the gossellers of Wisdom with the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is not indisputable, because Wisdom speaks of itself as the God's Word. The Word's doctrine is found in the *Gospel According to John*, in the *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, "God's Wisdom" is mentioned in the explicit christological context (1 Corinthians 1: 24).

In theology, from the Christianity's first centuries, the *sophiology* is also closely intertwined with Christology. In Origen's works, *Sophia*, on the one hand, is identified with the world of Platonic ideas, first-forms, logos, which, according to Platon's *Timaeus* (Plato, 1972, p. 455–541), is helped to demiurge in the process of the cosmos' creation. On the other hand, this intelligible cosmos appears in Origen's doctrine as a person, like the face of Jesus Christ, as the Logos. Athanasius the Great and Tertullian also compare *Sophia* with the Son of God as the second hypostasis of the Trinity. Sophiological motifs can be found in the teachings of such church parents as Gregory the Theologian, Saint John of Damascus, Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Augustine of Hippo, etc. (Florensky P., 1990, p. 319–393), the essence of which can be defined by the phrase of Maximus the Confessor: "For unity with God, we have no other mediator except Wisdom" (Maximus the Confessor, 1993, p. 225).

However, eastern and western theology does not have the developed *Sophia* doctrine. Here, the vision of *Sophia* as a mystically understood church or the doctrine is considered in the perspective of the Mariology dominates. Thus, the theoretical understanding of *Sophia's* image, the amount of attention given to it in theology, does not correspond to the place and meaning of this image, which it occupies in religious practice, temple architecture.

The main Christian church of Constantinople is dedicated to *Sophia*, the Wisdom of God. In Kievan Rus, the main church of the capital is the St. Sophia Cathedral. There is also known the rich *Sophia's* iconography, the role of *Sophia* in the liturgy is very important too. Thus, we can note

that the lack of theoretical insights of *Sophia's* image in philology, philosophy, and theology paradoxically bordered by its extensive use on the spiritual and moral level.

L. Zander writes that *Sophia* is a common name for a variety of subject that is very different from each other. But they all correspond to the same question by this name: the relation of transcendental and immanent, worldly and heavenly, God, world, and human. According to the researcher, sophiological structures cannot be formed on the statement's of reasons basis. They are based on irrational, mystical things, and require the revelation of existential experiences in which *Sophia's* orderliness, beauty and, at the same time, mystery inherent to the world around opens (Zander L., 1948).

The *Sophia* doctrine is found in *Kabbalah*. It comes from the idea of the inexpressible Deity which, being beyond any definition can be called the *Ein Sof* (or *Eyn Sof*) – Nothing. Nothing manifests itself in the world through the light perceived by the mind and creates divine rays, which constitute the basic forms of being, or 32 ways of wisdom. *Kabbalah* describes three types of wisdom that hierarchically correlate among themselves: the *Ein Sof* – the wisdom of the closed Nothing, the *keter* – is deeply enclosed wisdom, but it can be revealed, the wisdom of God, and the *khokma* – the mysterious wisdom that is the principle of all earthly wisdom.

*Sophiology* is developed in medieval mysticism – in works of Meister Eckhart, I. Tauler, H. Suso, and later J. Böhme, E. Swedenborg, D. Por-dage. In their writings, they raised a wide range of problems: from natural philosophy and ethics to the theory of language and cosmogony. The papers of these authors are sufficiently fragmentary, full of metaphors, allegories, and symbols. Key points in them are the doctrine of Wisdom, which is associated with *Sophia*, the Wisdom of God. S. Averinzev notes that their “mystical concept of ‘*Sophia*’ contains in itself the openness of creations before the Creator, and also the grace of the Creator to his creation” (Averinzev S., 1995, p. 8).

The most striking embodiment of this understanding of *Sophia* was the J. Böhme's mystic. In his concept, wisdom appears in the form of Heavenly *Sophia*, which was Adam's spiritual bride to his fall. Subsequently, *Sophia* plays the role of a chain between the philosophical interaction “yes” and “no”, takes place in the middle between heaven and earth, the Deity and the world, created and uncreated, ensures the process of self-disclosure of the Deity, His mirror, in which the Deity sees his reflection. “*Sophia* is, according to the Böhme's doctrine, – writes S. Bulgakov, – not the revelation, but the self-disclosure of the Deity, the moment of development in the Divinity himself. She is faceless and impersonal, as well

as Deity is impersonal in the Böhme's system" (Bulgakov S., 1994, p. 271). *Sophia* in the Böhme's doctrine is passively mirrored in relation to God, *Sophia* represents a certain transcendental scheme of the world, the principle of "spirit's embodiment" through which the Deity is understood. We can emphasize another important feature of J. Böhme's *Sophia*, namely: here, *Sophia* retains the first-forms of all creatures, and in the creatures provides the availability of *sophia's* schemes.

So, by analyzing the *sophia* discourse from antiquity to Christianity, we can note that in the history of the *sophia* problematics the following periods are distinguished: pre-Christian representations of antiquity; Gnostic sophiological constructs; Christian *sophiology*, the elements of which are found in the fathers' and teachers' of the church papers, and also medieval mysticism and the *sophiology* doctrine of Russian philosophy of unitotality. The first period of the *Sophia* doctrine's development is inherent in the natural philosophy's theme of understanding the world as the integration. The main theme of the second and third periods was the anthropological doctrine of the relationship between nature and the absolute. The main theme of medieval mysticism and the "philosophy's of unitotality" *sophiology* is the existence of God in its close association with the world.

## DOKTRYNA „SOFII” OD STAROŻYTNOŚCI DO CHRZEŚCIJAŃSTWA

### (STRESZCZENIE)

Doktryna „Sofii” rozwinęła się w europejskiej twórczości filozoficznej i religijnej w okresie przedchrześcijańskim (Sokrates, Parmenides, Platon). Była reprezentowana w gnostycyzmie (Valentinus) i neoplatonizmie (Plotinus), w pismach Ojców Kościoła (Atanazy Wielki, Grzegorz z Nyssy, Macariusz Wielki, Grzegorz Teolog), u myślicieli prawosławnych (Hilarion, Klim Smoliatich). Doktryna „Sofii” jako Mądrości Bożej jest zawarta także w Biblii, zwłaszcza Księdze Przysłów, a także w Mądrości Salomona i Mądrości Syracha. „Sofia” jest opisana ponadto w Kabale jako tajemnicza mądrość. Znalazła również swoje odzwierciedlenie w architekturze świątynnej i ikonografii Wschodu prawosławnego, gdzie jest wykorzystywana do ukazania znaczenia mądrości w życiu duchowym i moralnym człowieka. Doktryna „Sofii” została ponadto wyłożona systematycznie w średniowiecznym i nowożytnym mistycyzmie (M. Eckhart, J. Böhme, E. Swedenborg), dla której to wykładni ukuto określenie *sofiologia*, oraz w tzw. filozofii jednostronności (V. Sołowjow, S. Bulhakow, P. Florensky). We wszystkich okresach rozwoju refleksji nad „Sofią” zawsze pojawiają się takie zagadnienia, jak: kwestia integralności rzeczywistości, relacja między naturą a Absolutem czy więzi między człowiekiem a Stwórcą.

## “SOPHIA” DISCOURSE FROM ANTIQUITY TO CHRISTIANITY

### (SUMMARY)

Sophia doctrine was evolved in European philosophical and religious creativity and was developed in the pre-Christian period (Socrates, Parmenides, Plato), was represented in Gnosticism (Valentinus) and Neoplatonism (Plotinus), in the writings of prominent theorists of Christianity – the Fathers of the Church (Athanasius the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Macarius the Great, Gregory the Theologian), the ancient teachers of Christianity (Hilarion, Klim Smoliatic). The doctrine of Sophia, The Wisdom of God is shown in the Proverbs of Solomon Biblical Book, and also in the non-canonical books of the Old Testamentum – Solomon’s Wisdom and the Jesus’ the son of Syrah Wisdom. The Sophia doctrine as mysterious wisdom is described in Kabbalah. It was also reflected in the temple architecture and iconography of the Orthodox East, in the wider use of it at the spiritual and moral level. This doctrine has got a systematic form represented by the doctrine of sophiology in medieval mysticism (M. Eckhart, J. Böhme, E. Swedenborg), and “philosophy of unitotality” (V. Solovyov, S. Bulgakov, P. Florensky). These periods of the Sophia doctrine’s development are inherent in such ideas as a natural philosophy’s theme of understanding the world as the integration, anthropological doctrine of the relationship between nature and the absolute, the existence of God in its close association with the world.

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