This article examines the Russian Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov’s understanding of Sophia for the insights it may bring to recent notions of reality, particularly understood through physicist David Bohm’s quantum theory. I am not proposing a science versus religion debate; rather, I am comparing the respective metaphysics of a theologian and a physicist. For Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), Sophia is the ground of all existence. She is God’s divine nature, holding all the forms of mind and matter within an undivided wholeness. Within this wholeness, the experiential mode for humanity is a creaturely form of becoming. Life is in evolution and is measured as a positive process in time with the goal of revealing all possible modes of God’s love within the created world. Increasingly, scientific theories have also been advanced to describe the unity and order of existence, and the relationship between matter and consciousness. While encompassing notions of time and change, David Bohm’s quantum theory of the implicate order also suggests that reality is an undivided wholeness. He proposes that humanity’s problematic and destructive sense of separation and otherness is a result of the failure to perceive this reality. This paper looks at the interface between Bulgakov and Bohm, and suggests that to describe the implicate order as Sophian is to add a personal and purposeful dimension to our understanding of reality. Bohm’s unfolding/enfolding universe becomes a becoming process in time, a part of an evolution of consciousness. In Sophia, the fragmentary nature of current consciousness is purposeful. I suggest that the move towards wholeness is not possible without the sense of disintegration that humanity currently experiences.

In holding a Bulgakov-Bohm dialogue, I hope to offer a sense of meaning and purpose in a world that can be bewildering. In turn, a sense of purpose in our lives is vital if we are to be the effective agents for change that the world needs. Both theories affirm the individual’s ability – and responsibility – to effect change, and to work towards wholeness and healing. The creaturely Sophia provides us with the explicit means to do so, in our relationship with the material world, the explicate order. We can learn to increase our consciousness of wholeness so that we cease to experience, and therefore treat, the world as fragmentary. Both Bohm and Bulgakov have useful contributions to make to this learning. It should be noted that both Bohm and Bulgakov are
not mainstream thinkers and both the theory of the implicate order and the
type of Sophia have been contested and considered unorthodox within their
respective fields. More than fifty years after his death, Bulgakov’s work is
now attracting more widespread interest and acceptance, and perhaps it will
take that long for the metanarrative of Bohm’s physics to be appreciated. It is
conceivably their mutual ability to think outside the square that allows the
comparison I propose! I will begin by giving a short précis of Bohm’s quan-
tum theory, with particular emphasis on its basis in oneness, on the nature of
time and motion, and the relationship between matter and consciousness. I
will then compare these three areas within the context of Bulgakov’s Sophia,
illustrating their similarities and differences.

David Bohm (1917-1994) was one of the foremost theoretical physicists of
his time. His lifelong quest was to understand consciousness and reality within
a principle of wholeness. I am not a physicist and I am not an expert on the
mathematical dimensions of Bohm’s theory. However, Bohm wrote also for
the philosopher and for the lay person as he brought both mind and matter into
a new concept of consciousness and reality, and it is his metaphysical ap-
proach to quantum theory that I summarize here. Bohm sought to understand
“the nature of reality in general and of consciousness in particular as a coher-
ent whole, which is never static or complete but which is in an unending proc-
ess of movement and unfoldment.” Bohm’s work challenges the divided,
atomistic approach of science that tries to understand the world by breaking it
down into its smallest particles. He believes that science in general and phys-
ic in particular “have become much more positivist and empiricist in charac-
ter” than in the pioneering days of Niels Bohr, Wolfgang Pauli, and others. In
the new generation of physicists Bohm sees a tendency “to deny the scientific
significance of the implications of wholeness in the quantum theory that were
so strongly perceived by its founders.” He also challenges the subject/object
distinction that arises from such empirical investigation. The assumption in
scientific investigation is that the one who thinks (the ego) is completely sepa-
rate from and independent of the reality that one is thinking about. This dis-
tinction has been challenged from many post-modern directions but, despite

1. Two articles which examine the controversy surrounding Bulgakov’s Sophian theory are
Antoine Arjakovsky, The Sophiology of Father Sergius Bulgakov and Contemporary Western
(accessed February 22, 2006); Winston F. Crum, “Sergius N. Bulgakov: From Marxism to
Sophiology,” St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 27, no. 1 (1983). For a summary of Bohm’s
reception over the course of his career within the scientific community, see Robert John Russell,
“The Physics of David Bohm and Its Relevance to Philosophy and Theology,” Zygon 20, no. 2
(1985).

2. David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,

3. David Bohm, “Fragmentation and Wholeness in Religion and in Science,” Zygon 20, no. 2

4. Ibid.