
THE FIRST FORMS OF SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING OF ORTHODOXY AND THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF VLADIMIR SOLOVYOV

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Abstract

Throughout the history of Russia the attitude towards Catholicism was ambiguous, often Catholicism was perceived as alien and hostile to Orthodoxy. Vladimir Solovyov changes the attitude to Catholicism. In an effort to create a single Universal Church as the ideal form of Church polity, the whole Christian world should put aside their differences and unite in a single brotherly love. The Russian people should reconcile the Orthodox East and the Catholic West, stop anti-Christianity struggle in terms of Solovyov – this is the conciliatory mission of Russian people.

Keywords: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Universal Church, unity

1. Introduction

The problem of scientific overcoming of ‘hyper-critical’ attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church from a number of Russian authors found the bright reflection in the pioneer work of the Russian religious thinker Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900) [1]. Scientific activities of Solovyov falls on the last quarter of the XIXth century, during the reign of Emperors Alexander II, Alexander III and Nicholas II, when in the country there was a fierce debate about Russia’s place in the civilized world, the relations between Orthodoxy, Greek-Eastern Church and Catholicism, the status of religion in society and national identity between the ‘Slavophiles’ and ‘Zapadnichestvo’ (Westerners). Solovyov made an attempt to create for the Russian educated classes a new conceptual language for describing and understanding Catholicism. He proved the injustice of a number of common charges against Catholicism and the failure of some interpretations, which today remains relevant. Russian history knows periods of violent conflict and even military conflicts with the ‘Latins’, and various ‘unifying projects’, for example, the attempt of Alexander I to proclaim

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the mystical 'unity of the Christian people' from Austria, Prussia and Russia in the frames of the 'act of the Holy Alliance' in 1815. But on the 'household level' and in some publications there are still a number of 'negative clichés' and prejudice against Catholicism.

2. 'West' and 'East' in the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov

Vladimir Solovyov believed that the way we understand the 'religious past', will inevitably impact on the way this basis will develop a 'religious future', because only highlighting the positive in the past, we will be able to overcome the 'negative moment' in the future. To rethink everything knowing the historical contradictions, stopping useless criticism and biased accusations, that only can lead us all to a positive future, to a new world, to freer and richer spiritual forces.

For a number of well-known historical reasons, Russian authors rarely treated impartially, in the past and treat today, Catholicism, believing that "Catholicism was always the worst enemy for our people and our Church", but according to Solovyov, "that's why we have to be fair to it" [2]. Speaking of 'justice', he does not call to justify Catholicism, as some of 'filokatoliks' have done, claiming it as the 'ideal Church' or, on the contrary, as their opponents understood it as 'alien enemy forces', but he tries to search considering ways of mankind to the 'true Christianity' unprejudicedly, objectively and scientifically. Under the words 'East' and Orthodoxy he means Church of Russia (which is referred in the XIXth century as Greek-Eastern Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian Church, 'Russian Orthodox Catholic Church', 'Greco-Russian Church', 'Orthodox Greco-Russian Church', 'the Russian Orthodox Church of the East', etc.). Vladimir Solovyov addresses these issues in the context of the wider European debate caused by the conservative and enforcement decisions of the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), where 'threats' were rated as 'secular' and 'contemporary' alternative to Church tradition and were condemned.

The Catholic Church has declared its right to criticize Vladimir Solovyov's culture of the European secular elite, because it released itself from commitment to the ideals of the Church. It substituted the moral and religious principles of material well-being and wealth. Unlike the West, where the influential voice of the Church was traditionally subordinate to the power of emperors, the Christian Church was not able to create an organic Christian culture and to realize a Christian truth, which could be manifested in the establishment of "the whole of human society and in all its operations of the relations of the three principles of human beings, which is carried out in the person of Christ individually. This attitude, as we know, consists of free harmonization of the two lower principles (rational and material) to a higher divine through their voluntary submission to him not as a force but as good. For such a free submission of the lower principles to higher, so that they will come themselves to recognize the supreme principle as good, it is necessary that they have their own." [2, p. 167]

According to Solovyov, without autonomy and without the freedom of the Church community from the secular authorities, the Christian truth cannot be realized. But in the Eastern Church, unlike the Catholic Church, according to Vladimir Solovyov, freedom is absent. Most people come to the bosom of the Orthodox Church not alone, not driven by their personal desire and will, but by state coercion and cultural child baptism. The result was that “in Christian society, the human element turned out to be too weak and insufficient for a free and rational realization of the divine principle to the external reality, but as a result of this, material reality was outside of the divine principle, and the Christian consciousness was not free from a dualism between God and the world” [2, p. 167].

Slavophiles also saw the problem of coercion in the Orthodox Church. They thought that a considerable part of Russian society belonged to the Orthodox Church only outwardly, and with the assumption of religious and spiritual freedom, that “half Orthodox peasants will disappear in a split (schism of the Old Believers, very numerous, in spite of all the persecution), and half of high society will go to Catholicism” [2, p. 232]. Thus it was that the Orthodox Church was united only in appearance, while internally it was torn by contradictions that generated religious hatred, rather than becoming a sincere union of compatriots in the truth.

On one hand, “if any of the members of the Roman Catholic Church would deny the Filioque or ‘infallibilitatem ex cathedra’, he thereby shall be separated from the Church”. On the other hand, “we can openly deny imaginary Orthodox teachings of ‘a Patre solo’ and ‘de nullitate Romanei Pontificis’, staying in the lap of the Eastern Church”. In this connection, “before asking Catholics with any whatsoever requirements or suggestions, we need to define our own attitude to the controversial mandate (for us and not issues for them)” [3]. The Church arose and organically exists as a ‘community of the faithful’, in which context the ‘external unity’ of the internally split East Church community, according to Solovyov is fuelled by the energy of the total denial as ‘dominant’ (‘Police’) Church and Catholicism. Some overestimated Catholicism, especially in light of the recent split with the ‘Old Catholics’ after the First Vatican Council. Solovyov asks, “did the ‘Latins’ have a similar internal contradiction? Find them at least one slightest dogmatic assertion which was not based directly on the solution to one of them recognized by the Ecumenical Councils, or the decision of the pope ex cathedra, having, according to Catholic teaching, impeccable dogmatic authority. So, instead to dispute with ‘Latins’, not better for us to talk with each other before? After all, this is our house without a roof, and they have it, thank God, steel.” [4]

The desire of the Russian Church to get rid of the internal split with the help of the authority of state power and coercion, led to even greater fragmentation because the unity of the Church can be based only on love and mutual respect, but not on violence. Spiritual power, according to Solovyov, cannot be the principle and purpose because Christ is the principle and purpose - the kingdom of God. Spiritual power is a means to achieve the goal of the

kingdom of God on Earth, and should no be used for any other purposes, and other purposes.

In spite of the lack of practical links between parts of the Orthodox Church, in spite of the lack of unity and order in the organization, despite the stillness and inactivity, the Eastern Church, however, from the point of view of Vladimir Solovyov, retained a certain 'strength of the religious', which is expressed in the unity of its foundations and in preserving their religious peculiarities. Catholicism, in spite of its inner spiritual integrity, could not 'disassemble the Christian East by parts' by creating a 'union' with the various communities of 'Eastern Rite', because the Orthodox Church is a necessary part of the Universal Church. Being a mandatory element in the one Universal Church, the Orthodox does not forget their responsibilities in relation to the Universal Church. A basic principle of Orthodoxy is inviolability of the object of worship and immutability of its divine basis. But this, according to Solovyov, is not enough. Drawing on the basis of the divine, it is necessary to carry out the truth of Christ: "We have to take care that, on the basis of grace, Church building was erected - truly Christian and non-western and eastern, a universal divine-human culture. And in the case of this building, on the human side, must be not merely the preservation of the Church's truth, but also the organization of the Church's activities. Such organization is not possible without the strict order and without a strong government. Authority of the Church must be a strong domestic power, and at the same time, it should produce a powerful effect on the outside world. To have inner strength, ecclesiastical authority should be unified in order to be active in the outside world - it must be free from any external authority and coercion, it must be absolutely independent." [5]

The problem of the Orthodox East, according to Solovyov, is that it is Orthodox in Theology but not Orthodox in life and by taking the God-man Christ, it forgot about the divine-human significance of the Church. Orthodoxy understands the Church only as a relic given from above. Christian truth, represented by the Church from the Orthodox perspective, was before humanity and above humanity, and we forget that true Christianity is an union of God and humanity, that has a divine-human nature. The Church, according to Vladimir Solovyov, cannot be only over us, cannot be exclusively the object of worship and veneration, it also must be in humanity and for humanity. It is not only a shrine, but also the power and freedom - this trinity and it is the true life of the Church. Solovyov writes: "To talk about religious freedom, rejecting the shrine of Church tradition and the authority of the spiritual power is to build a building without a crown base and without walls. But, on the other hand, hold fast the foundation and the beginning of true religion in its tradition, forgetting its purpose - the free divine-human communication and the main tool for this purpose - the organization of spiritual power - which means rejoicing strength foundation, to abandon building walls and roof. Christian East was found in this latter position - on the very strong basis, but without walls and ceilings - thanks to its one-sided understanding of the Church." [6]

Sergey Troubetzkoy said that “Solovyov, in the same way as Aksakov, sees the going out of the abnormal situation of the Russian Church in a radical reorganization of the Church administration. In this case, Aksakov imagined an impending reform as a gradual decentralization of Church government, as the development of local parish governments. Solovyov, on the contrary believes that the democratic principle is contrary the hierarchical principle, that the reform of the local Church administration is feasible only in conjunction of Churches - Eastern and Western. Meanwhile, apparently only that Catholicism of Solovyov, which is expected by him as the Catholicism of the future – where the Pope is behind, the Russian Tsar is in the middle and the free prophet is ahead - is no more than a bloodless ghost, in which there is absolutely nothing threatening.” [7]

So, the future appears, from the point of view of Solovyov as ‘Unity’ in the universal brotherhood, which is impossible without ‘universal sonship’: “Before we are united in freedom, we should be united in obedience. To rise to the universal brotherhood the nations, states and rulers should at first obey the ‘universal sonship’, by recognizing the moral authority of a common father. Forgetting those feelings that people should feel about the religious past of mankind, would be a very bad omen for its future. When you sow wickedness, you will not reap far, not brotherhood.” [8]

In other words, the activity of the ‘Universal Church’ - is the unity of the three major forces: the ‘High Priest’, who embodies the true past of mankind; the ‘Secular authority of the sovereign’, representing the present, and ‘The Prophet’ who is the conductor to the ideal future. Only the harmoniously coordinated activity of these three forces gives us the opportunity to achieve ‘Unity’.

3. Spiritual mission of the Russian people

In the frame of a Russian Philosophy of history, Solovyov relentlessly pursued the idea of a sacrificed and conciliatory mission of the Russian people. In this regard, he set the goal for Russia to find a new moral position, riding it of the need to continue an anti-Christian struggle between the East and West and to put the great moral obligation on itself, both the East and West, reconciling them.

Solovyov, in the context of his religious worldview, thought that the highest point in the development of organization forms of humanity life is a compound of the state (the monarch or king), the spiritual (the high priest) and the prophetic (free prophet) power. The end of history is connected, by Solovyov, with development and combination of three powers: the priestly, royal and prophetic. However, Vladimir Solovyov imagined the specific socio-historical appearance of the triumvirate of ‘free theocracy’ as quite blurry. He placed particular emphasis on its moral and mystical aspects. Based on extensive historical and theological research, Solovyov concluded that the highest good and the true purpose of theocracy is in the perfect reciprocity of a divine free

connection - not in the fullness of power, but in the fullness of love. The utopian idea of connecting the monarchist (Russian absolutism), Roman Catholic (Western Europe, led by the Pope) and the prophetic power was obvious. Solovyov, at the end of his life, concluded that the project to establish a world of human community politically and religiously unified is not feasible.

Nikolay Lossky in his article 'Vladimir Solovyov and his successors in the Russian religious philosophy', emphasizes that the "establishment of the Christian culture and free theocracy requires an organic combination of positive spiritual principles of the East and the West. The first step on this path is the reunion of the Eastern Church, which has the wealth of mystical contemplation, with the Western Church, which created super-people's spiritual authority which is independent of the state. A combination of a reunited Church with the political power of the state, submitting to the moral strength of the authority of the Church, would be the basis of universal theocracy." [9] The mission of Russian people, according to Solovyov, is to initiate this task. In fact, the ideal of the Russian people has a religious nature. It is expressed in the idea of 'Holy Russia' - the ability to combine the Eastern principles with Western ones in the Russian people was historically proved through the success of Peter the Great's reforms; the capacity for national self-denial - necessary to recognize the Pope as the supreme pontiff of the universal Church - is inherent to the Russian people, as can be seen from the history of calling the Vikings. Solovyov himself expresses this property of the Russian people, arguing that it is better to abandon patriotism and developing the doctrine that the cultural vocation of a great nation is not a privilege, not domination, but service to other people and all humanity.

L. Bessonova, considering the principle of unity in the philosophy of history of Vladimir Solovyov, notes that "Christianity in his opinion should be a religion that will lead to the formation of a Christian state. Backed by the commandments of Christ, the same State in the field of international relations will promote peace. To paraphrase Christ's commandment of love to one's neighbour - 'Love all other peoples as your own'". [10]

The philosopher noted that 'three forces' develop human society. The first seeks to subjugate humanity in all spheres and at all stages of its life to one supreme entity. The other, quite the opposite, breaks the stronghold of the unity to give freedom to private forms of life, liberty, the face of its activities are universal selfishness and anarchy, the multiplicity of individual units without any internal connection. Both forces are limited. The first excludes a multiplicity free; the second, negative attitudes toward unity. If these two forces are not opposed by a third, then the story would have turned into a mechanism driven by these opposing forces. The third, Power, gives a positive content to the first two. First mitigating the two extremes, second, it reconciles a unity with the multiplicity of private forms and elements, creating thus an universal common to all mankind.

In the modern world the co-existence of these three forces is manifested in the Muslim East, Western civilization and the Slavic world. The first two – the Muslim East and Western civilization have exhausted themselves, falling into

the Rock of the Dead unity, into a universal selfishness and anarchy. Solovyov thought that the first two forces led nations subservient to them, to spiritual death and decay. Or ...is this the end of history? – impossible, according to the law of progress. Solovyov believed that it will inevitably be the third force, which only Slavic and Russian peoples can carry.

Thus, Solovyov devotes a special and important place to Russian peoples in the movement of mankind to unity and ‘God-manhood’. Why did the philosopher set up such hope for Russia and the Russian people?

According to Vladimir Solovyov, a characteristic feature of the Russian people is not religion, as the Slavophiles have thought, but a strong state organization established for specific historical reasons. Russia experienced a turbulent history from the invasion of numerous conquerors and reflecting of such raids in strengthens the State. On the other hand, the ideals of the Russian people are of religious in nature, as is expressed in the idea of ‘Holy Russia’. The reforms of Peter the First have proved the ability of the Russian people to combine eastern culture with western culture. In addition, the Russian people have the unique ability of self-denial, which was manifested during the history of the Vikings. The cultural mission of a privileged nation, which he considered the Russian people to be, is not to dominate but to serve others.

Arguing against the Slavophiles, who believed Orthodoxy the most characteristic feature of the Russian people, Solovyov wrote that it is difficult to consider Orthodoxy so characteristically. Having suffered a split in the 17th century it did not restore unity until the 18th century. The Orthodox Church is subordinate to the State. Western Catholicism gained experience from centuries of cooperation with the State, while retaining their independence from it.

Thus, the trait of the Russian people for self-denial can help lead to the recognition of the Pope as the head of the so-called ‘Universal Church’. Vladimir Solovyov thought that the Catholic Church and the Russian Empire are forces capable of leading this global historical process. Without Western Europe, Russia can not contribute to the rise of all mankind, and therefore it is necessary for a union of Russian autocracy with the Catholic papacy. He dreamed of Russia becoming the universal Christian monarchy. At the same time he expressed concern that Russia has not yet decided. It has double vision, entrained in different directions by opposing forces ... Russia’s fate does not depend on Constantinople or something similar but the outcome of an internal moral struggle of ‘light and darkness’ in itself. Let Russia, at least without Constantinople, at least in its present limits, become a Christian kingdom in the full sense of the word - and then everything else, probably, will follow it.

4. Conclusion

The philosophy of Solovyov is a prime example of the attempts of Russian authors to find elements of the ‘Whole Truth’ in the split of mutually exclusive alternative confessional worldviews. We now live in a world where, on the one hand, there is a ‘meeting of Russia and the West’ on the global world

stage, but, on the other hand, almost every day we see the question about the combination of 'original' and 'universal' on that stage. Vladimir Solovyov made one of the first attempts to create a new conceptual language of understanding 'Catholicism' and 'West' as an integral part of the global culture, criticizing the failure of a number of unilateral interpretations that remains extant today.

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