

Anthropology of Salvation in Russian Medieval thought: «Nestyazhateli» and «Iosifyanie»

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Abstract: This article analyzes the anthropocentric aspects of Russian Orthodox thought. It is noted that the Russian traditional self-consciousness inherited the main religious and moral norms and values of Byzantium, such as contemplation, Hesychasm, careful preservation of dogmatic and ceremonial aspects of faith.

The authors of the article conclude that the central problem in Russian Orthodox thought is the problem of human justification, the problem of understanding human essence. Starting with the understanding of the problem of theodicy, Russian Orthodox thought gradually turned into its visibly formal opposite and became essentially a philosophy that proves the high creative purpose of man - a philosophy that justifies man. Thus, the humanistic, anthropocentric direction of the development of Russian religious philosophy is emphasized.

Also, turning to the analysis of the dispute between «Iosifyane» and «Nestyazhateli», the authors of the article identify two opposite conceptual approaches to the philosophical interpretation of the essence of man: «contemplative man» and «active man». The authors conclude that Russian state policy has been mostly «Iosifyanian», and the philosophy became a haven for «Nestyazhateli».

Keywords: Orthodox Christianity, Russian religious thinking, justification of man, «A contemplative man», «an active man».

INTRODUCTION

One thousand years ago a Kievan prince, Vladimir the First, later canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church as St Vladimir, carried out mass christening of the Kiev citizens. It took place in the year 988 AD, several decades before the leaders of the Churches of Rome and Constantinople anathematized each other.

One of the major reasons for this splitting of the formerly united Church into Catholic and Eastern Orthodox confessions was the dogmatic problem of *filioque* (Sicienski 2010). Eastern Orthodoxy rejected the Christological postulate of Western Christians, made as a supplement to the Apostolic Creed as early as in the VI century AD in Toledo that Jesus, the Son of God, was a similar source emanating the Holy Spirit as was God the Father. The point was that Greek-Byzantine theology placed a special accent on the human side of the dual divine and human nature of Jesus Christ. This circumstance predetermined the logic of the spiritual evolution of Russia, the greatest Orthodox country of the world that for several centuries

considered the religious and aesthetic norms of the Byzantine Empire as a standard of its development.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In the present article, the comparative historical, as well as phenomenological and hermeneutical methods were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having accepted Christianity later than many other European peoples Russians took from Byzantine exegesis such attitudes to Christian dogma and moral norms that in essential respects differed from those of Catholicism. The chief peculiarity of the Byzantine Orthodox system - contemplation, hesichasm, and the careful preservation of the dogmatic and ritual aspects of faith — was inherited by Russian traditional self-consciousness.

The Byzantines, concentrating on the contemplation of the truths of Christianity, saw in their immutability ideological confirmation of the stable and eternal nature of their social imperial existence. The Russians by natural means reproduced Christian norms in their original form preserved for them by the stagnant Byzantium, which became the subject of their national

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pride (Berdyayev 2008). As for the German and Frank successors to the Roman Empire, they adapted Christianity to the dynamics of the constant historic changes in Western Europe. Ancient Russia, an heiress of Byzantium, also joining in the turbulent epoch of formation of its state system was, on the contrary, firmly opposed to any adjustments of theology to suit changeable political ends.

This circumstance had obvious negative consequences: Orthodox conservatism often prevented the realization of the demands of Russian modernization. This was wrathfully stressed by Pyotr Tchaadayev in the XIX century (Chaadayev 2019). The positive side of this conservatism made Christian values being treated in Russia on an incomparably higher level than any actuality, higher than secular life in general. It was not that Christianity deigned to stoop to the practical life of man, — on the contrary, the man with a burden of his earthly cares was to rise to the height of the moral ideal of Christianity. That is why the ethic core of Christianity preserved by the perished Byzantium became a superior subject of a most sincere and serious attitude.

The problem of theodicy on which the theological, religious and, to some extent, idealistic philosophy used to be focused, is transformed in Orthodoxy into a problem of justification of man, where it is the problem of utmost importance. The peculiarity of Russian Orthodox thought is a startling humanization of the traditional apologetic construction. Russian Orthodox thought started from the comprehension of its central subject — theodicy, and gradually changed into its visibly formal opposite and became, in essence, a philosophy proving the high creative destination of man — a philosophy that justified man (Soloviev, 2020). This circumstance determined the humanist, anthropocentric direction of the development of Russian Orthodox philosophic idea reflecting the traditional vector of the people's self-consciousness.

It should be stressed that the justification of God and of Man in Orthodoxy is not syllogistic but rather intuitive. Russian Orthodox thought was crystallized in vindication of the ethnic and political integrity of the emerging state. It principally could not have reconciled itself to staying aloof and providing a too-rational explanation of any world-understanding (*Weltanschauung*) postulates. The peculiarity of the «Russian way» of explanation of the destination of God and man was defined by the readiness to sacrifice the human substance and human passion to secure the

truth. The necessity of sacrifice for the sake of the truth was then recognized by martyrs and ascetics. Deeply implanted in Russian Orthodox thought is the understanding of the inevitability of self-sacrifice in the process of discovering the truth of human existence, which is far more deserving than just intellectual effort or exemplary piety (Berdyayev 1927).

If the cost of this idea was so high, if the belief in God constantly dictated to man the need for self-renunciation, and in this sense could only be gained through a larger or smaller heroic deed, so necessarily grew the moral measure of man himself. Thus the Orthodox ideal of a human being is based on the recognition of his great capabilities, the best confirmation of which is the ability of man to fulfil the Commandment of self-denying love to move closer to God. Man and God became indivisible parts of the Russian world-understanding «formula». An adequate conceptual understanding of the whole Russian culture and the main contradiction of Russian traditional Orthodox way of thinking will depend on how correctly and exactly we determine this «formula».

If we recognize that the development of the society was contradictory; if we take as a general premise an assertion that as society develops, so develop its inner contradictions. In this case we cannot fail to recognize that the correlation of theodicy and the justification of man is nothing but a demonstration of the fundamental contradiction of Russia's life.

Let us turn to the famous argument between «Nestyazhateli» (non-possessors) and «Iosifyane». The two opposing parties hotly argued whether the Church should possess riches. The two sides were represented by the outstanding religious figures as St Nil Sorski (1433-1508) and Iosif Volotski (1439—1515) (Wood 2016). The polysemantic nature of their sharp polemics gave a strong impulse to a further development of the historic events resulting not only in a different understanding of principle of monastic property but even more in the radically different philosophic interpretation of the human essence.

Man, according to Nil Sorski, is, first and foremost, a contemplative being. His way is a way of mournful labour, his destiny is a heroic mental deed. He lives only using his own hands and that is why he is satisfied with only those things that are necessary. His aim is the struggle with passions and achievement of humbleness, he is introvertive, his way of thinking is reflective. His ideal is a moral self-perfection (Lilienfeld 1963).

In Iosif Volotski's views, man is, on the contrary, an active being. He achieves his aims by any means, even by violence. The grandeur of his spirit is for him indisputable only when it is supported by more essential things, i.e. power and wealth (Smith 2018). The ritual side of theology carries more weight than the hesychastic one.

Even in this brief attempt at comparing these two different concepts of man we are put before a serious metaphysical contradiction. «A contemplative man» and «an active man» - these are the conventional symbols of the two contradictory conceptual approaches to the understanding of the essence of man. They are opposed because they are based on the two absolutes of the two fundamental characteristics of man - of human personality. All Russian history is marked by this contradictory division of the human essence into its unilateral models.

The historic and cultural extremes of the Russian fate symbolized by the «Contemplative» and «Active» models of man are directly linked with the question which is as old as the world itself «Is man a means or an aim?» A clear link exists between the model of the «active man» and the cruel political practices of Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, the Rurics, the Romanovs and some leaders of the Soviet epoch and the idea that man is only the means of realizing some abstract ideal and strengthening the charismatic intentions of the powers that be.

As closely linked is the «Contemplative» model of a man – which, as a rule, coincides with the Orthodox anthropology (or sometimes with the atheistic one) — and the fatal inability of the Russian intelligentsia to use the principle «man is a mere aim» to make the life of the people better, despite their moral anguish at the sight of the hardships of ordinary people. Leo Tolstoy, who regularly spent his royalties helping the poor peasants, often leaving his numerous family without sufficient money, was a typical Russian «intelligent» as he sacrificed himself to other people. His hostile attitude to the official Church that in its turn excommunicated him, does not change anything. The greatest Russian author and thinker was a sincere Orthodox in his understanding of the fundamental postulate of Russian Christianity - «The saviour will be saved».

SUMMARY

Having intensified in The Brothers Karamazov his variant of the categorical imperative in the explanation

of the price of eternal and universal human happiness, Fyodor Dostoyevski himself recognizes its absolute speculative nature in bringing Ivan Ksamazov to madness in the finale of the novel (Dostoevsky 1991). The suffering Ivan is unable to find justification for the existence of a God who allows evil to abide on the earth. This rebellion of Ivan clearly determines the two poles between which Russian thought rushes — between man and God. If there is a God, then it should be only for the sake of man, for his salvation, otherwise the existence of God loses all sense. Theodicy, according to Dostoyevski, can only exist in man (Cantor 2011). Focusing all his attention on a real man, Dostoyevski finds him in his utter abandonment. In his hope to find in the human image a reflection of the grandeur of Providence he more often discovers a horrible emptiness and abomination, or - a more rare phenomenon - a selflessness and readiness for a spiritually heroic deed. The last and greatest novel of Dostoyevski showed that man is the only measure of God, and only because of this continuing belief man himself becomes the only real subject of his own life.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the idea of the «contemplative» essence of man that did not always demonstrate the capacity of having the universal meaning of the moral beacon, had one more merit - the depth of the ideal of being able to admire everyone who wants to be measured by it.

The social forces which, on the contrary, clung to the «active» model of man, did not theorise even when they performed serious ideal operations. For example, Ivan the Terrible, in seeking to justify his unifying (and therefore historically correct) policy, chose to «split» the Trinity, presenting as the dominant facet, the punishing God the Father. These differences offer problems of a much deeper character.

Russian spiritual culture has numerous witnesses of fatal contradictions arising on the way to justifying man. Contradictions between contemplation and activity, the blessing of the abstract ideal, and the blessing of concrete political force. Contradictions between the aspiration to spiritual self-perfection and the recognition of the impossibility of real self-perfection in a world far from perfect and between belief in the exceptional and saving power of prayer and faith were used as a bludgeon against the poorest, bringing the people to despair. Many other examples in Russian social life could be given here, but those already named are sufficient to show that these contradictions are the fate

of the historic, religious and philosophic creativity of Russian folk.

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