

Human Rights With A Future

Cultural and counter-cultural aspects from an Eastern Christian Viewpoint

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The concept of “rights of future generations” may seem to be fully incompatible with the Christian east, often depicted as all lost in wonder with little interest for the pressing concerns of the immediate. So the present paper tries to cull disparate elements from an eastern Christian viewpoint to show the concept’s possible roots in the east itself or, at least, its applicability to it. Given the methodological need to restrict ourselves to a few but central examples, the paper limits itself to a period in which interest in social justice became dominant and was related, positively or negatively, to the Christian outlook. In a first part, 1. *Pravda, truth-justice, or the Quest for Justice*, the brute awakening of independent thinking, or philosophy, in a Russia where serfs were freed only in 1861 is seen to coincide with the desire to attain social status overseas and emancipation at home, with the result that the conceptual tools to promote the cause of social justice are refined but remain open to criticism. This theoretical framework receives a concrete test in a comparison between Vissarion Belinskij and Nikolaj Fedorov, a comparison that shows elements of pluralism, namely: 2. *A two-way future orientation: the future of future generations and the future of past generations*. Though this struggle was at first carried out mainly by baptized Christians, different concepts of what social progress is and of what being a Christian means led to a head-on clash between two great Russian thinkers, Konstantin Leontiev and Vladimir Soloviev, towards the end of the last century; this forms the theme of the third section, 3. *Social Justice and Eschatology in the Crucible*. Finally, a fourth part, 4. *Dialogue between Unequals, or the Scramble*

ABBREVIATIONS:

G. Florovsky, *Russian Theology* II = G. Florovsky, *Ways of Russian Theology* II, tr. R.L. Nichols, Vaduz 1987.

N.O. Lossky, *Russian Philosophy* = N.O. Lossky, *Hisdtory of Russian Philosophy*, New York 1951.

V.V. Lossky, *Russian Philosophy* = V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy* I, II. Authorized Translation from the Russian by G. Kline New York 1967.

J.M. Edie et alii (ed.s), *Russian Philosophy* I–III = J.M. Edie et alii (ed.s), *Russian Philosophy* (an anthology of texts) I–III, Chicago 1965.

for the Future, tries to work out some of the epistemological implications of this particular search for social justice in the future, especially in view of the collapse of an atheistic experiment which lasted seventy years and which came crashing down under the weight of its own untruthfulness, but from under whose rubble some of the most penetrating cries for future emancipation have become history.

1. *Pravda, or the Quest for Justice*

Nothing is so disconcerting about recent Russian history as the *unpredictable* character of its past – except, perhaps, the *predictable* character of its future! People falling into disgrace and being relegated to non-persons, revisionism as the hermeneutics of survival, but also five-year plans which heralded the eventual end of class-society and its concomitant class-war: all this is too fresh to require here extensive commentary.¹ And yet, the pitting together of predictability and unpredictability is the stuff out of which, for better or for worse, the great sagas of the past as well as the breathtaking vistas of the future are made, so long as they pretend to have something to say for the present.² On the other hand, to try to define culture without counterculture is like trying to shed finite light without shadow or to define human greatness without limits. Precisely this brusque reversal of predictability, not always accessible to western ways of thinking, can help us appreciate why it is imperative, in a quest for eastern correspondences to the concept of “future generations” not to skip to hurdle of analogy, whereby seemingly identical notions can evoke quite disparate connotations.

“What characterizes Russian religious thought,” asserts the great Russian thinker Semyon L. Frank (1877–1950), a convert from Judaism over Marxism and idealism to Christianity and author of *The Unfathomable*,³ “is the prevalence in it of apocalyptic and eschatological themes; besides, the whole of Russian Christian

1. Part of the paradox, however, is that revisionism was officially condemned as equally pernicious as dogmatism, since it did damage to the spirit of the revolution just as dogmatism clung to it uncritically; see S. V. Utechin, *Everyman's Concise Encyclopedia of Russia*, London 1961, 455f. An example of revisionism in this sense would be so-called legal Marxism, which, in the 1880's, attracted a number of economists and sociologists, such as P.B. Struve, S. Bulgakov and N. Berdyaev, who sought to canvass for communism not by underhand means, but in the legal press; *ibid.*, 309.
2. So has E. Bloch commented the historicity of Jesus Christ: “Der Stall, der Zimmermannssohn, der Schwärmer unter kleinen Leuten, der Galgen am Ende, das ist aus geschichtlichem Stoff, nicht aus dem goldenen, den die Sage liebt”; E. Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Frankfurt a.M. 1959, 1482.
3. N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, New York 1951, 268.

conscience may be said to differ from the western mind. Western Christianity succeeded in forming a culture and to put some basic Christian principles into social practice. This, however, could come about only at the expense of the precious awareness in early Christianity that the 'end of the world' was inevitable and close at hand; consequently, every ordering of earthly life is unstable, relative and limited. The opposite happened in Russia. The constant thought of the end of the world, of instability and precariousness of any corresponding world order and, at the same time – and this is the most common variant – the enthusiastic tension towards the ultimate goal of Christian faith, the transfiguration of the world and the coming of the kingdom of God, the realization of absolute *Pravda* (truth-justice) and the advent of 'new heavens and new worlds', entirely dominate Russian Christianity, often at the expense of a moderate and a responsible moral task of illuminating and elevating terrestrial life in a Christian way: or, at least, one does not endeavour to draw a clear limit between these two goals of a different kind.⁴ The difference Russian thought makes, according to Frank, lies in its creative future orientation, but not just of any future, but one of an apocalyptic and eschatological kind, which would account for the creative tension between culture and counter-culture.

In order to understand what kind of truth pravda⁵ is, it is not enough to ask what Russians meant by this term, but one must subsequently integrate the meaning within the wider context of future orientation. Russians had two words for truth, *istina*, which is cognate with Latin and German *est*, is, as well as with Sanskrit *asmi*, *asti*, and the German *atmen*, to breathe. Already this relays accurately one of the main impressions Russians (and, to a large extent, other Slavic peoples) had of the truth as concrete and life-bestowing.⁶ But Russians use another word, *Pravda*, which can signify both justice and truth; thus, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Alyosha Karamazov was cast with the allures of a martyr for the concrete truth, personified in Jesus

4. S.L. Frank, *Iz istorii russkoj filosofskoj mysli konca XIX v nacala XX veka. Antologia*, Washington D.C.-New York 1995, 56.

5. See, on this point, W. Goerdt, *Russische Philosophie*, München 1984, 449–453. On pp. 450–451 Goerdt quotes the text from Nikolai K. Michailowski (1842–1904): "Jedesmal, wenn mir das Wort 'Prawda' (pravda) in den Sinn kommt, kann ich es nicht lassen, mich über seine treffende Schönheit zu entzücken. Ein solches Wort gibt es offensichtlich in kein anderen europäpischen Sprache. Es scheint, nur auf Russisch werden Wahrheit (istina) und Gerechtigkeit (spravedlivost') mit ein und demselben Wort benannt und fließen gleichsam in ein einzige großes Ganzes zusammen. ... Die Prawda-Istina, geschieden von deer Prawda-Sprawedlivost, die Prawda des theoretischen Himmels, getrennt von der Prawda der praktischen Erde, befriedigte mich nicht nur nicht, sondern machte mir Kummer ...".

6. T. Spidlik, *L'idée russe*, Troyes 1974, 72–73.

Christ, and not for just any abstract idea or ideology.⁷ While the concreteness of *Pravda* introduces it into the universe of discourse of culture, its ambitious embrace of both justice and truth raises eyebrows, giving the impression that one will have to wait for a future aeon to see its complete realization. *Pravda* thus becomes a concrete ideal by which to judge reality, rather than something readily identifiable with factual states of affairs; its very unattainability makes it countercultural, putting in question the established order and checking wild dreams.

2. *A two-way future orientation: the future of past and of future generations*

Yet, even to understand *Pravda* as a concrete ideal we must also keep in mind under what specific conditions it was sought. For many centuries, Russian thought seemed to be slumbering in what has been termed “the long prologue to Russian philosophy” (G. Piovesana).⁸ Following the Decembrist Uprising, the first modern Russian uprising, so called because of the revolt on 14 December 1825 at the beginning of Nikolaj II (1796–1855)’s reign (1825–1855), the Czar at once banished philosophy from the universities, a prohibition which lasted from 1826 to 1863, and allotted the philosophical enterprise the limbo-like existence of merely commenting texts from Plato and Aristotle. The philosophical inquisitiveness — awakened by Peter the Great’s (1672–1725) turning to western models, and given a boost by Czar Alexander I’s (1777–1825) entering Paris, on 31 March 1814, with the victors over Napoleon — threatened to be delivered still-born. Had not Alexander N. Radischcev (1749–1802) risked his neck for criticizing the inhumanity of serfdom in his *Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow* (1790) in spite of Catherine II’s (1729–1796) “enlightened” rule (1762–1796), only to be reprieved and put into the State Commission for Codification of Laws, with the result that, nudged on by his incapacity to change the fabric of society, he committed suicide? And, at the other end of the spectrum, had not the Ukrainian Gregory Skorovoda

7. T. Spidik, *L’idée russe*, 76–77.

8. In the first chapter of his work, “Un luno prologo: secoli x-xvvi”, *Storia del pensiero russo (998–1988)*, Milano 1992, 9–41, Piovesana says that, before the outbreak of illuminism, one can only speak of fragments of gold in Russian thought, which together, however, do not yield one big coherent picture. This statement is true as far as it goes, but the author seems to underestimate the presence of other non-verbal communicative systems such as icons, ceremonies, customs, which perhaps render more faithfully the genuinely Eastern spirit. For an evaluation of this work see E.G. Farrugia, “Una storia della filosofia russa”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 59, (1993) 243–248; idem, “Pensiero filosofico russo in prospettiva storica: la storia sollecita paragoni”, *Lateranum LX*, (1994) N. 3, 589–595.

(1722–1794), strictly speaking the first Russian philosopher,⁹ mused socratically, in his own epitaph, about the art of living that, though the world had hunted him, it had failed to catch him?¹⁰

Under these conditions, real philosophical investigation could be carried out only in special circles and for special interests, mostly aiming either to upset the established order, or to strengthen it by developing ideological infrastructures. For the same reason, too, philosophy was exiled from the four quite outstanding Russian theological academies,¹¹ Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev (in the Ukraine) and Kazan (in Tartar Russia), which, taken together, specialized in an all-round patristic programme. In this state of affairs, thinking could thrive only in terms of the goals for which it was pursued, and thus was not infrequently degraded to an “applied”, rather than a pure, science.¹² Unwittingly, however, Russian thinkers were induced to make a virtue out of a vice, and thus were manoeuvred into a position of discovering very vividly the social impact of the quest of truth. Something thoroughly consistent with the eastern holistic viewpoint whereby dogma reflects on one’s ethos and ethos lives up to one’s dogma,¹³ one being the outside view of things and the other the inside vision, so that, ultimately truth and justice belong together within a differentiated unity, in the context of which they can be distinguished, but should never be separated.

And yet, precisely in order to respect the difference in kind of the pursuit of the same goal in east and west: social justice, one may briefly illustrate two different approaches to this goal within Russian thought itself. Although one of them professed himself to be an atheist, while nourishing a great love for Jesus Christ, his thought remains within the orbit of the Christian outlook and even of Christian theology. I mean Vissarion G. Belinskij (1811–1848), social critic and utopist,¹⁴ whom communists were quick to claim as one of their own, considering him to be the founder of criticism of the revolutionary-democratic type. The other thinker with

9. V.V. Zenkovsky, *Russian Philosophy* I, p. 53. He actually came from the Ukraine.

10. V.V. Zenkovsky, *Russian Philosophy* I. p. 56.

11. Martin Köhler, *Die Geistlichen Akademien in Rußland im 19. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden 1997.

12. G. Kline, “Russian Philosophy”, in: P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 7, New York 1968, 258.

13. This is another way of stating what Cardinal Saliège wrote one day: spirituality is lived dogma; I. Hauherr, *Etudes de spiritualité orientale*, Rome 1969, 145.

14. H.E. Bowman, *Vissarion Belinskij, 1811–1848: A Study in the Origins of Social Criticism in Russia*, 1954.

whom he is to be compared had eccentric views of the resurrection of our ancestors in this present life, but found acclaim, paradoxically from the Communists, too, besides being considered by Fedor M. Dostoevskij (1821–1881) and Lev N. Tolstoj (1828–1910) as their spiritual father. The author in question never wrote a book, but only scraps of paper, later put together by his admirers: Nikolaj F. Fedorov (1828–1903).¹⁵ Belinskij looked foreword to the future of present generations; Fedorov looked foreword to the future of past generations.

The comparison should give us pause, as rarely is the question openly broached, when dealing with future entities, about whose future one is in point of fact discussing: the victims' or the writer's; one can also make capital on poverty, too! Moreover, there exist various kinds of future: there is a future which really is only an extension of the present, as when earthquakes are predicted; there is a future which is a pseudo-idea, because it presupposes it already happening; and there is a future which is made of surprise and different velocities of duration, mirror of human, not mechanical, time, thereby allowing for real unpredictable change.¹⁶ Although it would take us too far afield if we tried to discuss these various possibilities, we cannot formulate a question about the rights of future generations without at least being aware of these various possibilities.

Struck by the grinding poverty he saw on the streets of St. Petersburg, whither he betook himself in 1839, and the reactionary character of Nikolai I's regime, whose accession to the throne in December 1825, as we have seen, was soaked in blood, the two souls in Belinskij's breast, the artist's and the critic's — he was among the very first to recognize Dostoevskij's talents when the latter's first novel, *Poor Folk*, was published in 1846 — veered from his former religious views to one of pronounced atheism; it was his letter to Nikolaj V. Gogol (1909–1852), who hailed from the Ukraine, on account of the latter's book *Correspondence with Friends*¹⁷ which, when read by Dostoevskij in Nikolaj V. Stankevich's (1913–1840) philosophical circle¹⁸ caused Dostoevskij to be condemned, put in front of the firing squad only

15. N.O. Lossky, *Russian Philosophy*, pp. 75–80. Besides having a vast erudition, Fedorov led an intensely spiritual life; Lossky considers him to be “an uncanonized saint”, *ibid.*, 75.

16. On the subject of time and the future see H. Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, Paris 1889; aptly translated as: *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of consciousness*, authorized translation by F.L. Pogson, New York 1960.

17. *Correspondence with Friends* may be safely be considered one of Gogol's less successful works.

18. With N. Stankevitch is usually reckoned the start of the Westernizing movement in Russia; see N.O. Lossky, *Russian Philosophy*, 51.

to be “pardoned” in the last minute and sent off for a four-year prison sentence to Siberia. Although in his letter Belinskij brands the Russian people as “profoundly atheistic by nature”, this turmoil in the heart is only a barometer of the inner struggle that was raging among the people, and need not be taken as a profession of faith; for he wrote six months later: “The Redeemer of humanity came into the world for the sake of all.... He, the Son of God, humanly loved human beings ...”.¹⁹

Belinskij addressed himself to Gogol in these terms:

... you have failed to observe that Russia sees her salvation not in mysticism or asceticism or pietism, but in the advances of civilization, enlightenment, and humanity. She needs not sermons (she has heard enough of them!) or prayers (she has repeated them often enough!) but the awakening in the people of a sense of their human dignity, lost in the mud and filth for so many centuries; she needs rights and laws which conform not to the teachings of the Church but to common sense and justice, and she needs the strictest possible observance of them.²⁰

There is something almost contemporary in Belinsky’s attitude: Christ yes, Church no!²¹ But it would be perhaps better to say that his concern about the future of human beings he saw suffering around him at the hands of those who should have cared for them induced him to criticize a stagnant institution with the hope of making it aware that a religion which does not care is a reality without concrete underpinnings. Having been used and abused so often, his dilemma will seem simplistic; but he fixed the price beneath which an attitude may not qualify as religious: compassion for the socially marginalized, which he found so badly lacking in the Russian Orthodox Church of his day; with Nikolaj Lossky (1870–1965), one my really question whether he really became an atheist.²²

19. N.O. Lossky, *Russian Philosophy*, 55–56.

20. Vissarion Belinsky, “Letter to Gogol”, in: J.M. Edie et alii (ed.s), *Russian Philosophy I*, p. 313.

21. On Belinskij’s attitude towards Christ, the church and primacy see B. Schultz, *Russische Denker*, Wien 1950, 47–72, especially 71f.

22. N.O. Lossky, *Russian Philosophy*, 55.

N. Fedorov likewise grapples with the future,²³ but from a completely different angle, namely in an effort to drum up support for what he called “the common cause”; the bringing back to life of our ancestors! This tenet can only be appreciated from a dual vantage-point. First, a spiritual doctrine: Our social programme is a Trinity, he was fond of saying. In spite of the trenchant criticism which G. Florovskij submitted Fedorov’s ideas from an Orthodox point of view, one cannot ignore Fedorov’s explicit intent to expound his theories in line with Orthodoxy.²⁴ For our purposes here, he is important for the theme of successive generations. At the same time, the gifted and much-consulted cartographer he was, endowed with encyclopaedic knowledge, also had the scientist’s curiosity in discussing means to protract human existence by perfecting medicine and raising standards of living. Decisive, however, is his thematization of the transfiguration of life as the overriding ethico-religious imperative.²⁵ In an ocean of backwardness and social egoism he propounded a theory which greater moved his contemporaries:

23. M. Hagelmaeister, *Nikolaj Fedorov: Studien zu Leben, Werk und Wirkung*, München 1989, 1: “Einige sehen in ihm sogar den russischehn Philosophen schlechthin (*samyj russkij filosof*), den whren Repräsentatnen der welterlösenden ‘russischen Idee’, den Begründer einer ‘Philosophie der Zukunft’. die — gleichermaßen national und universal —, aus dem Geist des Russentums und der ‘Tiefe des russischen Herzens’ (A.V. Gulyga) entstanden, für die gesamte Menschheit wegweisend sei”.
24. G. Florovskij, *Ways of Russian Theology* II, 91–99. Florovskij accuses Fedorov of having all too little Christianity in his philosophy, but of indulging rather in a “too complacent, unruffled and happy optimism” of the Enlightenment (p. 92); that he speaks ‘very rarely and vaguely’ about Christ” so that he has deep down no Christology (pp. 92f); that he is insensitive to “anything beyond the grave” (p. 93), to transfiguration, sin, salvation (p. 93) and grace (p. 94), to the mystery of death, which is reduced to a riddle (pp. 93f), to the doctrine of God-manhood (p. 97), and to the human personality, who is subordinated to the common project (p. 99). The Resurrection itself becomes a redirection and transformation of energy in nature (p. 93), consequence human task of science and art (p. 95). Methodologically, we cannot discuss here all these criticisms, but present an aspect of Fedorov’s thought “from the inside”, as Fedorov himself would have it, so as to say, so as to illustrate the theme which Florovsky himself recognizes in him, and in A. Comte, as central: “a need to overcome the onerous schism between successive generations” (p. 98). Florovskij (1893–1979), one of the most outstanding Orthodox theologians of this century, met with stiff criticism in his turn. While recognizing it as a momentum of erudition, many felt that it applied Florovsky’s own too stiff patristic and Byzantine criteria. N. Berdyayev called this work “No Thoroughfare in Russian Theology”. In effect, only two theologians pass the test: A. Chomjakov and Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow. See J. Meyendorff’s “Introduzione all’edizione russa del 1980,” pp. xxxv–xxxiii.
25. N.O. Lossky, *Russian Philosophy*, 79–80.

The doctrine of raising the dead can perhaps be called positivism, but it is completely opposed to progress as displacing of the older generation by the younger, as the exaltation of the sons over the fathers, and it is also opposed to positivism understood as knowledge only, as a school, as a form of scholasticism. The doctrine of the raising of the dead may be called positivism, but it is a positivism of action, since according to this doctrine mythical knowledge is not replaced by positive knowledge, but mythical, fictitious action is replaced by positive and real action.²⁶

By resurrection of our ancestors Fedorov means something that takes place in the here and now, is thus immanent, and not simply to be transposed into eternity.²⁷ It seems to be a cross between his belief in what Orthodoxy says about the transfiguration of present life-resources and the rising from the dead, and the harnessing of the resources of science. What it exactly means has given rise to wild speculation.²⁸ It comes closer home to say that, according to Fedorov, it is incumbent on Christians to pool their resources together and gradually eliminate whatever destroys human unity through lack of fraternity, “unbrotherliness”, as he called it, and breeds instead hostility. On the contrary, should human beings be able to reconcile themselves with God and among themselves, they should be able to reverse the tide of disintegration, as it concentrates its venom in the sting of disease and death.²⁹ As has already point out, this stance is basically religious, not socio-activist: it does not want to rationalize religion, but to transfigure the human potential so as to accomplish those wonders which only brotherliness, a rare quality, can do. The world would be healthier if progress were not bought at the price of forcing our predecessors to yield their place in life or through the pushingness of the new generation, so easily tempted to dismiss the fathers as out of tune with modern times and so bury them alive. If we define death as a natural process of making place for others, or, what it usually degenerates to, of being forced to relinquish

26. Nikolaj Fyodorov, “The Question of Brotherhood”, in: J.M. Edie et alii (ed.s), *Russian Philosophy* III, p. 45.
27. V.V. Zenkovsky, *Russian Philosophy* II, p. 602: “according to Fyodorov, if there is no immanent raising of the dead, there will be no transcendent resurrection”.
28. According to Zenkovsky, Soloviev certainly misunderstood him when he said: “To resurrect cannibalism, i.e. to resurrect death! What an absurdity!”; V.V. Zenkovsky, *Russian Philosophy* II, p. 602.
29. N. Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, New York 1963, 292f.

one's place, the untapped potential of brotherliness becomes evident in stopping concomitant diseases.³⁰ Unbrotherliness, one may venture to formulate, is that civil war (*Brüderkrieg*) making out of foreigners aliens and out of brothers rivals, thus sapping at the world's chief energy source, the human resource.

These two seemingly diametrically opposed viewpoints, Belinskij's and Fedorov's, meet half-way in their future orientation. Revolution and transfiguration become the common market of all future-oriented thinking, and, by and large, exhaust the whole gamut of possibilities as the outside chance of violence and the inner hope of persuasion. That this Russian debate, in which Belinskij and Fedorov were only two moments, was not simply in vain may be gauged by the fact that its endeavours have left a deep imprint on the language of socio-political struggle for justice: nihilism,³¹ populism,³² reactionism,³³ revisionism, which in turn set the stage for a seventy-year experiment in social justice: dialectical materialism, as the official philosophy of the communist party, which blended materialism with Hegelian motifs was known.³⁴ They are like so many epistemological stations of the cross for anybody who wants to learn from the bitter lessons of the past. No wonder that probably the most successful novel of the Soviet period was a surrealist piece, because it was a parody not of reality as a whole, but of a reality which had departed from reality: Mikail A. Bulgakov (1891–1940)'s *The Master and Margarita*, written against the Moloch of the state in praise of the unorthodox sectarian and socially marginalized Jeshua, whose resemblance with Jesus of Nazareth is certainly fortuitous!

30. So, on this point, E.G. Farrugia, "The contents of Tradition and the Discontents of Culture", *Tradition in Transition*, Rome 1996, 161–171.
31. See V.V. Zenkovsky, *Russian Philosophy*, pp. 74–78. Mikhail A. bakunin (1814–1876), a defender of anarchism, and Fr. Marx' rival at the First International, comes to mind.
32. See V.V. Zenkovsky, *Russian Philosophy*, 278. One of the most prominent founders of populism (*narodnichestvo*) is A.I. Herzen (1812–1870). He believed that Russian could skip the woes of capitalism by staging a peasant revolution with the support of the peasant communes.
33. For several types of reactionary attitudes in this period of time, on a different but related level, see A. Tamborra, *Chiesa cattolica e Ortodossia russa: Due secoli di confronto e dialogo. Dalla Santa Alleanza ai nostri giorni*, Milano 1992; e.g., the influence of Joseph de Maistre, the King of Sardegna's minister to the Czar from 1802 to 1817, pp. 20–26; but also A.N. Murav'ëv's (1841–1846) polemics against Rome, pp. 69–71.
34. S.V. Utechin, *Everyman's Encyclopaedia*, pp. 151f.

3. *Social Justice and Eschatology in the Crucible*

While the two writers we have briefly discussed seem to go in two diametrically opposite directions, the two who come next actually agree fully about the direction to take. Both were, in their own ways, converts to Christianity. From early life Vladimir S. Soloviev (1853–1900), oft hailed as the greatest Russian philosopher, had wanted to be a Christian, and age had lent maturity to his resolve. On the contrary, Kostantin Leontiev (1931–1891) had started out as an aesthete and wound his way to Mount Athos, where he spent a year of his life (1870–1871), only to move, in 1887, to the famous hermitage, Optina Pustin, in the Kaligula Oblast, the unlikely haunt of so many great Russians about a hundred miles south of Moscow, where he became a monk in the last year of his life. Leontiev has even been called the “Russian precursor of Nietzsche” by none other than Nikolaj Berdjajev (1874–1948),³⁵ because of a nihilistic approach to life. A reputation well-earned, if, first of all, we do not push comparisons without ignoring the differences, and secondly, because Leontiev’s fame lies in his being a *destructive* critic of culture.³⁶

In his criticism of the future as a socio-philosophical concept Leontiev’s target was primarily anarchism, under which label he also lumped liberal communists, whereas what he means by “socialism” refers as such to a past, not a present, movement.

[I]f the anarchists and liberal communists, in striving for their own ideal of extreme equality (an impossibility) through their own methods of unbridled freedom from personal encroachments, must bring us, through a series of antitheses, to societies which have yet to live and develop, to great immobility and to a highly significant inequality, then it is possible to assert in general that socialism, properly understood, is nothing but a new feudalism belonging to an already imminent future. . . . [T]hey all consider the ideal of the future

35. Nikolaj Berdjajev, *Leontiev*, tr. George Reavy, London 1940, p. vii.

36. Thus, Constantine Leontiev, in his “The Average European as an Ideal and Instrument of Universal Destruction,” *Russian Philosophy* II, 277, says: “Not considering myself bound to read every book and article in the world, finding this to be not only useless but extremely harmful, I even have the barbaric temerity to hope that in time mankind will through rational and scientific means, reach that end which the Caliph Omar is supposed to have reached empirically and mystically, i.e., the burning of the majority of colourless and unoriginal books.”

to be something like themselves, i.e., to these authors it is rather like European bourgeoisie.³⁷

On the assumption that the homogeneity of culture which began in the eighteenth century was only producing a “bourgeois” type of western European Leontiev argues that the highest degree of social prosperity and of universal political justice, unless tempered by the aesthetic criterion of what is beautiful and elegant and lofty, and especially of what is beautiful, elegant and lofty in religion, would only produce the highest degree of amorality.³⁸

Oscillating between an aesthetic christianity³⁹ and a genuine if not unproblematic conversion,⁴⁰ he did not hesitate to decry Tolstoy’s, Dostoevskij’s and Soloviev’s “rosy-coloured Christianity”, because of their humanistic and philanthropic elements,⁴¹ which seemed to him trying to snatch at heaven wherever one could find it — here on earth. In his revulsion to his early worldly life, he became something of a cultural nihilist, full of “philosophical hatred” for contemporary culture.⁴² For him, Christianity in its purity was to be found in its Byzantine form, and was best embodied in monasticism, which, however, required renouncing not only the world but also the aesthetic attitude itself.⁴³

37. C. Leontiev, “The Average European ...,” *Russian Philosophy* II, 278f. Among these authors he means also John Stuart Mill (1806–1873).

38. C. Leontiev, “The Average European ...,” *Russian Philosophy* II, 279f.

39. For example, it was the beauty of the Orthodox liturgy, rather than fascination with her doctrine, which attracted the young Leontiev; F. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia*, Turnbridge Wells, Kent, England 1986, I, 186: “In the first part of his life Leontyev’s mind was dominated by the ideal of beauty and the search for it. ... It was not a question of choosing what was immoral because it was immoral. It was a question of what was conventionally regarded as immoral being sometimes beautiful or aesthetically pleasing and as such, justifiable.”

40. Leontiev published this criticism in “Our New Christians,” 1882, a year after Dostoevskij’s death, but which included Tolstoj. “The Christianity to which Leontyev was converted was very different from Tolstoy’s. The God of Leontiev was a fear-inspiring God, the transcendent creator and judge, not a vaguely conceived immanent Spirit, expressing itself in universal love”; Copleston I, p. 189.

41. J.M. Edie et alii (ed.s), *Russian Philosophy* II, 268.

42. *Ibid.*, 269.

43. Copleston I, p. 190.

Leontiev had early affirmed the superiority of aesthetic values over moral and economic ones. Thus, a single century-old tree could very easily be more worth than twenty faceless men.⁴⁴ His Nietzschean nihilism comes to the fore in his attack on closed egalitarian individualism, rather than open aristocratic individualism.

Nietzsche had made a distinction between Christian *Nächstenliebe* (love of one's neighbour) and anti-Christian *Fernstenliebe* (love of the far-off, that is, of future generations). To love and to help one's neighbour, according to Nietzsche, is to preserve the weak and uncreative, thus undermining the living culture of the future. Leontyev drew a similar distinction, but reversed Nietzsche's evaluations, rejecting love of a "collective and abstract mankind" (*ibid.*, Vol. VIII, p. 207) and "the feverish preoccupations with the earthly well-being of future generations" (*ibid.*, p. 189) in the name of an inclusive compassion which, though evincing a Christian concern with presently encountered, existing human beings, embraces the strong and creative as well as the weak and suffering.⁴⁵

When, in the last months of his life, Leontiev received news of Soloviev's conference in Moscow, "The Decline of the Medieval Weltanschauung", in which he preached western-style progress, Leontiev could not believe his ears.⁴⁶ To him it seemed as if Soloviev was selling his Christian soul to the devil of progress. Though the angry letter he intended to send his former friend Soloviev never reached him,⁴⁷ news of it did; and the effects are hardly describable, as we shall see later.⁴⁸

In his vast systematic edifice Soloviev gave prolonged attention to the future and to the future of humanity. On his advocating publicly Christian pardon for the murderers of Tsar Alexander II (1818–1881), who had emancipated serfs no sooner he acceded to the throne (1861), Soloviev became *persona non grata* and

44. K. Leontiev, *Sobraniye Sochinenii* I, Moscow 1912, p. 306; see G.L. Kline, "Leontyev, Konstantin Nikolayevich (1831–1891)", in: P. Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 4, New York 1967, 436.

45. G.L. Kline, "Leontyev, ...", pp. 436–437.

46. Iwan von Kologrivof, *Von Hellas zum Mönchtum: Leben und Denken Konstantin Leontjews (1831–1891)*, Regensburg 1948, 284f.

47. Iwan von Kologrivof, *Von Hellas zum Mönchtum*, 286.

48. Iwan von Kologrivof, *Von Hellas zum Mönchtum*, 13.

relinquished his university post. With him, life and thought were of a piece; no wonder that, in the Introduction to his *The Justification of Goodness* he says that there is only one way to goodness and that is *Pravda* (261). The cause of all human suffering, individual and collective, past and future, he identifies with egoism.

It is the abnormal attitude toward everything else, the exclusive self-assertion, or egoism, which dominates our practical life, even though we deny it in theory — the opposition of the self to all other selves, and the practical negation of the other selves — that constitutes the radical *evil* of our nature. ... For if egoism, i.e., the striving to set up one's exclusive "I" in the place of everything else, to eliminate everything else, is evil in the strict sense (morally evil), the fateful impossibility of actually enacting such egoism, i.e., the impossibility of being everything while yet remaining in one's exclusiveness, is radical *suffering*.⁴⁹

Only through the sacrifice of egoism can human love save the individual as such.⁵⁰ The future-building sacrifice of egoism takes three forms: piety, or respect for superiors (parents), pity for equals (or sym-pathy, that is to say, the capacity to rejoice with them in their successes and suffer with them in their sorrows), and shame (as a kind of moral censorship) for inferiors. Human moral responsibility may be said to be fully expressed in these three relations, which may be reduced ultimately to shame as the root of morality, because through it the religious, social and individual dimensions as the three necessary forms of integrity required in the human, find their expression.⁵¹ These terms may elude us in their immediate grasp; but piety is past-oriented, because it deals with ancestors; pity is present-oriented, because it has to do with our age-group, or contemporaries; and shame is future-oriented, because it concerns our successors. We can even re-phrase somewhat the three key-words and call them: respect, sympathy and criticism. In the third and final part of *Justification of Goodness*, in which Soloviev analyzes goodness in history by discussing the relationships existing between the individual and society, the absolute moral order is identified with the Kingdom of God.⁵² In this

49. V.S. Solovyov, "Lectures on Godmanhood", *Russian Philosophy* III, 77.

50. V.S. Solovov, "The Meaning of Love," *Russian Philosophy* III, 87.

51. D. Strémoukhoff, *Vladimir Soloviev & His Messianic Work*, Belmont, Massachusetts 1980, 267–272. See also H. Dahm, *Solov'ev und Scheler*, München 1971; also: E.G. Farrugia, "Il corpo come imbarazzo e come carisma", *Lateranum* LXII (1996) 479–503.

52. D. Strémoukhoff, *Vladimir Soloviev & His Messianic Work*, p. 274.

way, he prepares the scene for his last great piece of work, *The Three Dialogues*, which include *The Short Story About the Antichrist*. Yet, something unusual takes place: considering the paternity of his own works, he does not show piety but rather exercises criticism: self-criticism!

Like a lightning rod Leontiev's criticism had galvanized the flittering thoughts of Soloviev into action. In *The Short Story About the Antichrist* he wrote in effect a kind of *Retractationes*, for they mark a complete turnabout for a young spirit, who came to distrust any talk that the good future was simply around the corner. The Antichrist is depicted in the very traits of the dashing personality Soloviev had wished to become, but who had failed dismally — so it seemed to him at this critical juncture — his appointment with Christianity. A philanthropic president of United Europe, he seeks everybody's good and even promotes ecumenism, only he does it without regard to the concreteness of the incarnation and is thus a Gnostic, poles apart from the Christian's incarnate interest in human suffering and future improvement. In order to drive the last nail in the coffin of abstract utopianism, Soloviev puts it in a nutshell: whereas Christ is incarnate, the antichrist is disincarnate.⁵³ As incarnate, Christ endures in time and has a future; as disincarnate, the Antichrist has no substance to him, but dwindles into the insignificance of illusion. Both the incarnate and the disincarnate meet on the playground of salvation history and fight for survival. The names of the players are eschatology and unrestrained belief in progress.

In this way, the hyper-eschatological attitude of Leontiev awakened Soloviev rudely from his utopian dreams, enabling him to temper them eschatologically.⁵⁴ However, one should also not forget Georgij Florovsky's scathing criticism of Leontiev, as one for whom religion was merely a way of saving one's soul, not a way of life; in a word: a religion of fear, not a religion of love.⁵⁵

53. Société Vladimir Soloviev, *Oecuménisme et Eschatologie selon Soloviev*, Paris 1994, 160.

54. G. Florovskij, *Ways of Russian Theology* II, 73. Florovsky reproduces also (p. 72) Soloviev's criticism of Leontiev: "Leont'ev's hopes and dreams did not spring from Christianity, which, he confessed as universal truth".

55. G. Florenskij, *Ways of Russian Theology* II, Vaduz 1987, pp. 69–76. On p. 73 Florovsky says: "Christianity has no 'good news' about history or for history. Leont'ev saw no religious meaning in history; he remained an aesthete and biologist in history, and was fully contented with that." See also the introductory remarks to the translation: P.C. Bori, "Introduzione all'edizione italiana," *Vie della teologia russa*, tr. Fl. Galanti, Genova 1987, pp. XIX, XXIII.

4. *Dialogue between Unequals, or the Scramble for the Future*

The foregoing analysis may sound a bit exaggerated, as if the socio-political struggle were all taken up by religious concerns. Yet we need only read the conclusion from VI. I. Lenin's (1870–1924) *What Is To Be Done?* (1902) in which he attacks his former comrade-in-arms and budding economist, about to return to the Church and become one of her most illustrious theologians, Sergej Bulgakov (1871–1944), and one of the most famous, if maverick, Orthodox philosophers, Nikolaj A. Berdjaev (1874–1948),⁵⁶ to persuade ourselves how momentous the whole discussion was. Yet: need it have taken the turn it factually took? Typical of scrambling is the involution, or inward curling, of a linear thought. Soon after their conversion from Marxism S. Bulgakov and others published their *Milestones* (1903),⁵⁷ proclaiming their disappointment with such unfortunate attempts to redress injustice; and, on the eve of the Revolution, *De Profundis* (1917), the swansong of freedom. Almost sixty years later, Aleksandr Soljenitsin (b. 1918) looked back and remembered in his *Form Under the Rubble* (1975). The revolution, which was meant to redress balances, kept rotating around itself; the chase degenerated into a rout.

Again, the analyses offered in this paper may seem meagre. Yet, if we have been able to discuss only a fragment of a thought in the prism of several authors from only one part of the Christian Eastern world, even this fragment might well appear like a splinter from a stray comet, a harbinger of a different planet. And indeed, if human rights leave so much to be desired in the present and so much to shudder about if we include the future, this is in part due to the fact that so little effective dialogue has taken place between various religions, cultures and socio-political systems in the past and the present. There is perhaps a deterrent to such dialogue: unequals sit unwillingly around the same table; or, to put it differently, the table must really be a round one, the conditions of dialogue must be in truth

56. VI. I. Lenin, "Was Tun?", in: Das Marx-Engles-Lenin-Institut beim ZK der KpdSU(B) (Hg.), *Lenin: Ausgewählte Werke* I, Moskau 1946, p. 323. Technically, Bulgakov started as a Legal Marxist. Berdjaev, in his youth, had been a member of the Social Democratic movement, foresaw the victory of Bolshevism, but broke with them over their repression of freedom.

57. *Vekhi* included the works of N.A. Berdyaev, S.N. Bulgakov, M.O. Gershenzon, A.S. Izgoev, B.A. Kistyakovsky, P.B. Struve and S.L. Frank. See N. Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance*, New York 1963, 111–130.

equal! The first condition has always been “getting to know you”. At the root of so much social injustice is the abysmal ignorance which separates not only the present from the future, but even the present from the present.

Yet the point is not lost in a bid to recover terrain for the rights of future generations. Just as liberal education serves best the utility of the nation, so, too, the most pragmatic way to look at the future is through the telescope of the distant future. The ability to reckon with a not so near future makes the big difference in terms of human maturity and success; while the capacity to order future plans within the framework of a future which is not immediately available is what distinguishes the culture of death, based on immediate gratification, from the culture of life, grounded in more patience than long-range but foreseeable projects call for. Charters of human rights remain paper documents so long as they do not instill a respect for men and women as ends-in-themselves; yet to instill precisely such a respect goes beyond a simple perception of the foreseeable. In politics as in education, few things are so detrimental to real progress as to seek immediate results, instead of preparing stable solutions through painstaking studies, at all pertinent levels.

Of course, a negative experience with one area of knowledge may predispose us against it. The story of human rights is one big concentration camps. However, if it is grossly unfair to keep harping on the black spots of the past, it is even worse to overlook them like so many memory lapses, which once they come back to their senses, can become active once more. Whoever ignores the mistakes of history is likely to repeat them; besides, the possibilities of the past are rarely ever fully activated! Like the seeds of grain found dormant in the pyramids after thousands of years they are capable of coming back to life, *to be resurrected*, as Fedorov might have put it.

Indeed, we cannot do justice to the greatness that is Russia unless we try to keep in mind its potential; never realized fully, it has nonetheless left its mark even where it failed, just as a life's work is to be judged not only by what we do, but also by what we fail to do. With this difference: potency is future-oriented, and, as such, is the language out of which hope shape the future in the concrete. One can also safely predict on the basis of the presence of such a huge potential hardly utilized at all that Russia will yet have a decisive word to say in shaping the future of thought and of human rights, and in a much more positive way than the not so far-off past might have suggested.

This holds eminently true of the rights of future generations on which the sketchy portrayals here may serve to throw a light.

The very immensity of the horizon seems to dictate the enormity of the task. This *Unheimlichkeit*, or not feeling quite at home with oneself or in one's own country, is the vector force of the struggle between progress and eschatology, certainly a dialogue between unequals. The only way out of this impasse is to create a synthesis which respects all the elements of the past, but which is forward-looking. When this integrative force fails, we have a scramble for the future. Communism was an example of precisely such a scramble: its borrowed religious mythology, with the first secretary representing the Messiah and the party the Church, the proletariat the world to be redeemed, and so forth, it was in many ways a secular imitation of the Church.⁵⁸ Communism was but one resolution of the vector forces. There are other — far more creative — possibilities, which are ignored, a lack of interest in Russian thought which one day is likely to wreak havoc on the future.

One abiding lesson from this tug-of-war between eschatology and history is that ethics, especially by Eastern standards, is not to be reduced to housecraft, but has a cosmic dimension which point of departure is the house economy, but soon extends to the *obscina*, the commune. This holds true of Russian society, but deep down it holds true of any society. In this way, the search of the person is something different than the quest of the individual, the former being enmeshed in community by a skein of relationships.⁵⁹

Enmeshed does not mean, or at least should not mean, absorbed. This brings us to the question of rehabilitating past victims. Could this not be one meaning of what Fyodorov is saying? Is the past really so ineluctable? That there are some processes of rehabilitation is clear, if we think of canonizations or political rehabilitations, Pavel Florenskij being a case in point. But rehabilitation, like growth and decline, is a universal process. Can we do justice to our parents, to our teachers, to those who never grew old enough to carry responsibility, to those never born, to whole unborn generations, to whole generations whose birth has been thwarted? Rehabilitating the future is an even more ambitious task, but one which can be tried. Whether we want it or not, the future is already heavily compromised by those ecological factors about which even the papers speak so often. But the future is bigger than whatever

58. B. Russell, *Storia della filosofia occidentale*, tr. L. Pavolini, Milano 1967, 1038–1048.

59. Personalism, we can say, is a trait of many Russian thinkers, such as of N.A. Berdyayev.

compromises it, because it gives rise to hope that we may nonetheless manage to leave a better world behind us.

Finally, we might be turned off by so much talk of monks among the thinkers listed. Being turned off is to interrupt a conversation; whereas the monastic element, in Russian culture, accounts for the counter-cultural ballast. A small indication comes from none other than President Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850–1937), first president of Czechoslovakia and one of the finest Czech philosophers ever, wrote an essay indicating the Russian monastery as the only place where the genuine culture of old Russia is to be found.⁶⁰ And he knew what he was talking about, given that he sensed the death-knell of culture in his country, at least for the immediate future. In view of the general crisis of culture signalled in postmodernism, which is spelled in terms of decline, Gnostic chaos and new age, we think that the culture of the future — the future culture capable of inspiring respect for the human — is to be found in the monastery as a meeting place of all those who realize that only eschatology can prod on the Christian to seek progress and only a sound personalism, so dear to the Christian East, can inject new life into human beings, whatever their station in life, not only as ends in themselves, but as children of the one God.⁶¹

Conclusion

Are progress and eschatology compatible? The struggle seems eternal, aiming at a stalemate, something approaching (in this life) the eternal return of the givens.

Progress and eschatology, however, are not really enemies; they are just unequal. They relate to each other as counter-cultures. First of all they are unequal to their respective tasks, if the tasks are interchanged. Progress would go to pieces on the back of eschatology, just as, in brainstorming, the forward-looking eyes of the creative, cannot at the same time look backwards in self-criticism; both are necessary moments of a solution, but they are difficult bedfellows. Even more so, they are also unequal due to the object they strive to know. Can we really measure eternity with the spoonfuls of time at our disposal? Not only the subjective thrust,

60. T.G. Masaryk, *La Russia e l'Europa: Studi sulle correnti spirituali in Russia* I, tr. E. Lo Gatto, Roma 1925, 9–13.

61. On the monastery of the future as a catechism of hope see E.G. Farrugia, "Every Monastery is a Mission," in: E.G. Farrugia, SJL. Gargano ISB Cam (ed.s), *Every Monastery Is a Mission*, Verucchio (RN) 1999, 178–188.

but also the objective point, changes the object into what it would itself wish to become. Eastern thought is particularly insistent on the ineffability of mystery.

What remains then? A scramble for the future! We have no alternative but to think our metaphysics in terms of the future; to think our theology in terms of the future; to think of ourselves in terms of the future. We are mightily interested in ourselves, and since our potential is hardly ever realized (Aristotle's definition of happiness being a rational nature's realization of its potential) we are greatly inclined to think future, to dream future, to speak future. The Negro singing his or her spirituals for consolation at the thought of the *imminent* presence of the Lord is a case in point. Yet, what we in fact do is to think of the future in terms of the past, to reduce time to space, to devoid meaning of content, purpose of thrust, attention of tension, history of story, movement of orientation.

One need only think what clumsy measures were taken, after the awakening of a newfound sensitivity to the poor, which made the rounds of the world with a much-needed but badly defined catchword, "option for the poor", to patch together truth and justice — or, as they are usually called in the West — faith and justice, to appreciate the insight of a collective enterprise, such as the Russian was from the start, in order to see the necessity to take it seriously. If only for that one word — *Pravda!* Without this word, herald of a unity of faith and justice,⁶² endemic to Christian Eastern thought, as well as without the element of the counter-cultural, guarantee that men and women are not simply reduced to ciphers of a culture but have a transcultural significance as ends-in-themselves, the rights of future generations are in danger of becoming yet an additional ideology, without any self-corrective, and without any real inspiration, because they too would simply aim to take somebody else's place and not create communion between past, present and future generations.

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62. Precisely the integrative character of Christian eastern thought accounts for the unity of faith and justice, dogma and spirituality, and so forth. For precisely the same reason, philosophical and theological themes in Russian thought are usually inextricably intertwined.