

## SOLOVYEV and ŠALKAUSKIS

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Before Solovyev there was no properly Russian philosophy; at least, there was no independent thought construction which had attained European significance. Russian thought was mostly a far and belated echo of Western thought. To be sure, there were powerful thought fragments, imaginative flights to the heights, subjective constructions, but no matter how inspired many of these appeared, there was no scientifically grounded philosophy until Solovyev came onto the scene.

### HIS LIFE

Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyev was born on January 28, 1853, in Moscow and grew up in a culturally significant family. His father was one of the leading Russian historians; it is told that in his youth he wanted to write a philosophical treatise which was to have proved the divine origin of Christianity. During his high-school period Solovyev lived through a spiritual crisis. He had read Buechner's **Kraft und Stoff** as well as the life of Jesus, both by Renan and by Strauss. He swore so much by the positivist Comte and by Darwin, that the friend of his youth, Lopatin, tells that he has seen no such passionate materialist in his later days. This philosophy, however, could not satisfy him for long. He searched further and came to Spinoza, in whose **Ethics** he recognized the presence of the spirit and the necessity for the divine. If Spinoza — as Solovyev himself has testified — was his "first romance," then soon he lived through a second with Plato, Augustine, Kant, Hegel, and Schelling. He was most deeply impressed by Schelling in his last period, in which he had pointed out the primacy of religious wisdom as well as the intellectual viewpoint and had made these the methods of his own world-knowledge.

With this turn, Solovyev came back to the faith of his people; his countrymen Chaadayev and Khomyakov were decisively significant in the conversion. In this spirit (already evident in his master's thesis on the "Crisis of Western Philosophy") he turned against the positivists, a position which was strengthened even more by his lectures on "Metaphysics and Positive Knowledge" two years later.

To deepen his knowledge, Solovyev soon traveled to the West, where he hoped to meet with the Indian, Gnostic, and Middle - Age philosophies. He spent some time in London, but soon left for Egypt, so that — as he expresses it in his vivid language — he could "listen to the wilderness" and "reach a more significant fullness and peace of the inner sight." His faith in God was more and more transformed into knowledge about him.

After his return, Solovyev began to lecture, but not for long, for after the attempt in 1881 on Czar Alexander II he petitioned for clemency on the would-be assassins and consequently was no longer permitted to lecture to the public.

Sentenced to pen and ink, he could only participate in the scholarly controversies. This he did without rest, fighting both the atheism of the Western-oriented liberal and the feverish nationalism of the Slavophiles — the Romantic believers.

In this double struggle he arrived at the insight that the split of the Greek-Orthodox Church from the Oecumene is a misfortune to Russia and to all Christendom. To restore this unity for himself, in February of 1896 he joined the Roman Catholic Church without leaving his Russian-Orthodox community of believers. He hoped that many of his countrymen would follow his example. He remained alone; this disappointment made his last years even more bitter. Weakened by so

much struggle and spiritual effort, Solovyev died in 1900, as a monk in the world, who impressed with his spirit and goodness all those whose roads crossed his own.

## THE NUCLEUS OF HIS TEACHING

In the middle of his teaching stands Christ, the God-Man, who marks the center of the world and history. All rays run together in Christ; the history of the world is headed toward him. His resurrection from the dead is the fulcrum of the plan of God, who wants to raise all to the Creator. Matter is also not thrown aside — it will be made clear in God.

But Solovyev is not only a philosophical apologist for Christianity; he is also a mystic. The spirit of Plato and the Greek Fathers of the Church breathes in him; thus, for him the world of phenomena is only a veil which is spread over the whole world. The mystic in him wants to raise it softly and thus open to us the brightness of God. In blessed moments he lives in the Eternal-Divine as the reality of his mystical love.

This announcement of the true Divine which hides behind appearances often sounds in Solovyev as a pantheistic explanation for the world.

The divine foundation of the all-unified world reveals itself to us as the eternal Wisdom, and in the form of Hagia Sophia. Solovyev believed having seen it in a mystical vision in London as well as in Egypt. He was then flooded by purified beauty in the light of the Divine, because "the immeasurable had entered her measure."

With the emphasis of this feminine element Solovyev comes near to the Gnostics, by which he does not quite escape the naturalization of the divine.

## HIS SIGNIFICANCE

This lies before all in his daring to confess his Christian world-view in an age of disbelief. After the materialism which announced that "man is what man eats" and called truth **filia temporis**, Solovyev was like a guide from the narrowness of matter to the breadth of the spirit; he founded a new idealism in the midst of an overpowering atheistic Russian intelligentsia.

Poets are also indebted to him, because he looks at the reality hidden behind the "Veil of Isis" in such exalted visions, that his language rises to poetic beauty. The Russian symbolist movement is almost unthinkable without him; even Alexander Blok reflects his light.

Many were attracted to him by his personality; he lived what he taught and thus walked as Good himself through the stormy life of his nation. One understands why Dostoyevsky idealized him as Alyosha in his **Brothers Karamazov**.

The deep meaning of his thoughts, his mystical absorption, the magic of his language, his whole being make Solovyev the most meaningful phenomenon of Russian philosophy. Certainly, he is the most influential lay theologian of his nation — he had managed to break the hold of materialism and atheism on the academic youth, thereby becoming the heart of the new Russian Renaissance.

## HIS ROAD TO THE WEST

Solovyev himself was the first missionary of his teaching: he wrote his book on **History and the Future of Theocracy** in Zagreb, and one of his principal works — **Russia and the Church** — appeared in Paris, in French, so that it could be read in the West. Few used this opportunity, because the thought of a mechanistically determined evolution (as represented by Darwin and Haeckel, for example) yet held sway over many. Solovyev had to wait for his disciples to introduce him to the West.

Among these, the refugees from Bolshevism—Bulgakov, Berayaev, Karsavin, and Ivanov — have done the most for their spiritual precursor. Since Solovyev's ideas remained hidden in their individual works, however, few in the West saw that these thinkers had received their light from a stronger sun. Solovyev himself thus remained in the background.

The honor of having removed him from this twilight falls to Tumarkin, Usnadse, and Steppuhn in Germany and to Michel d'Herbigny, S.J., in France; the latter called Solovyev a "Russian Newman." These works, which appeared before the First World War, were not to have quick successors, for the year 1917 which brought Bolshevism and dialectical materialism to Russia also put an end to the spread of Solovyev's ideas in his native country. Since at the same time the war cut our ties with the Slavic East, it appeared that Solovyev, having stepped forth from the darkness, would have to return to the darkness once more. This fate did not befall him only because of the Lithuanian scholar Stasys Šalkauskis.

## THE LITHUANIAN CULTURE-BRIDGE

Šalkauskis represented the view that his fatherland, the Baltic, was destined by nature to become a cultural bridge between the East and the West. These two worlds could not live independently of each other, but were forced to a spiritual exchange. The two polarities find a creative meeting-ground in the Baltic area, especially in Lithuania. Thus the Lithuanian nation has the historical task of understanding the East and the West, of bridging them together and lifting them to a higher spiritual unity. Šalkauskis outlines the historic mission of his nation in his work **Sur les confins de deux mondes**, which appeared in Geneva in 1919; in this work the mission finds its classical expression. Šalkauskis himself is a striking example of this culture-mediator vocation of the Lithuanians: he was to become a mediator between the two worlds as he guided Solovyev from the Slavic East into the romano-germanic West.

## STASYS ŠALKKAUSKIS (1886-1941)

Šalkauskis stems from an old Lithuanian family. He attended the Gymnasium at Šiauliai, where his father was a physician and the mayor. As a Catholic, Stasys found his first spiritual father in the Frenchman Ernest Hello. When Šalkauskis entered the University of Moscow in 1905 to study law, he became even more influenced by Solovyev, who had died just a few years before. He entered into a student circle named after the great man: the circle wanted to preserve the memory of the philosopher and to carry his spiritual riches into the future.

Among the members of this circle were N. P. Svencickis and Vladimir F. Ern. Ern worked vigorously for his dead master; inspired by him, he undertook to bring philosophy down from its heights in order to find the divine meaning of life, to awaken its spiritual beauty and social responsibility. There was not much time for this struggle; Ern died in the year 1917. Together with Svencickis, however, he had a decisive accomplishment: they won the first Lithuanian philosopher for Solovyev.

Šalkauskis was prepared for this in advance; he had refused the world-view which then reigned in the university, as witnessed by his following statement. "The majority of the Russian students at that time, together with a significant part of the professors, had signed up for Positivism and Marxism. The revolutionary and nihilistic spirit was so strong, that only a few could withstand it. In me it only aroused distaste, thus I looked for something entirely different. I had entered into the religious-philosophical society which was founded by Russian intellectuals in memory of Solovyev in order to bring the Christian world-view into harmony with political and social radicalism. Here I found the active leaders of this movement: V. P. Svencickis and V. F. Ern. I was impressed by these outspoken and active older colleagues, and together with them I read Solovyev's writings. I filled with enthusiasm for this great Russian philosopher, who now became very important for my spiritual development. Svencickis and Ern published the periodical **Zhivaia Zhizn**, in which were reflected the ideas about which we spoke in our society. All this was new to me and corresponded entirely with my spiritual effort. Although I was a Catholic in a Russian-Orthodox society, I was treated well. Among these honest searchers for God I never felt any narrow-hearted exclusive-ness or hate for other religions." [1](#)

Thus Solovyev became Šalkauskis' spiritual guide. Although the young Lithuanian studied law in Moscow and from 1911 worked in Samarkand as an attorney for a bank, yet his life was already given to philosophy. He took over from his mentor many thoughts, even fundamental ideas, and started to build a unified, systematically developed philosophical structure. No matter how near he was to Solovyev, still Šalkauskis wanted to be more than just a translation of Solovyev into the Baltic: in the Christian spirit of the Russian he aimed to find a Lithuanian solution of problems which were weighing him.

In order to better prepare for his life's task, Šalkauskis struggled to move from the loneliness of Samarkand on the Indian border to the West. Although the World War set up mountainous obstacles in his way, in 1915 he succeeded in coming to Switzerland, where he continued his studies in the University of Freiburg, this time in the Department of Philosophy.

This transfer was accompanied by a shock in spirit. Until then the young Lithuanian had lived in a Platonic world, had himself led by primordial ideas, and tried to approach them through meditation and intuition — exactly like Solovyev. Filled by this spirit, he defended himself against the neo-scholasticism which threatened to engulf him through the Freiburg

Dominicans. He felt ill at ease in a rationalism which seemed to give so little significance to personal experience. This jump from mysticism to scholastic thinking, from the living inner-sight to the dry logic was so difficult to him, that he confessed his disappointment in Thomism to his Lithuanian colleagues.

After Šalkauskis had conquered his initial uneasiness, he immersed himself in the study of this new philosophical road (according to the principle **audiatur et altera pars**), which was made easier by the help of gifted professors. His study of Plato now included Aristotle, who made him friends with the scholastic legacy. This resulted in an idea system which connected the West and the East, in which the ontology was Aristotelian, but the metaphysics thoroughly Platonic. The major role in the development of this system fell to the ideas of Plato and Solovyev.

In this new philosophical atmosphere Šalkauskis came to understand what mission was given to Solovyev in this Aristotelian-Thomist thought-area. He began to formulate a plan of presenting the West with Solovyev's thoughts — hitherto the West had heard about his teacher only in fragments and in round-about routes. With this goal in mind he organized a study-group of young Lithuanians who were spiritually at home equally in the East and West and, knowing the Russian and Western languages, could serve as true mediators between the two cultures. Thus his thesis of the culture-mediation task of his Baltic homeland would be illustrated by a forceful example.

To start off this work, Šalkauskis wrote a book, which would expose the nucleus of Solovyev's thought-legacy: the problem of the World-Soul. This book appeared in 1920 in Berlin under the title **L'Ame du monde dans la philosophie de Vladimir Soloviev**. The book shows the spiritual relationship of the writer to his Russian predecessor, but also shows how strongly he has been influenced by neo-scholasticism, for Solovyev's theses are judged in its light.

Solovyev's concept of the World-Soul is by no means original; it was known to Indian philosophers, Plato, Plotinus, Bruno, Schelling, and others. By the World-Soul they understood the unity of the world, that non-personal spiritual power which works in all living things. The individual soul is understood to be an emanation of this all-inclusive World - Soul. Solovyev was especially near to Plato, Plotinus, and Schelling; influenced by them, he wrote about the World-Soul: "Just as the divine powers form the one whole organism of the living Logos, so do the human elements form an equally unified organism, the all-human organism as the eternal body of God and the eternal Soul of the World." [2](#)

Using the arguments of his Thomist teachers, Šalkauskis refuses this formulation: he considers this as metaphysical monism, an anthropomorphic thought. This World-Soul seems to him just an image of the poet: "Ce ne peut être rien qu'une métaphore." [3](#)

Generally, the Lithuanian takes a very critical stance. Solovyev — so he asserts surprisingly — is more of a poet than a thinker, more a visionary than a philosopher. "Qu'est-ce que l'ame du monde sinon une fixation de quel-que vision mystique?" [4](#) The Russian had philosophised himself away from reality; he could have avoided this danger through neo-scholastic thought. "He did not do this, so he failed to reach his goal." [5](#)

This judgment shows clearly that it was formed in the Aristotelian spirit of the West. The critical position did not diminish the Lithuanian philosopher's love for his mentor, yet he knew too well what task fell to the Platonically inspired Solovyev in the rationalistic West. Basing himself on this, he encouraged his younger countrymen to do further research in Solovyev's thought - legacy. Thus Bistras presented the moral philosophy of the Russian philosopher; Ambrozaitis — the political theory; Mykolaitis gave a picture of his aesthetics; Trukanas explored the philosophy of history. Further works of Gronis, Sideravičius, and Tamošaitis added to these, so that through the mediation of young Lithuanians the Western world was presented with the foundations of an **Encyclopedia Soloviana**.

After their return to Lithuania, the University of Kaunas continued the work. Thus, Szykarski's book, **Solowjows Philosophic der All-Einheit**, appeared in 1932; for the first time it gave a complete introduction to the world-view and the writings of the Russian.

This work was also influenced by Šalkauskis, for he was a professor of Philosophy and Education at the same university and was still excited by Solovyev's ideas; even after his Aristotelian studies he remained a Platonist and Solovyevist on decisive questions.

How true he remained to his Russian teacher is shown even by the structure of his life, which — consciously or not — is near to that of his predecessor even in surprising details.

Just as Solovyev, so also Šalkauskis wanted to travel to India at the end of his studies, to experience the secrets of Asiatic wisdom. Just as the Russian, upon his return to his country he tried to organize academic youth in the Christian spirit. Just like the Russian, the Lithuanian attacked equally the Western-oriented rationalists and materialists, and the conservative nationalists who considered themselves Christian. Just as Solovyev, Šalkauskis fought against an autocrat regime, against the arrest and prohibition of idealist intellectuals. Even as his teacher was sentenced to silence by the czarist officials, so Šalkauskis was released from his academic position when Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union. Just as Solovyev turned away from his countrymen in disappointment at the end of his life, and accused them of not having understood the seriousness of the hour, and prophesied an apocalyptic end for the nation, so Šalkauskis accused his nation of indifference and betrayal of ideas, for which Bolshevism is a deserved punishment. Similarly to the Russian, the Lithuanian also led an

ascetic life, which he restlessly placed in the service of truth, for which he suffered much with philosophical patience and Christian resignation. In the chaos of the second World War he no longer had his own home; he died in his mother's house and was buried, like Solovyev, at the side of his father.

## NOTES

1. St. Šalkauskis, "Atsakymas prof. Pr. Dovydaičiui," *Ateitis*, Kaunas, 1936 (no. 11), p. 475.
2. B. S. Schultze, *Russische Denker*, Wien, 1950, p. 261.
3. St. Šalkauskis, *L'Âme du Monde dans la Philosophie de Vl. S.*, Berlin, 1920, p. 117.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

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