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## The philosophical idea of a new Christian civilization in Russian Religious Philosophy

**Abstract:** The article argues, using the thought of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Nikolai Berdyaev as an example, that the search for the genesis of the current political ideology, guiding the armed conflict launched by Russia in Ukraine, in the thought represented by Russian religious philosophers of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, i.e., the founders of a strictly national philosophy, is quite superficial and essentially unfounded. For the idea of a new Christian civilization with a new state order and a new role for the Orthodox Church, which they formulated, was an idea of such a Christian reality, the fulfilment of which, in their view, could only occur at a very distant time, actually at the end of human history, and required an earlier spiritual and moral revolution.

**Keywords:** Russian Religious Philosophy, Dostoevsky, Berdyaev, New Christian Civilization

### Introduction

Historical ideas are reread when a specific socio-cultural and political situation with its ambiguity and problematic nature forces this intellectual revision. In the era of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, causing dangerous global political and economic consequences, an extremely important

issue for representatives of the humanities has become the question of the cultural sources of the declared ideology implementing the national idea (the idea of patriotism), guiding Russia's attack on Ukraine, that is, the ideology supposedly guarding traditional national values. At the same time, it is often assumed in the ongoing discussions and statements formulated by historians of ideas,<sup>1</sup> philosophers,<sup>2</sup> writers<sup>3</sup> or publicists,<sup>4</sup> that these sources may have appeared as early as the second half of the 19th century, that is, when the strictly national philosophy of Russia, i.e., Russian religious philosophy proposing new ideas, but also reflecting to a large extent the traditional thinking of Russians, was being formed. It was created by prominent thinkers - writers and philosophers *sensu stricto*, including Fyodor Dostoevsky, Vladimir Solovyov, Nikolai Berdyaev and others. Its renaissance was already taking place after the collapse of the Soviet Union, thus influencing the mindset of contemporary Russians, shaping their *mentalité*. This became particularly evident when Russia, after its failure to introduce Western-style capitalism (which can be dated from the ruble crash in 1998), began to implement *reflexive modernization*, i.e., a capitalist economy based on anti-individualist national values. Restored to favor, after years of the reign of communist thought, Russian religious philosophy thus became a reservoir of ready-made axiological solutions and, at the same time, clichés of thought, relevant to Russians who found themselves in a new and difficult phase of their coun-

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<sup>1</sup> Andrzej Walicki, "Czy Władimir Putin może stać się ideowym przywódcą światowego konserwyzmu?", *Przegląd Polityczny* 130 (2015), access 2.09.2022, <https://www.tygodnikprze-glad.pl/> [it is worth adding that Andrew Walicki was primarily concerned with the conservative philosopher Ivan Ilyin].

<sup>2</sup> Michael Eltchaninoff, *Co ma Putin w głowie?*, transl. Andrzej Blik (Warszawa: Studio Emka, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> This refers to contemporary Polish writer Stefan Chwin. See Marek Nogaś, interview with Stefan Chwin, "Co Putin bierze z Dostojewskiego", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15.07.2022, 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> For example, a statement by croatian publicist Ivica Šola, "Kissinger – Da biste razumjeli Putina i njegove ideje, treba čitati Dostojevskoga, a ne Marxa", *Slobodna Dalmacija* 20, 2022, access 22.10.2022, <https://croativ.net/kissinger-da-biste-razumjeli-putina-treba-citati-dostojevskog-a-ne-marxa-30467/>.

try's development, described by researchers as a period of trauma,<sup>5</sup> anarchy, archaic<sup>6</sup>, or a return to medieval feudalism.

However, an important research question arises as to whether one can agree without much reservation with this popular position, which in its extreme form claims that Fyodor Dostoevsky or Leo Tolstoy began to popularize in their novels the idea of a *Great* (and authoritarian) *Russia*, which later Russian thinkers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries justified in philosophical terms, and on which today's Russian President Vladimir Putin eagerly relies as the foundation of a new strategy for governing the state, displacing the previous tactics of "ad hoc power without a script" and the use of political technologies (manipulation and imagology).<sup>7</sup> The following article argues,<sup>8</sup> that such a framing of the role of Russian religious philosophy is rather superficial and essentially unwarranted, especially in its mainstream, which we focus on here.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the idea of a new civilization with a new state order and a new role for the Orthodox Church formulated by Russian religious philosophers was a blueprint for such a Christian world, the realization of which could, in their view, take place at a very distant time, only at the end of human history, and not in a short period of time and "under the armed patronage of the Russian army and with the tsar as father in chief".<sup>10</sup> Detailed research in this regard, confirming the thesis presented here, was carried out by the author in the work *Od nihilizmu do chrześcijaństwa. Historia i współczesność idei filozoficzno-religijnego*

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<sup>5</sup> Halina Rarot, "Obraz władzy w najnowszej filozofii rosyjskiej (na przykładzie myśli Walentyny G. Fiedotowej)", in: *Obrazy władzy we współczesnej kulturze rosyjskiej*, ed. Bartłomiej Brzeziński et al. (Bydgoszcz: Dom Wydawniczy Epigram, 2017), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Valentina Fedotova, *Sotsial'nye znaniya i sotsial'nye izmeneniya* (Moscow: IF RAN, 2001), 233–236.

<sup>7</sup> Valentina Fedotova, *Khoroshoye obshchestvo* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsia, 2005), 435.

<sup>8</sup> Of course, the author is aware of the danger that, as a representative of Western culture, she may understand these issues in an overly fragmented and biased way.

<sup>9</sup> However, one should not forget about the exceptions that can cast a shadow over the whole phenomenon. The issue here is the work of the philosopher Ivan Il'in (1883–1954), as much as possible included in the phenomenon of Russian religious philosophy, although not in its mainstream (due to a not very Christian stance towards evil, i.e., advocating the axiological option of opposing evil by force). He is today described by French philosopher and Russian scholar Michel Eltchaninoff as "the first philosophical love of the Russian president". See Eltchaninoff, *Co ma Putin w głowie?*

<sup>10</sup> Nogaś, "Co Putin bierze z Dostojewskiego", 18–19.

*przewycięzania nihilizmu (From Nihilism to Christianity. History and contemporaneity of the idea of philosophical-religious overcoming of nihilism)* (Lublin 2011). The following article will present, in a rather abbreviated form, conditioned by the length of the statement, only some of the final results of this research, and only with reference to the thought of the precursor of this philosophy, namely Fyodor Dostoevsky, and to its mature form, occurring especially in the third period of the philosophical work of Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948).

## 1. Renewed Christianity according to Fyodor Dostoevsky

It is a fact that the life and works of the precursor of Russian religious philosophy and a champion for many of his successor-philosophers, that is, the outstanding writer and publicist Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881) could and can still be read in this spirit: that he was indeed “the world ambassador of the religiously legitimized total subjection of the Russian people to the sacral power of the authoritarian ruler”,<sup>11</sup> i.e., a classic proponent of the Russian tri-unity (Orthodoxy, self-rule, nation) preached since the second half of the 19th century. However, when one desists from hastily analyzing his entire oeuvre, one then perceives a certain thought-provoking split: in his journalistic works and diaries, Dostoevsky is indeed convinced, as the Polish writer and literary historian Stefan Chwin states, that “imperial Russia is the last authentic rescuer of true (Orthodox) Christianity on earth, for it defends humanity from the spiritual decay of the West”,<sup>12</sup> while in his great novels he seems to be anti-authoritarian. This ideological split of Dostoevsky can be interpreted in various ways. The first of these, ultimately extremely closely situated to the above popular thesis, can be found in the eminent Polish historian of Russian philosophy Andrzej Walicki. Admittedly, in his work *Zarys myśli rosyjskiej. Od oświecenia do renesansu religijno-filozoficznego* (2005), he states this research fact (referring to the position of many literary scholars), that “Dostoevsky cannot be identified with the characters of his novels [...] that Dostoevsky as a lit-

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

erary artist is not the same as Dostoevsky as a thinker”,<sup>13</sup> but in the end he favors the well-founded, in his opinion, thesis of American researcher James Scanlan. This author, on the other hand, “proved that Dostoevsky’s great novels of the 1960s and 1970s were the expression of a very coherent philosophical concept: dialogical in form (as Bakhtin rightly emphasized), but essentially, monological in content”<sup>14</sup> (and, we should add for the sake of completeness: being a consistent criticism of capitalism and Western individualism and its accompanying negatively conceived freedom).

The second way of interpreting this dualism, for the time being having only the character of a hypothesis, may look as follows: in his great novels, the writer Dostoevsky is indeed anti-authoritarian as a thinker, since their main theme is human freedom, its forms and limits. In them he posed the problem of freedom of the spirit in all its depth and sharpness. As Berdyaev later wrote in *The Philosophy of the Free Spirit* (1927), “it is clear that this thinker-writer did not grapple with the school question of freedom of the will, but with a far more serious problem,<sup>15</sup> [...] Russian religious thought discovered freedom of the spirit as its main theme. Already Slavophiles taught about Christian freedom (possible even in a world without freedom – H.R.). Its greatest preacher was Dostoevsky”.<sup>16</sup> However, this anti-authoritarianism of his was, for understandable life reasons, quite secretive. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), a Russian literary scholar and philosopher, called Dostoevsky’s works *polyphonic novels*, in which the writer did not impose anything on the heroes, nor did he say his last word, and in which there was only a constant dialogue of these figures, full of their conflicting voices and worldviews. One can intellectually venture and say that Dostoevsky in this very way taught future generations of Russian intellectuals to use *newspeak*, understood in its second sense, that is, the language of power and the media controlled by it, which is a vital necessity in all authoritarian or totalitarian systems.

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<sup>13</sup> Andrzej Walicki, *Zarys myśli rosyjskiej. Od oświecenia do renesansu religijno-filozoficznego* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2005), 480.

<sup>14</sup> James P. Scanlan, *Dostoevsky the Thinker* (London: Ithaca, 2002), 4; quoted by Walicki, *Zarys myśli rosyjskiej. Od oświecenia do renesansu religijno-filozoficznego*, 480.

<sup>15</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, *Filozofia wolnego ducha*, transl. Halina Rarot (Warszawa: WFiS PAN, 2022), 147.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, 180.

Finally, there is a third way of interpreting this split into writer and thinker, as hypothetical as the second.<sup>17</sup> It consists in seeing in Dostoevsky's bifurcated worldview a strictly Russian binary thinking (which was discovered in Russians by Boris Ouspensky and Yuri Latman), based on sharp, black-and-white divisions and disallowing the existence of an axiologically neutral sphere, and constantly balancing between these poles/positions, in this case between sympathy for anarchism and sympathy for authoritarianism. Moreover, as Nikolai Berdyaev points out in his post-war treatise *The Russian Idea* (1946), these opposing poles or positions can hardly even be considered antitheses, since they are complementary in one way or another, and thus form an antinomic whole, vibrating, full of fluctuations, but alive because of that. The second hypothesis is left for other researchers to verify, while the third hypothetical interpretation of the reason for the split in Dostoevsky's worldview can be easily justified by analogy with the binary mindset of the Russian as such. Moreover, this succumbing of Russians to conflicting desires and yet retaining a relatively stable identity is best conveyed, as the contemporary Russian writer Viktor Yerofeyev aptly notes, by the very symbol of Russia – the image of a two-headed eagle, looking in two different directions but sharing a common stomach.<sup>18</sup> It is impossible not to warn that this intellectual and at the same time emotional balancing act will also be very evident in Nikolai Berdyaev's views.

It is now worth taking a brief look at Dostoevsky's implicit social philosophy, admittedly underdeveloped, but nevertheless containing some important findings. As will be seen, one will find in it a lot of sympathy for anarchism rather than authoritarianism. The thinker was not only concerned with renewing the religious worldview, with reminding representatives of the positivist intelligentsia about it, as one would expect after he experienced a deep

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<sup>17</sup> In this case, the hypothesis can be more easily verified, since already cultural semioticians Yuriy Latman and Boris Ouspensky, dividing cultures into binary and ternary, stated that Russian culture is an example of a binary system, in which meanings are developed through “a dichotomous division into system and counter-system”. See Magda Dolinska-Rydzek, “Chrystus czy Antychryst? (De)sakralizacja obrazu władzy we współczesnej Rosji”, in: *Obrazy władzy we współczesnej kulturze rosyjskiej*, ed. Bartłomiej Brzeziński et al. (Bydgoszcz: Dom Wydawniczy Epigram, 2017), 94.

<sup>18</sup> Viktor Yerofeev, *Rosyjska apokalipsa. Próba eschatologii artystycznej*, transl. Andrzej de Lazari (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2008), 333–334.

conversion to Christianity (which took place in the wake of the trauma of Siberian exile). For he understood perfectly, almost like a social philosopher *sensu stricto*, that Christianity is *religio*, that is, a warm social bond that will not be provided by the Western instrumental reasoning on which educated Russians want to model themselves, as well as *confessio*, that is, the foundation for moral acts, without which these have begun to seriously erode. The thinker was deeply convinced that relying solely on conscience (without belief in the existence of God), which is the basis of Western European secular individualism, could lead to amoral attitudes.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Dostoevsky's concern to reorganize the crumbling social life not only of Russia, but also of Western Europe can be seen here. Such a Christian religion renewed in its meaning, in the form of the Orthodox,<sup>20</sup> rather than Catholic or Protestant, would, after all, also be *pietas*, or authentic piety, which is identical with deep love for man and the world, love on the model of Christ's love. It would not necessarily immediately identify with aristocratic mysticism, appropriate for the time being for personality and spiritually selected individuals. Dostoevsky also hinted in a novel way, ahead of the 20th-century movement of socially engaged Christianity (as noted by another later writer and philosopher, Dmitry Merezhkovsky), that being a Christian is by no means identical only with the *love of heaven* and the accompanying *hatred of earth*; on the contrary, it can finally be an unprecedented allegiance to the earth,<sup>21</sup> that is, it cannot only embrace the principle of fraternal unity and commitment to social, political and international problems, but also permeate them all with an accepting mystical love.<sup>22</sup> Faith as *religio*, uniting Russian society in a coherent whole into *an integrated spiritual community*, which philosophers counted among the camp of Slavophiles (Aleksei Khomyakov was the first to do so) referred to as *council*, i.e., an informal and harmonious spiritual unity of

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<sup>19</sup> Michał Bohun, *Fiodor Dostojewski i idea upadku cywilizacji europejskiej* (Katowice: Silesia, 1996), 94-95; Halina Rarot, *Od nihilizmu do chrześcijaństwa. Historia i współczesność idei filozoficzno-religijnego przewycięzania nihilizmu* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2011), 73.

<sup>20</sup> Here one can see, in addition to religious or national fanaticism, simple perspectivism, a common cognitive error found in writers or philosophers.

<sup>21</sup> Dmitrii Sergeevich Merezhkovsky, *Lev Tolstoi i Dostoevskii* (Moscow: Izd. Pyrozhkova, SP, 1909), 36-37.

<sup>22</sup> Dmitrii Sergeevich Merezhkovsky, *Prorok russskoi rewolutsii. K jubilee Dostoevskogo* (Moscow: Izd. Pirozhkova, SP, 1906), 151.

all believers, would also be a force gradually transforming societies and states from all over the world into the Church, i.e., into Humanity united in the spirit of brotherly love and mercy; in other words, into a new Christian theocracy.

This essentially Christian community, which is best understood on the basis of Orthodox anthropology, reflecting the spirit of collectivist thinking of the Russians, would finally replace legal formalism and state coercion as such with exclusively ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Thus, there would no longer be any place here for “the tsar as father in chief”, after all, the tsar had so far ruled the Orthodox Church only externally, officially (from the institutional side), and not internally, far from being a “rule of souls”. Nor would there have been the use of the Russian army assisting in the formation of this council. The said council would have been able to realize the ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity also toward people of other Christian denominations. Such *spiritual communism*, as defined by Berdyaev in his later work *The Origin of Russian Communism* (1937)<sup>23</sup> was the thinking of Dostoyevsky, would proclaim and realize social solidarity, occurring for the time being only in the lives of simple people, in the Russian people uniting in the name of Christ.<sup>24</sup> Dostoevsky’s proposed new form of social life for Christians, i.e., council, would be preceded by a stage of functioning in the form of a tribal collective and a stage of life proper to modern individualism.<sup>25</sup> Of course, the thinker did not expect that the emergence of such council would be something easy, thus avoiding one of the aspects of any utopian thinking, which is the rush to realize a new idea. On the contrary, he thought that the road to such a church – first a non-empirical, merely spiritual, and eventually an empirical community – would be quite long, but such a church, or the *Kingdom of God*, would be realized, if only at the end of history, as the old man Zosyma predicts in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Dostoevsky, who was criticized – fortunately for him – by many publicists or philosophers, realized in time this significant danger, that the idea of a new theocracy could easily degenerate and become a vision of an earthly paradise

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<sup>23</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, *Źródła i sens rosyjskiego komunizmu*, transl. Henryk Paprocki (Kęty: Antyk, 2005), 66.

<sup>24</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Dziennik pisarza*, transl. Maria Leńniewska, vol. 3 (Warszawa: 1982), 89.

<sup>25</sup> Rarot, *Od nihilizmu do chrześcijaństwa...*, 74.



built by the perfect Philanthropist Humanist, that is, actually the enemy of humanity, the Antichrist, as he showed in the the legend of “The Grand Inquisitor” contained in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Unfortunately, the later founders of the St. Petersburg movement of “new religious consciousness” (from 1903-1907), ideologically borrowing from their master Dostoevsky, failed to recognize this danger. Influenced by a difficult period in Russian history, they succumbed to the chiliastic illusion, i.e., the belief in the coming of the millennial *Kingdom of God* on earth (brought back to life by their fascination with primordial Christianity), and actually preached the speedy arrival of this *Kingdom* [after the disasters of the existing world order and the 1905 Revolution]. Only Berdyaev, having realized his mistake, will recognize the hope for the imminent realization of the *Kingdom of Heaven* under earthly conditions as decidedly unfounded, and will similarly judge the theocratic idea itself as coming into inevitable conflict with Christian freedom.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. New Christian civilization according to Nikolai Berdyaev

In the previous research reception of the thought of this prominent Russian philosopher, both Western European and Russian, the generally positive assessment of his philosophical-religious worldview referred mainly to the theoretical part. On the other hand, with regard to Berdyaev’s idea of practical reformation of Christianity in the direction of neo-Christianity, i.e., Christianity of the Holy Spirit, there were only various objections. Not surprisingly, therefore, interpretive errors also arose, both on the part of scholars with a secularist orientation and on the part of representatives of religious institutions. This happened, for example, to the prominent theologian Georgiy Florovsky, who in his most important work *Puti russkogo bogoslovija* (1927) too tendentiously identified the entire creative path of Berdyaev (including the emigration stage) with the early St. Petersburg period, in which the latter actually developed the idea of apocalyptic Christianity, predicting the coming

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<sup>26</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, “Lik i likhiny Rossii. K isledovaniyu ideologiyi Dostoevskogo”, in: *Rodnoe i wselenskoe* (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), 332-333.

Apocalypse and the Second Coming of Christ, and exposed himself to the charge of sharing mystical anarchism, formulated by orthodox theologians. It is then, in the years 1904–1907, a period of participation in the “new religious consciousness” movement seeking to formulate a “new Christianity”, that his sympathy for anarchism will indeed be revealed, but no longer in the form of the rule of the communist community, but of the religious community. As a budding (having survived his youthful fascination with Marxism) religious thinker, he then denies the institution of the state in general. He rejects the long-established collectivist Platonic-Aristotelian tradition in thinking about the role of the state in the life of the individual, and cautiously shares the individualistic thinking of Aurelius Augustine, who saw political secular power as a negative factor in the life of Christians, since almost every kind of it is intrinsically infested with evil. As such, state power cannot have any positive purpose.

Consequently, the Russian thinker sees the value of the state as inferior to the value of society, which in turn is inferior to the value of individual people. He also negates the self-rule of government in the state: not only monarchical, but even democratic, and takes the voluntarist position that it should be controlled and limited only by the institution of the Church and the “inner life of the individual”, that is, the spiritual life with its well-ordered conscience and gifts or charisms. He focuses his thinking on demonstrating the existence of another kind of authority, a second kind of sovereignty over the nation with an alternative to the secular idea of justice (born of a deep faith in God, not of a flawed human law). He seeks such a supra-state authority, to which the secular state could be subordinated, and which would set its boundaries. It becomes, in his work *Novoe religioznoe soznanie* (1907), the Christian Revelation, which contains and has always contained a detailed “Declaration of the Rights of the Human Soul” promoting man’s spiritual freedom from the natural world and temporal social life. It was on its basis that the spiritual kingdom was born, which took the form of the Church, although in the history of Christianity the two have never been closely identified. However, turning away from the earthly state as such does not mean that Christians cannot or should not oppose its degeneration. Berdyaev believes that Christians, by virtue of giving priority to transcendent and then immanent divine law over human law, because of judging the historical state from the point of view of

absolute law<sup>27</sup> even have the right to start a social revolution. This is how his neo-Christian idea of forming a socially active Christianity manifested itself. The earthly alternative to the state institution as such, including the rule of the czar or the coming rule of the workers, became, in his view, the idea of *a free personalist community*, also known as a *free theocracy*. Such a community would already be liberated from the coercion of state power and its more or less authoritarian apparatus. However, the thinker ultimately accepts a minimal role for the earthly state in shaping and supervising human life. It would boil down to providing at least the “substitute for peace” necessary in a world populated by spiritually perfected people preparing for the Apocalypse and the second coming of Christ. The remaining organizational tasks, however, would already be the responsibility of prominent religious figures, who would encourage moral and spiritual improvement in such a personalistic community voluntarily chosen by individuals.

This is how the *Christianity of the Holy Spirit* would come into being, that is, with the actual cooperation of Christians with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and at the same time a new era in the history of Christianity as such would emerge. It can be – complementing the thought of Berdyaev – also called a *new Christian civilization*, or, more precisely, *a new form of Christianity*. This would be the era of the Third Revelation of the Divine – as the Revelation of the Holy Spirit, complementing the two earlier ones: the Revelation of God the Father and the Revelation of the Son of God. It was to precede the occurrence of the fourth epoch, that is, the *Kingdom of God* and the end of the world as such. The *Kingdom of God* was thus to come into actual existence on earth in the very distant future, at the very end of the epoch of the Holy Spirit. Its coming was first to be heralded by specific apocalypses: political upheavals or revolutions occurring in Russia and other parts of the world. Because of its radicalism, it would also accelerate spiritual transformations and revolutions and the formation of mystical communities around the world, through which the transformation of the physical world would also take place. Thus, the “entanglement and insufficient separation of the imperial and the divine” would come to an

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<sup>27</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, “Gosudarstvo”, in: *Novoe religioznoe soznanie i obshchestvennost’* (Moscow: Kanon, 1999), 103.

end once and for all.<sup>28</sup> The Orthodox Church would finally cease to rely on the institutions of secular power, and would now rely only on its own strength, that is, on the activity and will of authentic communities of the faithful. The much-desired “brotherhood of people in Christ”<sup>29</sup> would be born, functioning above all political divisions.

Christianity would take on a qualitative rather than quantitative form, it would again have an eschatological rather than merely historical dimension. Essential in this process would be the unification of people through love. Human love, framed in a new way by Berdyaev, was the concretization and individualization of one love for God and for the divine nature in people. It was, of course, about non-physiological spiritual ecstasy, which with its power was supposed to transport people into the supernatural dimension and, by the way, was supposed to transform their physical dimension as well. Berdyaev imagined no other path leading to a free theocracy than precisely spiritual (mystical) love. In this early reflection on a new form of Christianity, the philosopher was not at all worried about the threat from Chiliasm. On the contrary, he praised it and justified it with the following words: “only in a theocracy will a miracle take place, but a miracle of faith. From striving towards God, mountains will move and it will become clear that the iron necessity and regularity of nature is only its disease, a growth on the body of the world [...]. The miraculous power of theocracy in the world is our chiliastic hope. It is only with chiliastic beliefs that our hope for the *Kingdom of God* on earth is connected [...]. The organic emergence of theocracy in the world is a foreshadowing of the chiliastic millennial Kingdom, the road to the *New Jerusalem*. The historic church rejected the chiliastic beliefs and therefore turned away from the earth, took away any truth from the earth”.<sup>30</sup> Berdyaev, looking for a convincing model to make this *Kingdom* possible, ultimately concluded that it would have to be an organic-evolutionary path, consistent with the natural growth and development of the nation as such.

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<sup>28</sup> Berdyaev, “Teokratiya”, in: *Novoe religioznoe soznanie i obshchestvennost'*, 264.

<sup>29</sup> Berdyaev, “Metaphysics of the sex and love”, in: *Novoe religioznoe soznanie i obshchestvennost'*, 247-248.

<sup>30</sup> Berdyaev, “Teokratiya”, 280.

In the next and already independent period of development of his philosophical religious thought, when he formulates his own vision of the idea of a “new religious consciousness”, his attitude to the state and secular authority will change: he will no longer deny them, but, on the contrary, justify them philosophically. Thus, it can be said that his Russian balancing act between anarchism and authoritarianism now settles at the opposite pole from anarchism. Berdyaev begins to see in the state as such, regardless of its form, also a positive aspect. It is the realization of tasks that cannot realistically be realized in such a fraternity. These tasks include protecting man’s freedom and independence and safeguarding him from “complete dependence of his life on anyone’s moral qualities, love or hatred”.<sup>31</sup> which can arise even in a free theocracy (and to which law and state coercion must ultimately be applied). In his next work *The Philosophy of Inequality* (1923), he will explicitly recognize the state as an entity in its own right, as an indispensable part of “the wealth and power of God’s world”, he will see in it “a high step in the hierarchy of being”.<sup>32</sup> Fortunately, he does not go to extremes in this new for him thinking, he understands that the state, despite its lofty status, can, unfortunately, easily turn into a “kingdom of evil”. This happens when it is made an object of idolatry, when it “begins to harm the spiritual and infinite nature of man”.<sup>33</sup>

However, this philosophical-religious justification of the role of state power as a necessary tool for disciplining the natural side of man, necessary even in a theocracy, does not mean that Berdyaev advocates a theocratic conception of the state and power in its historical sense. After all, the history of medieval theocracies has shown that such states, despite their religious origins, turned into degenerate forms of power as they operated in the natural environment, the world of nature and sensual man. After moving away from the apocalyptic movement of the “new religious consciousness” and into thinking in the spirit of mystical realism, evident in *The Philosophy of the Free Spirit* (1927), Berdyaev’s binary thinking again comes to lean toward the anarchist pole. He then writes extensively about a new, but already internal and invisible form of Christi-

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<sup>31</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, “O państwie”, in: *Filozofia nierówności*, transl. Jacek Chmielewski (Kęty: Antyk, 2006), 65.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem, 63

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem.

anity, namely the spiritual community of mystics, the mysterious *communion in spirit of people* endowed with grace.<sup>34</sup> Berdyaev is now convinced that this immanently existing *Kingdom of God* should no longer have any ties with real earthly power, it must materially become a negation of *the kingdom of Caesar*. He even advocates a radical metaphysical dualism that clearly distinguishes the empirical from that which is metaphysical in nature. Thus, the coming of *God's Kingdom* will no longer be preceded by violent natural and social cataclysms, but - nevertheless - it will require the emergence of a *new world* and a *new earth*, i.e., a real transformation of the cosmos. This time it is to be a transformation not so much in the external sphere, as he thought earlier, advocating the socio-political involvement of Christians, but first in the internal, spiritual sphere. Moreover, he considers his previous considerations as an inexplicable fascination with the idea of Judaic chiliasm and a manifestation of his limitation in thinking, forcing him to look for the *State of God* in human history, or in its final stage, while it is exclusively the absolute goal of history. He condemns, both in himself and in other members of the New Religious Awareness movement, the misuse of the concept of apocalypse, which ultimately depresses them and thus exempts them from of nature and sensual man.

After moving away from the apocalyptic movement of the “new religious consciousness” and into thinking in the spirit of mystical realism, evident in *The Philosophy of the Free Spirit* (1927), Berdyaev's binary thinking again comes to lean toward the anarchist pole. He then writes extensively about a new, but already internal and invisible form of Christianity, namely the spiritual community of mystics, the mysterious *communion in spirit of people* endowed with grace. Berdyaev is now convinced that this immanently existing *Kingdom of God* should no longer have any ties with real earthly power, it must materially become a negation of *the kingdom of Caesar*. He even advocates a radical metaphysical dualism that clearly distinguishes the empirical from that which is metaphysical in nature. Thus, the coming of *God's Kingdom* will no longer be preceded by violent natural and social cataclysms, but - nevertheless - it will require the emergence of a *new world* and a *new earth*, i.e., a real transformation of the cosmos. This time it is to be a transformation not so much in the external sphere, as he thought earlier, advocating the socio-political involvement

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<sup>34</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, “O królestwie Bożym”, in: *Filozofia nierówności*, 214.

of Christians, but first in the internal, spiritual sphere. Moreover, he considers his previous considerations as an inexplicable fascination with the idea of Judaic chiliasm and a manifestation of his limitation in thinking, forcing him to look for the *State of God* in human history, or in its final stage, while it is exclusively the absolute goal of history. He condemns, both in himself and in other members of the New Religious Awareness movement, the misuse of the concept of apocalypse, which ultimately depresses them and thus exempts them from social activity.

The philosopher, now writing extensively about the need for a spiritual transformation in Christians' perception of the social and natural world, speaks of a necessary change in the structure of their consciousness, which will result in a shift from existence in the form of *sensual man* to existence in the form of *spiritual man*. This change, of course, requires cooperation with God's grace, but in Berdyaev's view it is not something elitist, given from above only to certain people. For it is available to every person from within, in his depths, since God is an infinite power present in man (as well as existing and beyond man - panentheism). As such, it can become the foundation for immanent sobriety, for the *Kingdom of God* arising in human hearts, abolishing external compulsions and mutual distrust or hostility. The goal of the *Kingdom of God* arising in this way is not only contemplation and the search for inner peace, as the traditional Orthodox Church has always taught, but also the formulation of *holy opposition* to the earthly state. Of course, the Russian theoretician and reformer of Christianity was well aware of the difficulty of building such a strong council, which, on the one hand, would overcome this temporal world with its compulsions in the name of another world and life in freedom, in the name of the *Kingdom of Liberty*, and which would be alien to the concerns of economic and political life, and, on the other hand, would be capable of opposing the concrete actions of this or that state power. Moreover, in this opposition it would have to exercise a great deal of prudence, since "Caesar" - as a synonym for state power - can put the seal of finitude on the Spirit".<sup>35</sup> This painful and antinomian issue, which reflected both the thinking of the Orthodox Church with its almost absent social policy and the aspiration of

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<sup>35</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, *Królestwo Ducha i królestwo cezara*, transl. Henryk Paprocki (Kęty; Antyk, 2003), 41.

philosophers – neo-Christians – to rectify this state of affairs, was summed up by Berdyaev in his already posthumously published work *The Kingdom of the Spirit and the Kingdom of Caesar* (1949), with the pessimistic-realist statement that the Christian teaching on life in temporal society will still be something problematic and unsolvable for a long time to come.

In his emigration period, Berdyaev rather puts the accent in his reflection on the idea of unification of different varieties of Christianity, which was proposed and tried to implement by the religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov. He writes about it in his émigré work *The Philosophy of the Free Spirit* and in his later article *Razdor mira i khristianstvo* (1946). Here, he argues that this unification of the quarreling churches cannot be realized using the institutions and methods of international politics;<sup>36</sup> it is rather about grassroots movements in which religious philosophers can play a very important role, meeting the needs (and against the position of the traditional Orthodox Church). Their goal will be to teach tolerance by getting to know each other's adherents of different Christian confessions, by becoming aware not only of the significant differences between denominations, but also by looking for and accentuating similarities. This great task requires the weakening of mental divisions, the acceptance of differences in the spiritual experiences of Christians, the dissimilarity of their mental structures. The unity thus achieved, that is, a special transconfessionalism, would at the same time lead to the advent of a *new era of Christianity* and the emergence of a new spirituality. The role of Christian prophetism, which had weakened in historical Christianity, would increase. In this new, but only internally existing Christian civilization, a dual process would take place: the spiritual life would strengthen and deepen, while the moral and cult-organizational manifestations of Christianity would weaken. There would be a victory over sociomorphism in Christianity and over its previous cooperation with the socio-political forms that enslave it. Christianity, if it wishes to become a *court* against political power, must strive for independence from it.

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<sup>36</sup> Nikolai Berdyaev, "Razdor mira i khristianstvo", in: *Istina i otkrovenie. Prolegomeny k kritike Otkroveniia* (Saint Petersburg: Izd. Russkogo Khristianskogo Gumanitarnogo Instytuta, 1996), 210.



## Conclusion

As has been shown and proven, neither Dostoevsky nor Berdyaev can be accused of building an idea of a great Orthodox Russia (with an authoritarian regime of power) that could be called, in philosophical-religious language, a New Theocracy or Promised Land. Dostoevsky realized this potential danger in time, that the new theocracy with the tsar on the throne (or already without him) could easily degenerate and become a false vision of an earthly paradise built by a perfect Philanthropist-Humanist, or indeed Antichrist. In the case of Berdyaev, this kind of idea was only a stage in his work, as he himself abandoned this tempting but also dangerous idea and then, in many of his later works, criticized these chiliastic illusions of a Promised Land possible under temporal conditions. He shifted the focus of his thinking, as can be seen, not to the socio-political life of Russia at the time, but to the inner life of Christians and its improvement.

However, it was not just about the individual, but rather about a state religious community, i.e., a free theocracy, the kingdom of Christ, and later a council less burdened by traditional associations. This community would initially develop – in the first and second phases of the development of his position – in the secular sphere, “interacting with its institutions and perfecting them without coercion, only by criticism”,<sup>37</sup> and then (in the mature phase of his views) would be formed exclusively in the inner spiritual sphere, built by people with a high level of spiritual life, that is, in essence, by such Christians who had embarked on the path of moral and religious awakening, or moral revolution. This community was first to develop a *new Christianity (neokhristianstwo)*, that is, the *Christianity of the Holy Spirit*, and then only complement the previous Orthodoxy with its gifts and charisms. The noble primacy of the Spirit (spiritual values not of this world) shown in this statement and the conviction of the unique mission guiding the Christian community (in the sense of Orthodox Christianity), fulfilled in this still temporal world – unfortunately – permeate today in a Machiavellian way into the narrative of Putin’s government, and the thought of Fyodor Dostoevsky is simply politically instrumentalized. It can be said, following Ostop Ukrainets, that “regardless of what this or that author

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<sup>37</sup> Berdyaev, “Teokratiya”, 278.

had in mind, classical Russian culture today is deeply integrated into the fascist mindset<sup>38</sup>. So different was and is the fate of artistic or philosophical ideas.

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<sup>38</sup> Ostap Ukrainets, "Duch czasu. Dostojewski jako powód do wojny", transl. Oleksi Martson, access 10.09.2022, <https://ukrainer.net/duch-czasu-dostojewski/>.

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