

# **Vladimir Soloviev and the Interpretation of Catholicism by Russian Authors in the Context of Cultural Dialogue**

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## Abstract

The Catholic Church has been attracting the attention of Russian theological and secular authors for many ages. In Orthodox theological literature, the assertion of Orthodox Church's verity tends to be combined with the opinion of the Catholic Church as more "congenial" in some ways, but ultimately separated from the Orthodox Church, and as a result it leads to distortion of the truth of the Orthodox faith.

During the 20th century, Russia experienced two revolutionary cultural transformations that have come to allow worldviews previously at odds to come into contact. In the context of a renewed Orthodox awareness and cultural identity in Russia, the philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev and his interpretation of Catholicism is very attractive for efforts at mutual understanding. Before Soloviev (especially in Soviet Period), only critical and anti-Catholic papers predominated. Soloviev, however, raised the problem of the interpretation and understanding of Catholicism to a high level by considering the problem of "ours versus the strange". He found universally valid content in both Orthodoxy and Catholicism. This content is to be found only in a partial manner in the historical churches, but he thought it would become fully manifest in future.

The aim of this paper is to present the methodological ways of creating the image of Catholicism as different from Orthodoxy.

In the secular scientific literature through 1917, there were only works in which authors simply described the parts, ceremonial, and dogmatic sides of the Catholic Church as it developed in Russia until the last decade of the 19th century. In the works of Soviet authors, any church (Orthodox or Catholic) was treated as an archaic institution which was completely subordinated to autocracy and which played a reactionary role during the epoch of reforms. The authors consider the problem of Catholicism from the atheistic point of view, and they have only one aim – to reveal Catholicism as a hostile force for all spheres of people's life and its destructive influence over development of culture and science.

The authors of the period after "perestroika" consider a wide circle of problems about Catholicism. Usually the authors pay attention to the problem of history of Catholic Church's existence at the territory of Russia and questions of governmental policy to the Roman Catholic Church connected with it. They pay attention to the policy of the Pope of Rome and as a result, the relations between Russia and Vatican.

That is why the works of Vladimir Soloviev are very interesting. Although an Orthodox philosopher, Soloviev was one of the first to attempt to develop the criteria for an objective opinion of Catholicism. He exercised great influence over the understanding of Orthodox-Catholic relations. Refusing the tradition of opposing Orthodox Russia to western "rationalism," Soloviev criticized what he called, "abstracted commencement." He advocated the idea of "free theosophy," which put together empiricism, rationalism, and mysticism. In contrast to the majority of Orthodox authors--in particular, to the representatives of Slavophil tradition who saw the future of Russia as exclusively Orthodox, Soloviev saw his social ideal

in “free theocracy” or “Universal Church,” without any nationalism, ultimately unifying the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Churches.

### Biography

*Natalia Markova, born in 1979, graduated from Vladimir Teaching Training University in 2002, now preparing her PhD theses at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanity, Vladimir State University. The theme of her scientific investigation is "Interpretation of Other in the Orthodoxy-Catholic Perspective". Since 2002 she has been the lecturer in Religious Studies and Philosophy of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanity, Vladimir State University. She is a Secretary of "Russian Inter-region LSI-Symposium" (Vladimir State University, Pomor State University, Moscow St. Andrew's Biblical Theological College). She participated in preparing of 11 LSI-applications for Metanexus Institute. She participated in 7 international conferences. Natalia Markova is the author of more than 10 publications.*

During the 20-th century Russia had revolutionary cultural transformation twice. In this context Vladimir Soloviev`s philosophy and his interpretation of Catholicism is very attractive. Before and after V. Soloviev (especially in Soviet Period) the critical and anti-Catholic papers predominated. Only V. Soloviev could raise the problem of Catholicism`s interpretation on the high level of considering of the problem of “Our and Other (Strange)”. He found the universal content in Orthodoxy and Catholicism, this content is partly in historical churches and he thought it to be real in future.

The aim of this paper is present the methodological ways to creating the image of Catholicism as different to Orthodoxy. The Catholic Church has been attracting the attention of Russian theological and secular authors for many ages. In Orthodox theological literature the assertion of Orthodox Church`s verity is united with the opinion of the Catholic Church as more congenial but separating from the Orthodox Church, and as a result it lead to the distortion in believing.

What about secular scientific literature till 1917, there were only works where authors tried not only to describe officially the parts, ceremonial and dogmatic sides of the Catholic Church on the territory of Russia till the 90-th of the 19-century.

In the works of soviet authors any Church (Orthodox or Catholic) was treated as an archaic institute which was completely subordinated to autocracy and which played the reactionary role during the epoch of reforms. The authors consider the problem of Catholicism from the atheistical point of view and they have only the aim – to undress Catholicism as a hostile force for all spheres of people`s life and its destructive influence over development of culture and science.

The authors of the period after “Perestroika” consider a wide circle of problems about Catholicism. Usually the author pay their attention to the problem of history of Catholic Church`s existence at the territory of Russia and questions of governmental policy to the Roman-Catholic Church connecting with it. They pay attention to the policy of Pope of Rome and as a result – relations between Russia and Vatican.

In difference from the majority of Orthodox authors, in particular from the representatives of Slavophil tradition who saw the future of Russia exclusively in Orthodox Russia, Vladimir Soloviev saw his social ideal in “Free Theocracy” or “Universal Church” without any nationalism and which unify Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Church. Realization of this ideal is possible only with “Free Theurgy” and the creative final stage of

history – “God Universe”. But it is impossible to achieve this objective while the Christian Church has been in disconnection. What about Western Orthodoxy and Eastern Catholicism, Soloviev thinks that they don't exclude each other, but supplement ones. Their hostile opposition is not the result of their real eternal nature, but the temporary earthbound historical fact. Vladimir Soloviev prefers neither of them (the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church). Each of them has own advantages over other one. The connection of two origins – ecclesiastical truth and ecclesiastical organization – is the opportunity to create Veritable Universal Christian Church. Neither the Western church nor the Eastern Church disowned each other but in temporary separation they became the hostile to each other. Soloviev thinks that Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism which were in the united Christian Church must be connected again in the Universal Christian Church.

Vladimir Soloviev shows the conditions of Churches' unity. At first, Orthodoxy will admit the spiritual and historical authority of Pope of Rome as the successor of St. Peter, but the Orthodox Church will never admit Pope's administrative authority. Secondly, the Orthodox Church must save its ceremonies and the main role of emperor's authority. The central united role in the Universal Church belongs to Rome.

Creating the Christian culture and “Free Theocracy” needs organic combination of positive spiritual origins of East and West. The first step on this way is the reunion of Eastern Church, which has the wealth of mystical contemplation, with Western Church, which has created the over human spiritual power, independent from the state. The combination of this reunited Church with political power of state, which submits to the moral power of church's authority, will be the basis of the Universal Theocracy. From Soloviev's point of view, the mission of Russians is in beginning to work out this problem. The ideal of Russians has the religious character; the ability for combination of western origins and eastern origins in Russians was demonstrated by the successes of Peter the First; the ability for national renunciation, which is important for the recognition of Pope as the High Priest of the Universal Church, is the character of Russians. Vladimir Soloviev develops his doctrine that the cultural mission of great nation is not the privilege and predominance but the service for other nations and all humanity.

What the Catholic Church is? From Soloviev's point of view, the general idea of Catholicism is in the dependence of society and every person to religious origin of secular authority. Soloviev tells about unconditional subordination of state regional churches, civil authorities and every person to the Catholic Church.

In the ecclesiastical sphere the Roman Church is the origin of evident unity, centralized power and supreme authority. Soloviev thinks that the aspiration of Rome to unite heterogeneous elements of universe was the cause of general hostility of the western and eastern nations to the Catholic Church. But the Western nations are in deep connections with Catholicism. What about the Eastern nations, especially Russia, it was difficult to them to change their sense of hostility to the Catholic Church. But to Soloviev`s mind we must give up our hostility for the sake of truth and equitable thoughts.

Arguing about the character of spiritual authority of the Roman-Catholic Church, Soloviev thinks that Pope`s privileges can`t spread on the eternal basis of the Church. The first basis is consecration. In consecration Pope of Rome is the same bishop like other ones and he has no privileges over them. The second basis of the Church is sacraments. During fulfilling of the sacraments Pope has no privileges over any priest. What about the third basis of the Church – Revelational Truth of Christianity, Pope has no privileges over any layman. Nobody may create new revelations or truths, nobody may establish new dogmas, and nobody may be the cause of consecration or sacraments.

Vladimir Soloviev notes that central authority of papacy has the earthbound, that is why conventional and official meaning. The privilege of Pope must be not the privilege of domination but the privilege of service. What about the character of this service, Soloviev thinks that the supreme clergymen when hardly believing in religious basis of their power must function not for this power but with this power for the common weal of the Church. Authority must be the aim of the action, but not the active power. These conditions are the true basis of papacy.

Vladimir Soloviev distinguishes the elementary “Papacy”, based on love and freedom, and “Popery”, based on jurisdiction and force. “Popery” tries to deprive the regional churches of their independence. The dependence of bishops on archbishops is replaced by their complete subordination to Pope.

“Papacy” presents the idea of the limited theocracy between the Church and the state, spiritual power and secular power, but “Popery” gives theocracy the character of violent dominion. The force of original theocracy is in its religious over human character.

Vladimir Soloviev creates a new image of Catholicism, he leads out the philosophical dispute about difference between empirical and ideal (theoretical=theological) Orthodoxy and Catholicism on the new level, trying to leave the tradition of “blame non-Orthodox confession”. Soloviev divides two concepts: from one side “Papacy” - “Popery” and

“Compulsory Orthodoxy” - “Veritable Orthodoxy” from the other side. Here we see the problem of modern methodological debates about views “inside” and “outside” on the religious events and we can see the necessity of dialogue between these trends. But it is the theme of new investigation.