Summary of Course C.6–8: Soloviev – Cosmology

The course examines the philosophy, cosmology and theology of the Russian philosopher, poet and mystic Vladimir Sergeyevich Soloviev (1853–1900). In the history of philosophy, Soloviev is regarded as a "Platonist in the full nineteenth century", who brought Christian Platonism up to date and sought a synthesis between Western philosophy, the Eastern Orthodox tradition and the natural sciences.

1. Soloviev's Life and Intellectual Development

Faith Crisis and Resolution: Soloviev grew up in a devout family as the son of the renowned historian Sergei Soloviev. At the age of fourteen, he underwent an intense crisis of faith, during which he renounced religious practices and immersed himself in the works of German materialists (such as Feuerbach) and French rationalists (such as Renan). Through the philosophy of Spinoza, mathematics and the natural sciences, however, he found his way back to faith, the Absolute and the spiritual values of the Russian people.

Critique of Western Philosophy: In 1874, the twenty-one-year-old Soloviev defended his doctoral thesis on "The Crisis of Western Philosophy". He demonstrated how both Western idealism and subjectivism (from Descartes to Hegel) and empiricism (from Bacon to Mill) necessarily culminated in a positivism and nihilism that impoverished the richness of reality.

Conflict with Westernizers and Slavophiles: Soloviev came into conflict with the Westernizers (who blindly imitated the West) and the extreme Slavophiles (who rejected every non-Russian idea). Soloviev, by contrast, defended universalism: in Christ, all peoples and cultures are one.

Silencing and Personal Charisma: After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II (1881), Soloviev called on the new tsar to show Christian mercy and refrain from executing the assassins. This led to a lifelong ban on his lecturing at universities. Nevertheless, his personality made a profound impression through his humility, presence ("aura") and concern for failures and the poor.

Mysticism and Sophiology: Soloviev's thought was sustained by mystical experiences of cosmic interconnectedness and divine Wisdom (Hagia Sophia / Logos). In his work "Three Meetings", he described how, in the Egyptian desert near Cairo, he beheld divine Wisdom as a female figure of light who revealed to him the all-encompassing unity of the universe.

2. Christian and Philosophical Realism

Soloviev's thought is rooted in Eastern Russian Christian Realism. Whereas Western thought has strictly separated philosophy, science and faith, Eastern thinkers integrate all academic disciplines on the basis of biblical-Christian faith.

Biblical Dynamism and Catharsis: Using the Gospel story of the woman with the issue of blood (Mark, Matthew and Luke), the course clarifies the concept of Christian realism. Human action and faith (fideism) work together (synergy) with the divine life-force (dunamis) that flows from Christ. *Jesus does not destroy natural or paranormal magical patterns, but purifies them from within (catharsis) and elevates them to the supernatural plane.*

Trinitarian Life: The divine life-force flows in a Trinitarian manner: the Father is the originating primal source, the Son the receiving vessel, and the Holy Spirit the outpouring into creation.

Liturgical Ideation: Byzantine liturgy is not mere imagination or a nominalist play of symbols. It is an icon of the heavenly liturgy and makes events in the history of salvation (theophany) tangibly present. Thus, during the entrance with the Gospel book, Christ is physically venerated among the faithful as the uncreated Wisdom of the Universe (Logos).

3. Telluric Religion and Cosmic Kinship

An important theme in the course is the telluric (chthonic or earth-bound) dimension of Russian piety.

Mother Earth and Christianization: The traditional Russian peasant revered "moist Mother Earth" as a living, merciful mother who nourishes humanity, heals ailments and bears human sins. This pagan substratum was Christianized in popular religion and linked to the veneration of Mary (Theotokos). Sin is not understood here in individualistic terms, but as a defilement of the entire cosmos.

Deification of the Cosmos: Since the Incarnation (incarnatio) of Christ in Mary's womb, not only humanity but all creation (plants, animals and inorganic matter) has been drawn into a movement towards Christ (Rom. 8:19–24).

The Jesus Prayer over Creation: By pronouncing the name of Jesus over things in nature and over fellow human beings (including sinners and

criminals), their original dignity and potential for deification (theosis) are revealed.

4. Historiosophy and Soloviev's Precursors

Soloviev's cosmology builds on nineteenth-century Russian historiosophy (philosophy of history), which reflected on Russia's distinctive destiny, Christian universalism and its relationship with Western Europe.

Precursors: Thinkers such as Skovoroda (who regarded Christ as the essential law of the cosmos), Chaadaev (who understood Christianity as an active cosmic energy uniting humanity), Khomyakov (a leading figure among the Slavophiles) and Belinsky (who located the secret of history in the unity of the Passion and Resurrection) paved the way.

Christian Humanism and Godmanhood: Soloviev synthesized these currents into the idea of Godmanhood (Enanthropèsis Theou / theiosis anthropou). He advocated "Christian Humanism": modern social liberation and human emancipation are—often unconsciously—necessary conditions for the realization of the fullness of Godmanhood.

5. Soloviev's Cosmology: The Five Realms

The core of Soloviev's cosmology is the division of reality into five realms, arranged according to a hierarchy of increasing fullness of being:

1. The Inorganic Realm (Mineral Nature): Symbolizes a mode of existence without inner change ("the stone exists"). It provides the necessary material foundation or biotope for the next form of life.

2. The Plant Realm: Exists and lives ("unconscious, motionless dreams"). It is characterized by an active, directed relationship with warmth, light and moisture.

3. The Animal Realm: Exists, lives and possesses a natural awareness of its environment and of time. Animals exhibit purposeful movements, facial expressions, vocal communication and memory.

4. The Human Realm (Natural Humanity): Exists, lives, is conscious and encompasses spirit (logos). Human beings possess reason, language, abstract concepts, cultural-historical memory and an ethical nature manifested in shame, compassion and reverence. Human beings grasp the meaning of life through ideas.

5. The Pneumatic Realm (Deified Humanity / Kingdom of God): Humanity moved by the Spirit of God (pneuma) and participating in the divine nature. This is the culmination of the development of creation and salvation.

Laws of Evolution in Creation

Irreducibility: A higher realm builds upon a lower one as a material condition (biotope), but cannot in any way be reduced to it. The lower realm does not possess the qualitative surplus required to conjure the higher realm into existence by itself.

Apocalyptic Turning Point: Towards the end of his life (1898), Soloviev became acutely aware of pervasive, socially active evil and the figure of the Evil Antichrist. He realized that the fullness of the Kingdom of God would not emerge through smooth, uninterrupted human progress, but only after a drastic Apocalypse and the general resurrection.

6. Theological Idealism and Evolution in Creation

Soloviev restores Platonic ideocentrism within a Christian framework:

Eternal Ideas in the Trinity: What emerges as “new” in biological and cosmic evolution already exists ontologically from all eternity as an idea in the Spirit of the Triune God.

Biology versus Ontology: Biologically, higher forms appear after lower forms in time; ontologically, the higher ideas precede them. Material evolution merely provides the favourable conditions in which divine ideas can take shape in creation.

Conclusion

Course C.6–8 presents Soloviev as a thinker who bridges the gap between faith, philosophy and the natural sciences. His cosmology portrays the universe as a dynamic, purposeful process in which matter is progressively transformed, through the Incarnation of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit, into the fullness of Godmanhood.