

**Understanding the Roots of Collectivism and Individualism in Russia
through an Exploration of Selected Russian Literature**

- and -

Spiritual Exercises through Art.

Understanding Reverse Perspective in Old Russian Iconography

by

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Abstract

The first essay is a sustained reflection on and response to the question of why the notion of collectivism and collective coexistence has been so deeply entrenched in the Russian society and in the Russian psyche and is still pervasive in today's Russia, a quarter of a century after the fall of communism. It examines the development of ideas of collectivism and individualism in Russian society, focusing on the cultural aspects based on the examples of selected works from Russian literature. It also searches for the answers in the philosophical works of Vladimir Solovyov, Nicolas Berdyaev and Vladimir Lossky. As well, it investigates historical concepts put forward by Nikolay Karamzin, Vasily Klyuchevsky, and Dmitry Likhachov, and the ideas found in literary works by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Boris Pasternak, and Zakhar Prilepin. This essay illuminates several of the historical roots of the ideas of collectivism and individualism that may have influenced the writers. Special attention is paid to the historical development of folk culture in the Proto-Slavic society, the influences that the Russian Orthodoxy with its dogmatic rules had as well as on the contradictory interaction between the modernizing proposals of Westernizers and the utopian collectivistic ideas of the Slavophiles in the XIX century Russia.

The second extended essay examines one particular form of spiritual exercise that aims at creating contact between Orthodox Christians and an icon. This exercise is an integral part of religious practices in the Russian Orthodox Church. The present study focuses on dogmatic and metaphysical aspects of this contact where the icon represents not just an object of religious worship but rather a tool or a portal enabling mental union with the divine. The essay pays special attention to the technical feature specific only to Byzantine and Russian icons: the reverse perspective that allows the viewer to reach a higher state of spiritual concentration. Another component of this essay is an attempt to look into the philosophical concepts of the sublime, the personality and the symbol, their interrelation, and the influence they had on the development of Medieval Russian iconography and church architecture. The essay illustrates the major differences between Western rational approach to pictorial art and that of Russian Orthodox iconography, the latter being an idealistic symbolic form of art subordinate to higher spiritual purposes.

Keywords: collectivism; individualism; Russia; Orthodoxy; Westernizers; Slavophiles; literature; icon; art; Russia; Orthodoxy; reverse perspective; personality; symbol

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Understanding the Roots of Collectivism and Individualism in Russia through an Exploration of Selected Russian Literature

These two essays have one element in common: they are directly related to Russian culture and historical mentality. Despite many years of living outside of Russia in Germany and Canada, I still feel some attachment to Russian culture and history and I still have a strong affinity with Russia as a place, with its people and its culture. Russians who live and grow up outside of Russia often have a special sense of Russia. In my attempts to explore the notions of collective coexistence in my explorations into Russian mentality, during the reading of many works of literature, I noticed again and again what an important role the Russian Orthodox Church played in shaping a Russian mentality. The same theme of religion is constantly present in the second essay, regarding the importance of art in spiritual exercises. I was always deeply interested in the subject, and with the beginning of the GLS courses with their many readings and discussions, I began to collect ideas and historical information that allows me to test the validity of my feelings about collective notions in Russian society. I have delved into the subject not as a specialist but as a participant and informed onlooker with experiences of other societies and cultures.

The purpose of this essay is to explore ideas and authors that may have influenced the development of ideas of collectivism and individuality in Russian society through an approach using selected examples of Russian literature. My aims and objectives are to explore and speculate about several literary works in order to detect and understand the expressions of individual ideas or individual feelings as well in the

development of the concept of *Russianness*. I will be taking into account only some of the external historical, political, religious and economic forces that I feel have influenced individual or collective ideas, which have been a feature of Russian history since the intellectual and cultural disputes of the 19th century.

Having been born and educated in Russia and being a Russian culture bearer, throughout my life I read many Russian books and communicated with many Russians both in Russia and abroad. Often, while in a specific Russian-speaking environment, I noticed an implicit or explicit commitment to some kind of communal or universal unifying notion and at the same time both the implicit or explicit denial of individualism of any kind. In addition, I clearly see the signs of suppression of individual initiative in the Russian socio-cultural life and at the same time the labeling of individualism as a sign of an egoistic attitude or selfishness rather than the encouragement and development of the concept of the individual. These observations are perhaps related to having spent my childhood and formative years in the time of the former Soviet Union with its active communal ideology and communist propaganda.

I am certain, and wish to show the roots and the forces that make me feel that certainty that this desire for collective coexistence in Russian culture is much deeper than I had realized. Already in ancient Russian literature, according to Academician Dmitry Likhachev, ". . . live folk collectivism is visible . . ." and in which ". . . any individual principles are muted . . .".¹ In many classical works of literature by Pushkin, Nekrasov, Gogol, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, some of the main ideas in their novels are based on the author's concern with the fate of the entire country or with the general problems and hopes of all society, rather than with the needs and desires of an

¹ D. Likhachov, *Great Heritage*. Moscow: Sovremennik, 1975. p. 6.

individual. Obviously, there are many authors in Russian culture who tried to reveal the individuality of a simple person, to illustrate his characteristics and preferences. One can name Fyodor Dostoevsky or such an artist of spiritual strength of simple peasant people as Leo Tolstoy. But both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, in their attempts to show the individual needs of a person, pictured him in Russian cultural and social environment, and disclosed the nature of characters within the Russian society, because in comparing Russian and Western European literature, this contrast between individual interests and those of society is reflected much more significantly within Russian literature, and public interests are of higher priority. This phenomenon always fascinated me and that is why I want to explore the roots and causes of this collective commitment through analyzing some specific examples of Russian literary works.

In this essay, I will not go into detailed descriptions of many of the historical developments in Russian society and the state, but in the context of the topic it will be necessary to review at least some of the fundamental features of Russian culture. Among many of these, I would indicate two as the most important: the communal life of Pre-Russian society and Russian Orthodoxy. Without these two fundamental features, it seems impossible to trace the relationship between individualistic aspirations and collective commitments, that formed present Russian society.

The genesis and development of Russian culture is the subject of many voluminous historical works. I will pick only one aspect, relative to this essay, stressing that, although throughout history Russian culture was considered to be one single culture, there was a point in Russian history, namely with the emergence of Russian statehood, when the culture of Russia can be described as being divided into two

unequal parts: "the peasant culture" and "the noble culture", from the second part, of which in the XIX century another split occurred as "civic culture", or Enlightenment driven ideas represented by *rasnochinets*², that is to say men of mixed, more plebeian social origin, and the representatives of the nascent bourgeoisie. The understanding of this separation in Russian culture, albeit these dualities did not always oppose, but rather informed each other, is important for a better understanding of the dichotomies within the Russian society and all the political and cultural tensions recurrent in the history of Russia.

The origin of the peasant culture is inextricably linked to the concept of *mir* or the village community, rooted in the peasant consciousness present among the majority of Russians since the early centuries of the formation of the Russian state. It is necessary to take into account the fact that the settlement of proto-Slavic tribes took place far to the north in the black-earth areas, namely in areas of forest or steppe land that do not promise large yields and require much effort for cultivation. The winters at this latitude are long and extremely cold, the Spring comes fast and often damaging and swamping of fields and pasture areas; the summers are short and often very dry. In general, the environment does not allow long-term planning, but is forced to rely on luck or fate. This point must be considered for the understanding of the religious aspirations of the Slavs and their fatalistic attitude toward their own life, which subsequently resulted in the relations within Russian society of such unequal classes as the class of nobility and the class of serfs, where both classes accepted inequality in society as something self-evident and logical in nature.

² I will come to this term *rasnochinets* later, while exploring the problem of a *superfluous man*.

Despite these harsh climatic and geographical circumstances, proto-Slavic tribes had one big advantage: historically, the Slavs possessed much land. Due to the fact that there was a surplus of land, the Slavs developed the custom of moving from one place to another through the boundless forests, in order to cut down areas of these forests, burn them and arrange plowed fields. When one area lacked fertility in harvest, farmers moved on to another. Thus the population of Ancient Russia at that time constantly moved from one place to another. It was very rare for the grandson of a peasant to die in the place where his grandfather was born.³ The attitude towards one's land has always been extremely important for Russian people and the issue of land ownership has always been a key political issue in the history of Russia.⁴ Nikolay Berdjaev directly connected Russian character with the land when he wrote that "Russians always liked to live in the warmth of a collective, in some kind of fusing with nature of earth as in mother's womb."⁵

Due to the long distances between settlements, weak trade expansion, difficulties in communication, and the need for neighbors' support during an attack by external enemies, Russia gave rise to the tradition of centripetal forces for small social groups that were necessary for survival. These social groups were formed on the scale of one village or many families. Thus, for many centuries, a village or a small community was the pinnacle of human social order, a measure of one's own social behavior, where the entire dependency of an individual on communal decision has been created. The large

³ M. Pokrovsky, *Russian History in Ancient Times*. Sankt-Petersburg: Poligon, 2002. pp. 33 - 34.

⁴ It is necessary to remember that up until the Revolution, Russia was a predominantly agricultural country, in which more than 80% of the population were peasants. The demand of free possession of land was the main issue all throughout the Russian history, starting with Middle Ages peasant rebellions (e.g. Pugachev's Rebellion), and during the contradictions in the Russian church (possessors vs. non-possessors movement led by Joseph of Volokolamsk and Nil Sorsky in 16th century), as well as after the emancipation of serfs in 1861 and even helping communists hold power after the Revolution in 1917 thanks to their *The Decree on Land*.

⁵ N. Berdyaev, *The Fate of Russia*. Moscow: ACT, 2004. p. 5.

number of separated communities in the vast territory of Russia has created many smaller national groups and dialects, and therefore hindered the formation of shared religious traditions and common philosophical views that universally related to the surrounding world. Paganism also influenced the formation of small communities, because the worshiping of pagan gods can justify the rejection of other more conventional beliefs and allows concentration on one's own beliefs rather than the beliefs of other groups.⁶ The main value for the small peasant community became a prerequisite for survival - their own close-knit group, bonded with tribal loyalties and common responsibilities towards the common land⁷ and mutual moral obligations of support and help to each and everyone in the community. This was a basic characteristic of the Russian peasant community which later was raised by Slavophiles as the main value of the Russian nation.

Later in this essay, I will try to describe in detail the concept that informed the Slavophiles and their vision to use the characteristics of the village community for the development of the whole Russian society, but here I would only like to mention some initially negative characteristics of such a social formation. The culture of the peasant community, consisting of primitive agricultural techniques, patriarchal laws, and fixed social arrangements among members of the community, meant a cautious, non-innovative and rather fossilized presence in which any possible change of this social formation was seen as threatening and leading to unpredictable consequences in the

⁶ We can find the proof of the fact that proto-Russians had many different pagan gods in the chronicle *The Tale of Bygone Years*, where it is documented that prince Vladimir established many different idols in Kiev in his attempt to unify many different Slavic tribes under his leadership. The prince had a pure political interest while Old Rus became more and more powerful and the prince desperately looked for a religion able to unify many different tribes. After failing to accomplish this with pagan gods, Vladimir decided to choose Christianity. See A. Kuzmin, *Establishment of Christianity in Russia*, Moscow: Molodaja Gvardia, 1988. p. 12.

⁷ To avoid all possible property arguments, all land in a Russian village community belonged to the community. No private possession of land was allowed. The parcels of land were distributed and redistributed among the members of community according to their demand. See N. Karamzin, *History of the Russian State*, 12 vols., Moscow: Nauka, 1987. p.18.

community with the possibility of its destruction. Under such circumstances, any individual, voluntary efforts for change would likely be a priori rejected by the community, as well as rejecting many kinds of violent or forced measures towards the community by an upper power even by government were seen very critically through their denial. This resulted in Russian history ranging from passive runaways⁸ to Siberia or Western Europe to many active peasant revolts. Additionally, it must be said that the existence of an individual in a Russian village community included forcible compliance with landowners and authority. Any reluctance to comply with the rules of the community led to severe sanctions, including physical violence, seizure of property, and, later, the curse of the church which was invoked to ensure spiritual authority. Thus, from the moment of initial formation of communal relations in Russian society, the antagonism between social cohesion and individual attempts began to take shape. Any demonstration of individual values, unusual, and untypical for a community was initially perceived as a potential threat to the entire community. On the other hand, life in the community initially was tamed to certain human social behaviors through conforming and consenting to existing Feudal conditions: some kind of social conformity, obedience to one's own fate, to fear of changes, reluctance to innovate, and a cautious or even hostile attitude towards anyone in the community or outside who proposed any type of change. As Edward L. Keenan argues, ". . . the entire complex of traditional behaviour developed within the Russian peasant community, represents manifestations of "group

⁸ According to Kluchevsky, in the 17th century, every year as many as 40 000 peasants were registered as runaways. See V. Kluchevsky, *A History of Russia*, London: Russell & Russell, 1960.

wisdom" based upon shared experience and expectations concerning human behaviour, and, ultimately, upon a shared view of man, both self and other.⁹

Of course, this was the fate of most peasant and feudal economies, primitive and landowning. However, there is a significant difference between the enslavement of peasants in Western Europe and in Russia. While in Western Europe serfdom was based on the financial relationship between a landowner and a land tenant, that is, had purely economic roots, in Russia, the same original (XV century) economic relations quickly turned into political ones, where a landowner became an owner of a land tenant's rights, not of his debts. A Russian landowner had the right to take his peasants with him while moving to a new residence, to judge his own peasants and to punish them, to banish them to hard labor, even to sell them like the rest of his property separating a husband from a wife and parents from their children. In this regard, one can compare the fate of Russian peasants with the fate of Slaves in the USA in the era of slavery, but certainly not with the fate of the serfs in Western Europe, who always had the right to apply to the court and an opportunity to leave a landlord after paying all rent debts. Serfdom in Russia, as a humiliating fact of owning human souls so brilliantly satirized by Nikolai Gogol in *Dead Souls*, caused a great outcry among the educated people in Russian society (see footnote 65) and can be considered as the catalyst for political protests in Russia during the XVIII and XIX centuries.

Under such initial conditions, the individual in the Russian peasant community was formed not from the point of view of Western liberal humanism as the spokesman of his own will from the self-centered position of the active agent, but as a quiet and submissive part of the whole, ready for passivity rather than action, willing rather "to

⁹ Edward L. Keenan, *Muscovite Political Folkways*. The Russian Review. vol. 45, 1986. pp. 125-126.

*sleep on the stove*¹⁰ in order to wait out a disaster than to actively oppose it and deal with it. Nikolay Berdyaev referred to the nature of a Russian as ". . . feminine, passive and submissive in state businesses, he is always waiting for a groom, husband, sovereign."¹¹ This was a short characteristic of "the peasant culture".

Referring to the development of the other side of Russian culture, "the noble culture", it is necessary first to understand the characteristics of the state in ancient Russia. Numerous proto-Slavic tribes developed three different albeit underdeveloped types of public government: great prince in Muscovy, a prince and the prince's band of men in Kiev and the People's Assembly, *veche*,¹² in Novgorod. Because of the numerous geopolitical and religious factors, which I will not develop here, the type of governmental power in the form of an independent great prince developed in more advanced ways in the Principality of Moscow.

Since the 14th century, from the very beginning of formation of the centralized Muscovite state, a special kind of culture began to take shape. The carrier of "the court culture" first was the grand prince, the family of the grand prince and the members of the princely and *boyar* clans. Thus, this community, both physically and socially, was separated from the rest of society. It hindered in every way participation in this closed society of foreigners and poor people, and thus was situated in a self-created and very isolated environment. According to Edward L. Keenan: ". . . from a very early stage the court culture has been characterized not only by extreme forms of the ceremonial camouflage and secrecy employed by all such closed systems, but also by an

¹⁰ In Russian fairy tales the main character is often depicted as sleeping on the stove. e.g. Jemelya (in *Jemelya and Pike*) or Ilya Muromets.

¹¹ N. Berdyaev, *The Fate of Russia*. Moscow: ACT, 2004. p. 4.

¹² V. Kluchevsky, *A History of Russia*, London: Russell & Russell, 1960.

extraordinary hermetic silence and denial to outsiders of even general or trivial information that might have political significance."¹³ Keenan describes the grand prince court as an "atomic structure", where the grand prince is a nucleus, and rotating elements will be different members of the princely and *boyar* clans.¹⁴ This structure of governmental administration is in contradiction with the structures of government in the majority of medieval European countries, which were more like a pyramid with horizontal distribution of power, based on the principles of Roman law and popular representation and thus implied the distribution of responsibilities between many individuals, mandate holders of political power. Many historical and political reasons led to such unequal hierarchical power constructions. In this regard, I would like to mention the philosophical justification for the difference between East and West made by Hegel, as long since Hegel's ideas had a significant influence on the development of liberal ideas among the Russian Westerners. Hegel based his understanding of such differences on the freedom of will, arguing that

Now finitude of the will characterizes the Orientals, because with them the will has not yet grasped itself as universal, for thought is not yet free for itself. Hence there can but be the relation of lord and slave, and in this despotic sphere fear constitutes the ruling category. Because the will is not yet free from what is finite, it can therein be comprehended and the finite can be shown forth as negative. This sensation of negation, that something cannot last, is just fear as distinguished from freedom which does not consist in being finite but in being for itself, and this cannot be laid hold of. Religion necessarily has this character, since the fear of the Lord is the essential element beyond which we cannot get.¹⁵

¹³ Edward L. Keenan, *Muscovite Political Folkways*. The Russian Review. vol. 45, 1986. p. 129.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁵ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd. 1892, p. 96.

I can only speculate that because of this lack of inner universality and freedom for itself, in Russia, from the XII century, the so-called "verticality of power" was being built: that is, a direct dependence of everyone in the society on the decisions of one individual - first the grand prince, then the Tsar, then the Emperor. The expansion of Russian territory did not shake this stable vertical form of authority, but even strengthened it. As in a Russian village, the court avoided any risks and innovations, and relied heavily upon direct sanctions and mechanisms of control. Just as in the case of village culture, any political change could bring unforeseen dangers to the established court system and thus personally for the king and for his entourage. The existing system of extreme centralization of power and the autocratic rulership in Russia with strong centripetal forces from the side of king's confidants and the vertical power of the king directly over each of his slaves existed in Russia. In the 18th and 19th centuries, some attempts were undertaken, for example by Empress Anna Ioannovna and Emperor Alexander I,¹⁶ to establish the Constitution in Russia and to grant more rights, not only to noble people and bureaucracy but to peasants as well. Unfortunately, all these attempts did not end until the revolution of 1917; some of its features still exist today.

These two types of culture in Russian history, mentioned above, which I have experienced in my own life through my experiences and observations, are nevertheless important for understanding the controversy of the 18th and 19th centuries between the "Westernizers" and "Slavophiles". On the other hand, the Russian culture still is to be understood as one general culture, and I see two historical forces that helped Russian culture not to separate completely into the "peasant" and the "noble" categories and the

¹⁶ For Rosenkampf and Speransky constitutional projects, see A. Zubov, *Thought about the causes of Russian revolution: Experience of 18th Century*, Novy Mir, Vol. 7, 2004.

ongoing effort to remain a unified society. These two cultural forces are the Russian language and Russian Christian Orthodoxy. I will return to the features of Christianity in Russia later, and my thesis that the Russian language is fully expressed in Russian literature.

If I were to very schematically describe the main differences between Russian culture and Western culture, then in my opinion the major factor lies in the person's relation to the world around him. In Western culture, beginning with the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, the basis of the culture itself was an independent, analytical and creative human activity. In the Russian culture, on the contrary, it is a submission to some kind of superauthority which has power to rule over everyone, such as metaphysical religious dogmas or pagan prejudices, or even to the pressure of the state apparatus.¹⁷ This is due to Russian culture, as many other nations of the East, having been formed on the basis of a Feudal tribal way of life, with strong familial and kingship loyalties, and hence the obligations of submission, first to the head of family, and later to the one who has a unifying and saving power. Later, these paternalistic obligations grew into absolute submission to the centralized monarchical power.¹⁸ On the contrary, it appears that in Europe, despite the presence of monarchies, the Western enlightenment and Protestant Christian tradition informed by Renaissance humanism and the medieval concept of Kingship, as well as the revolutionary traditions of peasant uprising, and the development of a merchant class which had along with the intelligentsia ideals reflected in utopian thought, the need for an educated merchant

¹⁷ As for Nikolay Berdjaev: "State power was always an external and not an internal principle for non-governmental Russian people; it wasn't created out of the nation but it always came from outside as a groom comes to a bride. And that is why very often it projected itself as something foreign....." N. Berdyaev, *The Fate of Russia*. Moscow: ACT, 2004. p. 4.

¹⁸ It is in Russian tradition to call a monarch "father of nation". See A. Pushkin, *The Tale of the Golden Cockerel. Selected works*. Moscow: Slovo, 2005.

class, industrialization and institutionalization of fast developing countries lead to Constitutionalism, Republicanism and the rise of the Bourgeoisie as the protectors of individualism with its strong ideas of equality, civil liberties, and freedom of entrepreneurship. Hegel tried to explain this difference in the development of self-subordinating or subordinating to others thinking through the development of religious philosophies of the West and East, pointing out that in Eastern philosophy "The oriental consciousness raises itself, indeed, above the natural content to what is infinite; but it only knows itself as accidental in reference to the power which makes the individual fear."¹⁹ This definition can be applied to the relationship to the sublime in Russian Orthodoxy, where all the notions of the human spirit are mere subjects under a higher power of God; that is, according to Hegel's definition, human spirit is not free.

The emergence of ancient Russian literature is directly related to the advent of Christianity and the development of Orthodox Christian philosophy. It should be borne in mind that Russia received a one-sided understanding of Christianity understood by the Byzantine church. Thus, from the beginning, Russian culture was quite isolated from the mainstream of early medieval Europe and the main cultural branch of the Slavs which, according to Mirsky, was "an offshoot of the Greek stem."²⁰ Such one-sided and dogmatic religious backgrounds did not allow development of individual writing or creativity. Peasant culture has created a huge amount of songs, tales and legends, but no one had written them down and they were distributed from generation to generation only orally. The court culture adhered to conservative positions, and did not feel the

¹⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd. 1892. p. 97.

²⁰ D.P. Svyatopolk-Mirsky, *History of Russian Literature*, Moscow: Eksmo, 2008. p. 17.

need for romantic poetry or narrative art.²¹ Russian literature until the 17th century, with few exceptions, did not know poetry or novelistic prose. Due to the strict selection of rules for writing down only religious or historical facts, only these two areas had the greatest development in ancient Russian writing - historical literature in the form of chronicles and descriptions of important events and theological literature.

Both types of literature, chronicles and theological literature, did not know individual authors in the early centuries and very often one chronicle was repeatedly rewritten and modified by many authors.²² What was in such books without any fictional characters, without the love stories and poetry so characteristic for medieval European culture with its knightly romanticism, that an ancient Russian reader was looking for? In historical literature, an ancient Russian reader primarily sought strict documentalism: the reader was not interested in beautiful images of events or characters but in historical events and historical figures themselves. This kind of literature gave detailed descriptions and provided knowledge about events that occurred in history, but did not offer moral or philosophical evaluations. Authors always remained anonymous, and except for several of names, medieval Russian authors are still unknown. Popular in religious literature were not philosophical treatises on the perception or understanding of new Christian religion in Russia, but generally all sorts of regulations, dogmatic rules necessary for compliance with the basics of the Christian life or the lives of the saints, whose authority was never contested and whose spiritual experience was not analyzed but accepted as self-evident. It is obvious that under such strict and limited conditions, it is extremely difficult to find a manifestation of individualism in the author's thoughts;

²¹ D. Likhachov, *Great Heritage*. Moscow: Sovremennik, 1975. p. 8.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

however, I would still like to name a few examples of medieval literature in which an individual acts independently where one can see the free approach of the author and sense his thoughts, feelings and personal message to the reader.

One of the most famous works of Russian medieval literature is *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, written in the late XII century by an anonymous author. This literary work is unusual for many reasons. Firstly, it does not follow the characteristics specific to Medieval Russian literature mentioned above: it is not a pure chronology, although it is about a military campaign of a not very well-known prince. It does not apply to purely religious subjects; furthermore, there are many references in the text to the fact that this poem is probably written by a pagan or a person very close to paganism.²³ The individuality of the author is evident in his attempt to get far beyond the format demands on literature of his time and to write something that is on one hand very constructive and structured, and on the other hand simply beautiful. The aesthetic value of this piece of literature lies in descriptions of the nature and lyrical experiences. For example, the author mentions crying five times. A very famous incantation is sung by the protagonist's wife, Yaroslavna:

"I will fly, like a cuckoo,"
she says,
"down the Dunay.
I will dip my beaver sleeve
in the river Kayala.
I will wipe the bleeding wounds
on the prince's hardy body."²⁴

²³ In this poem, not only are the names of different pagan gods frequently mentioned but are also paradoxically combined with a pure Christian context. Pagan gods are mentioned without humiliation or denial, they are not called Satan nor creations of false consciousness or ungodly will as they had been when appearing in medieval Russian literature. See E. Anichkov, *Paganism and Ancient Russia*, Moscow: Akademicheskij Project, 1993. p. 330.

²⁴ *The Song of Igor's Campaign*, translated by Vladimir Nabokov, New York : Vintage Books, 1960. p.17.

In the same poem, the love of the country is shown, which was absolutely alien to Russian literature at that time. In one line, a Russian soldier says: "O Russian land, you are already behind the culmen!"²⁵ One of the main manifestations of the author's personality was his attempt to use a purely literary work to express a political message. The author openly requests the Russian princes to stop the war. It should be understood that *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* was written in the era of feudal fragmentation in Russia, the weakening of centralized power of the Kievan state and the outbreak of war between princes for the lands of the decaying state. In his poetry, the unknown author places the responsibility for maintaining the country's decay on princes and their greed, and proclaims a stop to the war:

*brother says to brother: "This is mine, and that is mine too,"
and the princes have begun to say of what is small: "This is big,"
while against their own selves they forge discord,
[and] while from all sides with victories
the pagans enter the Russian land . . .²⁶*

This work certainly reveals the individuality of the anonymous author and his desire to create a socially important and aesthetically appealing piece of literature, which he is perfectly achieved.

In order to show other examples of manifestations of individualism in Russian culture, it is necessary to describe, in general terms, the particularity of philosophical and Christian thought in Russia. As I mentioned above, the emergence of ancient

²⁵ *The Song of Igor's Campaign*, translated by Vladimir Nabokov, New York : Vintage Books, 1960. p. 22.

²⁶ D. Likhachov, *Great Heritage*. Moscow: Sovremennik, 1975. p. 49.

Russian literature is directly related to the advent of Christianity and the development of Orthodox Christian philosophy. Russia was exposed to Christianity through the Byzantine church, and was quite isolated from Western Christian philosophers and their teachings and controversial disputes. Orthodox thought in Russia was different than in the West. Until the 18th century, philosophy in Russia was not separated as a special form of intellectual creation, but was only an instrument for preferably patristic theology, which never turned into scholasticism.²⁷ The defining theme for Byzantine and later for Russian theology was not the relationship between faith and knowledge and the search of definitions for various events and objects of reality, but the anthropological problem of the divine wholeness of spirit, which can be achieved by spiritual exercises and by avoiding of all kinds of external sinful passions.²⁸

From the two most important philosophical schools of antiquity, the Byzantine Christian philosophy adhered to the Platonic point of view about how to envision the surrounding world. A starting point of Platonism is the negation of reality as representation of truth. Plato accepts reality but only as given and not perfect and opposes it as theoretically true but unreachable. The abnormal nature of reality lay, according to Plato, in its irrationality, contingency, falsity. What he accepts as true, proper, reasonable, an ideal world, can be accessed only through mental contemplation, hence only through mental theoretical activities. Of course, the philosophy of Plato contains an element of moral as well, but it is in the background. Byzantine Christian philosophy gave a practical moral significance to this Platonic metaphorical opposition between the true and untrue world. Like Platonism, Eastern

²⁷ See A. Kartashev, *History of the Russian Church*, Moscow: Terra, 1997.

²⁸ The works of many Byzantine Christian philosophers of V - VIII centuries were devoted to this problem, such as Isaac of Nineveh, Maximus the Confessor, Saint John Climacus. See A. Kartashev, *History of the Russian Church*, Moscow: Terra, 1997. pp. 117 - 121.

Christianity is based on the denial of reality as something morally wrong, evil, and sinful.²⁹ Thus, in the fundament of the Eastern Christian theology is the principle of contradiction between an external material life, which is subordinated to the unconscious and blind laws of nature, and the inner spiritual life in the form of dogmatic laws, which are necessary for the coexistence of a man together with God.

The philosophical difference between Western and Eastern Christianity was the schism that Western Christian philosophers had the courage to step back in their arguments - although sometimes camouflaged - from the frozen religious dogmas and were able to develop their abstract and rational philosophies in trying, through reflection and scholastic methods, to explain the existence of the world and the destiny of humans in the world. The priests of the Eastern Church, who once memorized basic doctrinal principles of the Fathers of the Church, were not able or willing to find motivation and desire to combine religious faith with a free philosophical thought or to reveal of divine life with the discoveries of human knowledge. According to the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, whose words may appear very straightforward and controversial, ". . . in spite of the personal talents and learning of many bishops, despite the many useful scientific works of our clergy, independent spiritual science does not exist in Russia. Russian theology has brought nothing significant, no treasures of spiritual knowledge and rests exclusively on definitions and formulas of the VII and VIII centuries, as though nothing had happened from the time of the last great masters of the East such as St. Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus."³⁰

²⁹ "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness", 1 John 5:19.

³⁰ V. Solovyov, *The Goals of Philosophy*, Lecture on February 25th, See V. Kuvakin, *Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov*, Moscow: Znanie, 1988. p. 37.

It has to be said that, together with Orthodoxy, Russians not only took the dogmas and canons of the Orthodox faith from Byzantium, but through the Greeks managed to transfer the importance of aesthetic expression during religious rituals, the importance of ecclesiastic architecture, church singing, iconography and Christian asceticism. All these aspects of Orthodoxy were the most attractive for Russians and were later developed with the greatest activity and independence. However, during the XI - XII centuries some differences emerged between the Byzantine Greek Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. They were both external and internal. External differences were of liturgical character: performing rituals while sitting in Greek Church and while standing in the Russian Church, reading the Gospel towards the visitors in the Greek Church and turned to an altar away from visitors in the Russian Church; and forbidding women to sing in the church choir in the Greek Church. Internal differences were much deeper: for the Byzantine Orthodox philosophy, considerations and scrupulous accuracy in moral and religious behavior were very important, for the Russian Orthodox philosophy, primary importance was given to the formal perfection of technical or ceremonial processes and practices combined with a belief in their perfection and an unconditional rejection of any possible criticism or review. According to Averintsev, until the era of Peter the Great, the philosophy of the Russian church was built mainly on ritual matters. Averintsev argues that "when the Greeks in the time of St. Gregory Palamas (XIV century) discussed the idea whether the grace of God is a created force or an uncreated energy from the essence of God, the Russian priests discussed the legality of two fingers or three fingers crossing."³¹

³¹ S. Averintsev, *The Poetics of Early Byzantine Literature*. Sankt-Petersburg: Azbuka-Klassika, 2004. p. 430.

One of the main differences between the Western and Eastern Christian was that a Western Christian chose the human will, and thus the freedom of his own action for his understanding of the world and for understanding himself as the primary instrument. Hence the desire of the Western world was organizing the public life through the balance of many wills as a dominant political power through the will of the majority decision (republic) and/or through the will of the majority in compromise with the will of the minority (democracy). While an Eastern Christian sought the perfection of the human not in himself but in the summation of human features with the divine ones through metaphysical enlightenment and comprehension of human soul. Eastern Christianity attempted to see and feel the goodness of God in reality, which can manifest itself only in the spiritual exercises and the formalities of religious rituals. The theological differences of God in Western Christianity and Russian Orthodoxy lay in the essence of God's Son. Western Christianity believes that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father God and the Son of God. Russian Orthodox Church believes that the Holy Spirit comes only from God the Father. This is due to the fact that only God the Father is considered the creator of the world. This difference in understanding of the essence of the Son of God became one of the reasons for the separation of church to the West Christianity and the East Christianity.

Christianity was established in Russia quite quickly. Many factors influenced this turn from paganism: the willingness of the state apparatus to finance the Christian church; a historical background of the spreading of Christianity in earlier years before the official baptism of Russia by prince Vladimir in 988³²; no known faith conflicts

³² It is well known that the grandmother of prince Vladimir, the official baptizer of Russia, princess Olga had been Christian baptized in Constantinople. See N. Karamzin, *History of the Russian State*, 12 vols., Moscow: Nauka, 1987. p. 24.

between Christianity and traditional pagan beliefs of the Slavs, who believed that all religions are equal to the aspirations of the One God; granting a status of independency to women and empowering their property rights by the Christian church, which was impossible in old pagan Russian society. Moreover, Christianity came to Russia not by force through other nations, but through the power of the state and was originally perceived by the population as a kind of public commitment to the prince.³³ In addition, the spreading of Eastern Christianity from Byzantium to Russia was influenced by many political factors such as the importance of Constantinople, which was considered in the X century as a successor to Rome (I will discuss the description of the idea of "Moscow - the Third Rome,"), as well as an opportunity to fulfill religious rituals in native Russian language in contrast to the requirements of the Western Christian church of compulsory Latin.

However, apart from all these factors, the national factor is the one that appears to me to be the most important one. And here we are back to the Russian community culture. Since the beginning of the expansion of Christianity in Eastern Russia, the concept of conciliarity of the Russian church arose. The concept of "conciliarity" was selected by the first educators in Russia, Saints Cyril and Methodius³⁴ who chose this term in contrast to the Western term "catholicity", as the Russian term *sobornost'* (conciliarity) contains not only the idea of the common meeting of many people, but the idea of common decision making or united commitment by a large number of people. The cause of such a notion was that in Russia there was a material analogue of

³³ In the chronics *The Tale of Bygone Years* (X century), there is a scene describing the process of baptizing the residents of Kiev by prince Vladimir, in which residents made it voluntary. However, in another piece of medieval Russian literature *The Sermon on Law and Grace* (11th century) by the Kievan Metropolitan Hililarion there is an insinuation that the baptizing process by prince Vladimir was quite violent. See A. Kartashev, *History of the Russian Church*, Moscow: Terra, 1997. p. 44. and p. 126.

³⁴ In the translation of The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed the Greek term "καθολικήν" (katholic) was translated as "соборную" (conciliar). The first Christian books are thought to be translated in Old Russian by Saints Cyril and Methodius. See A. Kartashev, *History of the Russian Church*, Moscow: Terra, 1997. p. 30.

conciliarity, which was village community - a proto-Slavic institute with the power of not only social, but also moral unity of people. The East Christian church explained the necessity of an united community by the fact that since man is sinful it requires extraordinary mental strength to deal with his sins; in this struggle he does not have enough force on his own, and so a united force is needed, some sort of spiritual synergy that can pave the way to salvation. Thus, adopting the national characteristics of the Russian people, the Church in Russia transformed into a national religious institution. According to Nikolai Berdyaev, "Russian history quite exceptionally showed a full nationalization of the Church of Christ, which defines itself as universal. Church nationalism is a typical Russian phenomenon. It permeated our Old Believers. But the same nationalism prevails in the dominant official church."³⁵

The peculiarity of the Russian national mentality, which later found its expression in Russian Christian Orthodoxy, was the principle that, according to Russian medieval mentality, a person accepts the reality of nature as something external or accidental. That means the manifestation of material nature is only a set of phenomena, which are indifferent and secondary to the absolute truth and spiritual content, which are merely the factors contributing to human existence or hindering it. Under these circumstances of external reality, the existential question was, how can the unconditional spiritual idea be realized? Russian Orthodoxy gave an answer that it is possible, but only through the unity of the human soul with the Divine. Thus, for the Russian people the Mother of God and Christ became embodied as the soul of the surrounding world or primordial matter of everything that exists. Thanks to this philosophical paradox, the ancient Slavs managed to form a bridge from a primitive pagan metaphysical understanding of the

³⁵ N. Berdyaev, *The Fate of Russia*. Moscow: ACT, 2004. p. 9.

world to its Christian religious interpretation. That is why Christianity helped to keep the two types of Russian cultures that I mentioned above together. According to Solovyov, "Russian public life had its duality, but did not break up thanks to the third higher power, which sanctifies the will of the people and the activities of the government, putting to both of them the same eternal goal - the placement of the God's truth on earth."³⁶

A contradiction between the communal religious consciousness and individual religious commitment in the history of the Russian Church can be seen most clearly in the ideology expressed by Joseph Volotsky and Nil Sorsky at the end of XV century. According to the philosophy of Joseph Volotsky the essence of Russian Orthodoxy was in collective life and joint construction of the "City of God" on earth. The monastery, as he understood it, should be one of the central soul elements of the Orthodox people, besides other sometimes non-hostile and sometime hostile social elements of the whole society. According to Joseph's plan of a strictly organized cenobitic monastery, he very quickly found allies among local princes and began large-scale construction, broad agriculture and even primitive production. A significant characteristic of the monastic world was not the denial or rejection or running away from society, but the inviting of the greatest possible number of people into the monastery life for the purpose of religious education or other involvement. Another interesting fact was the copying of social structures into the monastery life. Joseph divided the monks into classes: laborers mostly by their origin, the monks themselves, and the highest category of monastery bureaucracy with the unequal distribution of wealth between these three classes. At the same time, Joseph copied severe censorship, so popular in Russia, when he absolutely

³⁶ V. Solovyov, *The Goals of Philosophy*, Lecture on February 25th, See V. Kuvakin, *Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov*, Moscow: Znanie, 1988. p. 41.

prohibited any expressions of personal opinion between monks, saying that "Opinion is the mother of all passions. Opinion is the second fall of man."³⁷

Another, even more contradictory aspect within the ideology arising at the same time as the religious philosophy by Joseph Volotsky was the ideology created by Nil Sorsky. Nil Sorsky, the same as Joseph, lived in a critical time for all pan-European and Russian history. It was a time of Islamic dominance in the East, the discovery of America and the beginning of Reformation. It goes without saying that Russia absorbed from the West new ideas and teachings of religious thought, thus ushering in the time of manifestations of *religious individualism*. Steven Lukes argues that "Religious individualism is thus both a religious doctrine and, by implication, a view of the nature of religion."³⁸ I dare to add to this very precise characteristic my view that this individualism has an impact on how one views the surrounding world and one's feeling about one's own purpose of existence in this world. In this sense Nil Sorsky was influenced by the Hesychasts doctrine³⁹, which he learned during his visit to famous monasteries on Mount Athos, already well known to Moscow. After his return from Mount Athos Nil, like Joseph, wanted to arrange his life according to the type of the "new monastery". But unlike Joseph, Nil, together with only one of his disciples, began to build their monastic cells without making it known to the public, but rather by scaring away anyone interested in his attempts by the harsh demand of denial of all forms of possession including the possession of land. His ideology was the absolute refusal of physical possession and public exposure: no collective life, no productive economy, no notion of any luxury. In his understanding, the feat of a monk was in pure "spiritual activity", an

³⁷ Joseph Volotsky, *Apostle*, See A. Kartashev, *History of the Russian Church*, Moscow: Terra, 1997. p. 112.

³⁸ S. Lukes, *Individualism*, New York: B. Blackwell, 1990. p. 94.

³⁹ Christian mystical doctrine is based on inner concentration and exceptional asceticism, which in practice involves acquiring an inner focus and blocking all physical senses.

intense internal mental work through ongoing spiritual experiments. Unlike Joseph, Nil supported the development of personal views of his few students and their critical attitude towards religious dogma and ecclesiastical traditions, saying "There are lot of scriptures, but not all of them have the divine essence. You, perceiving the truth while reading, keep it."⁴⁰

In this example of a clash of medieval ideologies we can see the "dualism of the Gothic" pointed out by Arnold Hauser. He argues that with the development of society in the Middle Ages and with the spread of humanitarian ideas throughout the European world, a man again and again confronts the choice between the spiritual dictatorship of the church and the development of unbiased secular culture. He talks about "the balance between individualism and universalism and a tradeoff between freedom and commitment."⁴¹ In Russia, as in Western Europe but with some delays, the era began of conflict between the dogma of the dominant majority and the inner world of the individual, between the religious infallibility and progressive dilettantism, between orthodoxy and subjectivism. And in all these oppositions the core reason was the contradiction between the expression of the free will of man and the outside formed subjective social world order.

Another example of the expression of individualism in Russian medieval literature is the work of one of the most famous and controversial kings of ancient Russia, Ivan IV or Ivan the Terrible. Of course, Ivan IV had reason to express his will and independence as the sole ruler of Russia, but the interesting aspect of this kingship is that the king explained his right for expressing his free will beside his authorial power through the fact

⁴⁰ Nil Sorsky, *Statute of Monastery Life*, Sergiev Posad: Sergieva Lavra, 1998. p. 18.

⁴¹ A. Hauser, *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*. Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1970. pp. 244 - 245.

that, according to the Russian rite, he was considered the Lord's Anointed on earth. Ivan the Terrible explained not his state but his moral authority by the theological principles, that the ruler and the people are equal in their devotion to the spiritual authority of the general Christian principles. Thus, through Christianity the superpower of moral salvation is expressed. With these words Ivan comes to the idea that he, as the major representative of the Russian state, not only protects the Russian people and provides them legitimacy, but he also guards and encourages the exploits of the Holy Spirit. Based on this ideological theory, Ivan the Terrible formulates his ethical value system, the remains of which are visible in the political life of Russia even nowadays. This system is based on the postulate of the priority of state interests over the interests of the individual. The state order, which was understood as a necessary condition for the spiritual salvation of the Russian people, justified any means including tortures and executions. In his letter to Prince Kurbsky, Ivan the Terrible expressed the optimal formula of the Russian autocracy with the following words: "We are always free to grant our slaves and we are always free to execute them."⁴²

The state, according to Ivan the Terrible, is responsible for everything before God; that is, it is the king who takes personal responsibility for all the suffering of the people and thus gave himself the right to do any crime in the name of a higher purpose. In addition to original philosophical thought, which changed the whole political life of Russia for ages, Ivan IV was certainly an interesting creative person, to some extent the only one in the history of Russia at that time. According to Likhachev, "The king's works

⁴² Ivan IV's response to the first Kurbsky's letter. J. Lurye, *Correspondence of Iwan IV with Andrey Kurbski*, Moscow: Akademiya Nauk SSSR, 1979. p. 77.

stand out significantly from all the written works of that time because of their temperament, expression, the use of unusual words and expressions."⁴³

There was another ethical system, which in particular is necessary to pay attention to, especially because it has something in common with the system of Ivan IV - a system created by Protopop (High Priest) Avvakum. It was written later, in the 17th century, with the beginning of the emancipation of the individual in Russia, at a time when Russia began to borrow Western ideas and technologies. Not surprisingly, there was a man who set another new and progressive (albeit utopian) idea against the totalitarian ideas of the king. However, for better understanding, it is necessary to recall once again the contradiction between monastery ideologies by Joseph Volotsky and Nil Sorsky on the issue of "non-possessors", which, 100 years later, led to a split in the Russian Orthodox Church.

But what was the reason for the split in the Russian Orthodox Church? In Russian history, there exists the paradoxical fact that in spite of the cruel reign of Ivan IV (1530 - 1584), the Russian people remained calm and did not protest very much; but one hundred years later, under government of another Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich with the unofficial nickname "The quiet one", a considerable part of the Russian people suddenly began to express protests, including escape to the deep forests of Siberia and even self-immolations. What happened?

I have already mentioned the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church had been understood in the Muscovite state as a national church. In the XV-XVII centuries, this understanding of a national belonging created a specific religious patriotism, which made Muscovite people see the essence of Orthodoxy in the most minor peculiarities of

⁴³ D. Likhachov, *Great Heritage*. Moscow: Sovremennik, 1975. p. 266.

ecclesiastic rituals. These national features, whatever they may be in themselves, were perceived as untouchable sanctuaries. Thus, the original idea of the universality of Christianity⁴⁴ was replaced in Russia with the idea of an unshakable Russian faith. Out of this inviolability principle, Russian priests came to the conclusion that true Christianity remains preserved only in Russia, and because of this exclusive interpretation only local Russian Orthodox traditions should be considered as true traditions and not the traditions of the Greek Church. The longer such an ideology existed in Russia, the greater was the gap between the Russian Church and the Greek Byzantine Church, from which Russia took over Christianity.

This contradiction sharpened when the Russian Patriarch Nikon, trying to adjust certain church rituals and theological books to the canons of the Greek Byzantine Church, suddenly caused perturbations for a large number of Russian believers. Those who did not agree with Nikon's reforms were called schismatics or *Old Believers*. Old Believers believed that there lay great trouble in the way that Russian bishops declined the ancient Russian faith and tried to change it in favor of Western Christianity. Patriarch Nikon did not change the Russian Orthodoxy in a Western way, but did manage to assimilate one rule of the Western Church: he used his spiritual authority as a political power. Thus, for the first time in Russian history, the Russian Orthodox Church took its place on Russia's political scene as an equal political power, separated from the government and from people's will. It inevitably resulted in rejection from both sides. By understanding himself as a representative of legal authorities, Patriarch Nikon

⁴⁴ "Where there can't be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondservant, freeman; but Christ is all", Paul's Letter to the Colossians (3:11).

put himself against the current supreme power of the king⁴⁵ and, as V. Solovyov pointed out, "strained after the state crown".⁴⁶

After expressing his political position and opposition against the King, the official Russian Church lost its moral authority in the eyes of many Russian Christians as a religious institution, losing its divine supremacy and turning into a pure collaborative authoritarian force. It became obvious that such a force would not be accepted by much of the Russian population. Russian government stood in defense of the church authority using political and financial pressure of the state apparatus and even executions. The letters by Protopop Avvakum were specifically aimed against such a situation in Russia. The paradox of the opposition between the official Russian Church and Old Believers was the fact that both parties proved the truth of their religion, not with dogmatic principles or philosophical justification, but purely with external rituals and texts. The only difference was that the official church demanded compliance with rituals of the Greek Orthodox Church and Old Believers insisted on ancient Russian ones.

The split in the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17th century is paradoxically similar to the opposition of Slavophiles and Westerners in 19th century Russia; I will discuss this further. With regard to Avvakum, he denies the suggestion that only the Russian Tzar is responsible for all the sins of the people subordinated to him. He argues repeatedly that it is not the head of state but rather every person in the nation that is responsible for the sins of the whole nation and for their own sins.⁴⁷ Avvakum,

⁴⁵ It is known that the Patriarch called himself "great king" in his letters, which was a prerogative of the Russian king only. Beyond that, many cases of Russian church involvement in state businesses are known from chronicles and governmental protocols. See N. Karamzin, *History of the Russian State*, 12 vols., Moscow: Nauka, 1987. Volume 2. pp. 452 - 456.

⁴⁶ V. Solovyov, *About the spiritual power in Russia. (On the occasion of the last pastoral proclamation of the Holy Synod)*. Moscow: Prospekt, 2014. p. 14.

⁴⁷ Avvakum: "In which rules it is written that the Tsar possesses the Church and is allowed to change dogmas and give blessings?... This is not the Tzar's business but it is the business of true pastors because they give their soles for Christ herd." See

similarly to Nil Sorsky, denied cooperation between the church and the state and opposed the religiously violent state to individual spiritual enlightenment and each person's inner spiritual exercise. However, he sees a way out through religious ascetic sufferings, saying that "the duty of everyone is to be tormented to death as long as there are sin and instability in the faith".⁴⁸ He argues that martyrdom is the only phenomenon that will relieve an individual from conflict with his own conscience. Undoubtedly, it was an ethical stance of a rebel against the established violent system; a kind of reaction against the system of state repression of personal responsibility, and in this way it was a manifesto of moral individualism and personal freedom, absolutely new to Russia at this time. D. Likhachev calls Avvakum a literary follower of Ivan the Terrible, saying that ". . . the same as Ivan the Terrible, Avvakum was a rebel against all literary traditions by the way he used special effects of the mixing Old Slavonic church expressions with the simple Russian language."⁴⁹ I will show how this theme of suffering is important to Dostoevsky's characters, from the peasant prisoners in *The House of the Dead*, to Raskolnikov, Ivan and Dmitri Karamazov.

In the first centuries of its existence, the Russian medieval state was no different from other nations of medieval Europe. Russia successfully delivered furs, honey, flax and slaves to Europe and the Middle East and was actively involved in the global market at the time. Russian princes gave their daughters in marriage to European kings⁵⁰, the monks from Ireland and Germany preached in Russia, and Russia ruled the famous trade route "from the Varangians to the Greeks". However, with the emergence

Avvakum Petrov, *Life of protopope Avvakum written by himself and others his writings*. Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoye Publishing, 1979. p. 55.

⁴⁸ See Avvakum Petrov, *Life of protopope Avvakum written by himself and others his writings*. Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoye Publishing, 1979. pg. 102.

⁴⁹ D. Likhachov, *Great Heritage*. Moscow: Sovremennik, 1975. p. 287.

⁵⁰ Anna Yaroslavna, the daughter of Yaroslav the Wise, Grand Prince of Kiev and Novgorod (1030 – 1075) was the queen of France and consort of Henry I of France.

and spread of Christianity in Russia, the desire for a more complete separation from the rest of Europe becomes more and more relevant in Russian political life, as does the wish for choosing its own path of development. If in the oldest works of Russian literature we can still find notions of being part of Europe⁵¹, later, however, the Russian Orthodox Church, in its earliest sermons, labels Russians as a peculiar people, different from the other nations of Europe with their special divine purpose.⁵²

For as long as Byzantium was an independent political center of the Christian East, Constantinople was of central importance for the Russian Orthodox Church, which recognized the supremacy of the Patriarch of Constantinople and agreed to accept the metropolitans, mostly Greeks, sent from Constantinople to Russia. But in the XV century, with the fall of Constantinople and the liberation of Russia from the Tatars, the political center of the Christian East moves from Byzantium to Moscow. Russians began to understand themselves as successors of the Greek ecclesiastical domination. Using the same historical reasons which Constantinople used hundreds years ago, declaring itself "The Second Rome", the Muscovite state began to consider itself rightful in overtaking all political benefits from Byzantine. In the same way as the Greeks, in their time, considered ancient Rome as having fallen into barbarism, Muscovites began to consider themselves the center of the Eastern Christian world. Russia adopted Orthodox Christianity from Byzantine at X and XI centuries and, together with Orthodoxy, it adopted a Byzantine identity along with a form of religious beliefs, dogmas and spiritual exercises mixed with attempts to control the political governmental procedures of the state and society for fulfillment of its interests. For this reason, a

⁵¹ For example, princess Olga was compared in old chronics to queen Helena, and prince Vladimir was compared to emperors Konstantin or Charles the Great. See D. Likhachov, *Great Heritage*. Moscow: Sovremennik, 1975. p. 63.

⁵² In *The Sermon on Law and Grace* (11th century), the Kievan Metropolitan Hilarius calls Russians "new people" and "people chosen by the God", D. Likhachov, *Great Heritage*. Moscow: Sovremennik, 1975. p. 67.

specific political ideology with the slogan "Moscow as the Third Rome" was created and implemented and, common to nationalistic ideologies, it dulled the expression of individualism and the pursuit of personal freedom for a long period of time.

Peter the Great (1672 - 1725) destroyed this nationalistic principle of exclusive destiny of the Russian nation and enabled Russia's inclusion with the other European countries. Religious intentions and a plan to create an ideal society were abolished by Peter the Great and replaced with utilitarian non-religious state mechanisms. Unfortunately, through Petrine reforms, Russia acquired only external features of Western civilization, while its mentality remained a bearer of ancient Russian notions. However, thanks to Peter's reforms, Russian nobility and gentry were actively included in the procedures of the state apparatus and received responsibilities which, for the first time in Russian history, were associated with the status of an independent political power. Due to Because of constant wars and business during the organization of the army and navy, Peter the Great did not have enough time for reorganization of economic and political life in Russia. That is why he was forced to sacrifice the major principle of Russian autocratic government and tried to share his power with first ministers and members of the Senate, which he created using examples of constitutional power from the Netherlands and Sweden. These were the first attempts of a Russian Tsar to redistribute the governmental power and at the same time the responsibility from himself to others. By giving such duties to the most noble people of the Russian society, Peter the Great created the situation when they first received the right to make independent decisions, which undoubtedly affected the upraising of the spirit of individualism among the upper strata of Russian society from the beginning of

early XVIII century.⁵³ In my opinion, the true beginning of liberalism in Russia can be associated only with the decree of Peter III from February 18th 1762 called *Manifesto about Freedoms of the Noble Russian Gentry*. Before this decree, Russian nobility were forced to spend all their lives in service to the Tsar, whereas after the decree they were freed from this 25 year long mandatory service and were allowed to retire, to travel abroad and to devote their lives to their own purposes and not to the purpose of the Tsar. According to M. Alexandrov, one of the major motives of this decree was the consideration that throughout history, the Russian noble class has reached such a level of self-awareness and civic self-identification that it was able to serve to higher authorities not because of fear or materialistic motives but because of its understanding of his own civic obligations and responsibilities towards the mother country. Under such circumstances: "There is no need to enserf the noble class by strict laws, as Peter the Great was forced to do."⁵⁴

For the first time, the Russian educated society, the Russian intelligentsia, realized its responsibility for the fate of their own country. The old formula of the personal responsibility of one king, created by Ivan IV, which I mentioned above, ceased to be effective, despite the fact that Tsar de jure remained the head of Russian state until the revolution of 1917. According to Derrek Offord, "Two immense and interrelated tasks preoccupied the intelligentsia in the marvelous decade of its development: the creation of an original and human literature, and the solution of the question as to Russia's historical relationship with Western Europe."⁵⁵ The idea of the Russian intelligentsia's influence on the destiny and development of Russia caused a

⁵³ For the political reforms of Peter the Great see V. Kluchevsky, *A History of Russia*, London: Russell & Russell, 1960.

⁵⁴ M. Alexandrov, *State, Bureaucracy and Absolutism in Russian history*. St. Petersburg: Wolf, 1910. p. 99.

⁵⁵ D. Offord, *Portraits of early Russian liberals*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. p. 3.

heated debate about the future of the country and the path of its development. At the heart of this debate was a question of priority between what I am arguing in this essay, individualism or collectivism. In an attempt to find the answer to the question of whether Russia should follow the path of Western Europe in its development or make its own way towards civilization, the Russian educated society became divided into two groups: the Westernizers and the Slavophiles. The formal cause of this confrontation was the publication by Chaadayev of the first of his *Philosophical Letters* in 1836. Writing from "Necropolis", the "city of the dead" - by which he meant Moscow - Chaadayev compared Russia to the West in the most unfavorable terms. In his letter, Chaadayev could foresee the splitting of Russian educated society "between supporters of faith and adherents of reason, between defenders of *individual* and advocates of *collective*".⁵⁶

In order to analyze the philosophical positioning of the Slavophiles, we have to keep in mind that they were historically divided into old and new generations⁵⁷, and denied the inevitability of Russia's following Western patterns of civilization development. They came to this decision through their own philosophy, believing that the main flaw of the West was abstract rationality and the individualistic nature of its religion, philosophy, science, and public life. Against this abstract Western culture they opposed political, religious and ethical features of the patriarchal Russian Church and the values of the *Mir*, the rural community, as well as the spiritual connection between Russian autocracy and simple people mediated through the Russian Orthodox Church, which they found to be an institution that meets the needs of all Russian people in the best possible way. The core aspect of Slavophile philosophy is the idea of conciliarism

⁵⁶ T. Balagova, *Aleksey Khomyakov and Ivan Kireyevsky as founding father of Slavophilia*. Moscow: Vyshaja Shkola, 1995. p. 15.

⁵⁷ D. Offord, *Portraits of early Russian liberals*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. p. 77.

(*sobornost'*), which I mentioned above, which is the ethical, cultural and the political ideal through the idea of true brotherhood or the tight community within the Christian religion. According to the Slavophilist theorist Khomyakov: "*Sobornost* is a community of people who are free of antagonism and who are united through the belief in Orthodox values, which guarantee the integrity of an individual and togetherness of knowledge. *Sobornost* is the usage in Christian love of freedom for everyone and unity for all."⁵⁸

Since such conciliarism is possible only within the Church, Slavophiles put forward the idea of the revival of the church as the idealistic apostolic Church of the first centuries of Christianity, and the interpenetration of ecclesiastic motivations in the life of every individual and society as a whole. Slavophiles insisted that only in Russia and specifically in a village community there exists the true spirit of Christian brotherhood, where society cares about everyone and the community as a whole. The truly Christian character of the Russian people was demonstrated, according to the Slavophiles, "by their practice of periodically repartitioning the land available to them in accordance with the changing needs of the families in the village community, by their communal use of resources such as woodland, pastures and fishing grounds and by their discussions of the corporate affairs at an assembly at which all had a voice."⁵⁹ According to their philosophy, the old generation of Slavophiles demanded a complete return to the original unity of the entire Russian nation as well as demanded that the individual mind completely abandon its independence so characteristic for the Western individualistic

⁵⁸ A. Khomyakov, Selected works, Vol 8, p. 246. See T. Balagova, *Aleksey Khomyakov and Ivan Kireyevsky as founding father of Slavophilia*. Moscow: Vyshaja Shkola, 1995. p. 67.

⁵⁹ D. Offord, *Portraits of early Russian liberals*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. p. 8.

worldview⁶⁰ in favor of a common religious faith and church tradition. Later a new generation of Slavophiles modified this requirement, praising Russian Orthodoxy not for its substantially religious and ethical content, but only as a sign of Russian ethnic nationality. Thus, the philosophical and religious teaching was primitivized to the level of nationalism, that is, to the radical and violent views that demonstrate the higher purpose and special features of the Russian people based on their unconditional subordination to strong state apparatus as the only one possible core element able to keep the nation alive and together. Thus, they made the state apparatus an absolute condition for preserving the nation as a whole. The glorification of a vital and indigenous Russian community was based not on the fact of traditional unification of the whole nation within the church, but on the fact of social agreement regarding the reluctant coexistence of peoples without rights and retrograde autocracy.

I am arguing that Slavophiles created a project of an ideal state⁶¹, in reality some kind of utopian state was imagined in which they tried to combine the major Christian commandment of love for each other with the urgent needs of Russian society for modernisation and reformation. Because of this form of religious utopianism, the philosophical system of Slavophilism placed in the foreground only philosophical and ethical motives and justifications, and almost never analyzed, not to mention criticized, the real social life in undeveloped Russia. In my opinion, the utopianism of this idea is expressed in its frailty, in an artificial projection of the political concept of a long-term future without trying to implement this project in the present. If the Westernizers, in their reasoning, operated on examples of political, economic and social life available and

⁶⁰ Ivan Kireyevsky: "Western philosophy cannot take roots in our society because its power lies in abstract rationality, which does not have perspectives for moral development". Ivan Kireyevsky, *Schelling Speech*. See T. Balagova, *Aleksey Khomyakov and Ivan Kireyevsky as founding father of Slavophilia*. Moscow: Vyshaja Shkola, 1995. p. 134.

⁶¹ Aleksey Khomyakov: "From a village community the whole civic world can derive", *Ibid.*, p. 65.

already tested in the present in other countries, the Slavophiles backed their arguments with ideas sensed from the past, which they looked retrospectively and projected onto some indefinite future, which P. Chaadayev called Slavophile teaching as a "retrospective utopia."⁶²

In fact, in the history of Russia we can clearly see how excessive freedom was considered to be a destructive element from the perspective of the state apparatus, and therefore the state apparatus tried to strictly regulate the people's service in the government's interest. From the beginning of the XV century, the state has gradually assimilated various groups in society, who performed similar state duties in large enclosed classes, leaving the opportunity for social classes to move up in the hierarchy only within the same class. The purpose of these attempts was to simplify the composition of public service and to assign the specific state duties literally from birth. In such a system, each class permanently concentrated within itself and was separate from the others. Later these classes of state duties were called *soslovia*⁶³. Kluchevsky referred to this process of creation of classes as "a victim of society in favor of the state" and to the separation of classes, which later lead to creation of serfdom in Russia, as "lowering the level of social civilization."⁶⁴

There is a tradition in modern historical literature of referring to Slavophiles as Conservatives that, in my opinion, is how I see the Slavophiles not quite correct, because I understand conservatism to be primarily an attempt to preserve (conserve)

⁶² See Chaadayev's Letter to Schelling on May 20th 1842, P. Chaadayev, *Complete works and selected letters*. 2 vols., Moscow: Nauka, 1991. Volume 2. p. 378.

⁶³ *Soslovia* was a peculiar system of social groups: nobility, clergy, urban dwellers and peasants. However, within these groups, many detailed categories were recognized. A separate category were *raznochintsy* (persons of no rank). According to the Table of Ranks, Russian government had a separate stratification for different layers of governmental bureaucracy. By the end of the XIX century the estate paradigm no longer corresponded to the actual socio-economical stratification of the population, but the terminology was in use until the Revolution of 1917. See Wikipedia.org: *Soslovia*.

⁶⁴ V. Kluchevsky, *A History of Russia*, London: Russell & Russell, 1960.

the existing social values: This is the nature of conservatism, to perpetuate tradition and ethics. The German idea of a *Volkstaat* was not far from the Slavophiles who wanted a state that reflected the needs of the lowest to the highest classes. Slavophiles were not defenders of many of the existing traditions of old Russia, but rather used their philosophy as an instrument for the modernization of Russian society. For example, Slavophiles were strictly against serfdom in Russia. According to Khomyakov: "Moral distortion of gentlemen is deeper than the distortion of slaves and the deep depravity of winners exacts revenge for the misfortune of losers."⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the Slavophiles saw the proof of Russia's destiny in its slavery and miserable economy, because they believed that a higher power, the Russian people, should bring to the whole humanity a power "not of this world"⁶⁶, and external wealth and civic justice do not matter; the great historical mission of Russia has a religious and not an economic essence. This appeals to nationalism too, ultra nationalists move around within this boundaryless world of ideas and ideologies. Stalinism could even be said to pursue a historical mission.

In contrast to the Slavophiles, Westernizers recognized the split between rational consciousness and religious belief as a reasonable and historically rational account of historical conflicts, but they never proclaimed that the philosophical consciousness of an individual always contradicts his religious faith. The starting point of the Russian Westernizer philosophy was an axiological rational understanding of the individual. An image of a civilized educated individual who knows how to defend his own dignity and how to reasonably use the freedom of political public actions was created by Westernizers under the impression of Hegel's ideas on slavery and serfdom as a form

⁶⁵A. Khomyakov, *About the Old and the New*, See T. Balagova, Aleksey Khomyakov and Ivan Kireyevsky as founding father of Slavophilia. Moscow: Vyshaja Shkola, 1995. p. 87.

⁶⁶"Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world....", John 18:36.

of alienation of the individual which involves other forms of unfreedom. Hegel, who after Rousseau proclaimed that man is born free⁶⁷, was also one of primary thinkers who is responsible for the Westernizers' belief in the hopes for the possibility of a step-by-step exit from the state of oppression of master and servant, lord and bondsman, and into the possibility of reintegration with reality without a resignation towards society. Belinsky wrote to Gogol:

Russia sees its salvation not in mysticism or asceticism or pietism, but in the successes of civilization, enlightenment and humanity. It does not need sermons (they had been listened to enough), but needs an awakening of a sense of human dignity in people, lost for many centuries in the mud and in captivity, as well as rights and laws consistent not with the teachings of church but with common sense and justice, and implemented as strictly as possible.⁶⁸

In my opinion, one mistake made by the Westernizers, was that many of them were eager to reform Russia with the help of radical methods ranging from several terrorist attacks on authorities to a socialist revolution. Under the ideological influence of Westernizers, such as Herzen and Ogarev in their journal "The Bell", in the 1850s and 1860s student groups began to appear in Russia, first only promoting the ideas of liberation, and then forming into organizations that saw their main purpose in forcing the Russian government to institute democratic reforms. Terror was seen as an acceptable method of such enforcement. As an example, the members of an illegal group "Narodnaya Volya" (*The People's Will*), referred to as *Narodniki*, expected to force the political changes in Russia through the murder of the Emperor Alexander II. Even in

⁶⁷ "But the fact that man is in and for himself free, in his essence and as man, free born, was known neither by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, nor the Roman legislators, even though it is this conception alone which forms the source of law". See Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. Ltd. 1892, pg. 49.

⁶⁸ V. Belinsky, *Complete works*, 10 vols., Moscow: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1953 –1959. Volume 10. p. 213.

their peaceful activities, trying to copy the external progressive patterns of Western societies such as open public debate, political competition, and freedom of speech, they were not aware of the prerequisites that made these patterns possible and were core elements of the development of any society: tolerance of opinions different from own, emphasis on the dignity of the individual, and belief in the power of the enlightened individual.

In general, Slavophiles and Westernizers pursued common goals of developing Russia's modernization while choosing different and even opposed methods. Both philosophies had a direct bearing on Europe, where Westernizers perceived processes in Russia as part of the European process, whereas, according to Dostoevsky, "Russia was not Europe, but only wore European uniform, but under the uniform was a different creature"⁶⁹. On the other hand, Slavophiles argued that what is possible for Europe is not applicable to Russia, as Russia has developed and is developing its own way, different from the European way, and has its own metaphysical destiny.

After comparing many philosophies the Russian intelligentsia became very interested in Hegel's philosophy, because in it they found the same religious phenomenon of a relationship between an individual and the Absolute that they failed to find in the Russian Orthodox Church, which began to lose its metaphysical attraction and became increasingly just an official governmental institution, which, according to Solovyov, "was forced to put on the state-owned uniform."⁷⁰

However, the philosophical understanding of the nature of the individual led to the Russian literary - cultural concept of the "superfluous man", formed in the XIX

⁶⁹ F. Dostoyevsky, *Complete works*, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1981. Volume 23. pp. 41- 42.

⁷⁰ V. Solovyov, *About the spiritual power in Russia. (On the occasion of the last pastoral proclamation of the Holy Synod)*. Moscow: Prospekt, 2014. p. 52.

century as a result of a combination of the Western European philosophy of rationalism and universalism leading to reason as the basis of the individual and individualism and Eastern Slavic philosophy of a different form of contemplative reasoning and moral formation of the soul, which was influenced by and adopted from the Russian Orthodox Church. Thus, in the same way that classical Russian literature emerged at the intersection between Western and Eastern cultures, the concept of the "superfluous man" (*лишний человек*) was formed in response to the controversy between an individual perception of the world and forced collective coexistence in Russian society. The concept was formulated by Russian writers through the portrayal of a philosophical type of man who, in his relationship with society and because of that isolation and marginal being, became an anthropological as well as pure creative literary concept.

A "superfluous man" is a focus on the tragedy of existence of a philosopher within the society. The emotional condition of a "superfluous man", caused by this concept became an emblem of the person in the play "Woe from Wit", represented by Alexandre Chatsky in Alexander Griboyedov's drama *The Woes of Wit*, Eugene Onegin in Alexander Pushkin's novel of the same name, Grigory Pechorin in Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, and Yevgeny Bazarov in Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. The "superfluous man" as an individual appears in the everyday social world as a result of qualitative changes in the sense of a Russian identity, the essence of which is to move from a passive perception of the world to the acceptance of one's own consciousness, and then, to the ability to change the perception of the world according to one's own conscience. Thus, for the first time in Russian culture, not only had the idea of individualistic perception formed, but also the importance of moral individualism

for the improvement of society. If the fictional heroes of the past only stated historical facts, that took place near them, since the middle of XIX century, Russian culture experienced the need to change the consciousness of a protagonist in favor of, or against, historical facts in an attempt to influence similar events in the future. The essence of a man, his inner qualities, were considered of highest priority and not his origin or welfare. So, if Chatsky, Onegin and Pechorin are depicted as representatives of the noble class, that is, a kind of elite in Russia, who embodied values accumulated from the time of Peter's reforms and the Age of Enlightenment, then Bazarov is already portrayed as a representative of a new class, a *raznochinet*⁷¹, who possessed different, more radical values based on his skepticism and denial of aesthetic, ethical, social and political beliefs of the old generation as well as of any liberal illusions, and who sees a way out for Russia in civil disobedience and revolutionary violence. These more radical people, in particular Dostoevsky, criticized in his novel *The Devils*, Pyotr Verkhovensky speaks the words "We will proclaim destruction. Why is it, why is it that idea has such a fascination. But we must have a little exercise; we must. We'll set fires going."⁷²

The writers who created *The Woes of Wit*, *Eugene Onegin*, *A Hero of Our Time* and *Fathers and Sons* attempted to reproduce the spiritual world of "superfluous people" and their individual alternatives to everyday public life. Being endowed with individual qualities, they are shown as carriers of the highest spiritual values, as

⁷¹ Russian government undertook attempts to free Russian society from class prejudice. For example, the Russian Minister of Education Uvarov (1786 - 1855) formulated the official state national ideology in the formula "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality". Thus, an attempt was made to level the upper aristocratic class of society, to artificially democratize it and to make it more equal with the other strata of society. This ideology pursued purely political purposes as well as depriving aristocracy the rights to private judgment and fighting for their rights, and therefore guaranteeing the failure of possible aristocratic rebellions. See Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy, History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteen-Century Russian Thought*. Legal philosophies of Russian liberalism. Oxford: Clarendon, 1987.

⁷² F. Dostoyevsky, *The Devils*, New York: Vintage Classics, 1994, Part II, Chapter 7.

persons who had the ability to consciously, independently, and productively form their own inner world and act on that basis, thus forming a person-centered society.

However, to be "superfluous" in Russian society does not mean to have the privilege of spiritual leadership. The figure rather has the burden of total misunderstanding and isolation. It manifests the eternal conflict between an individual and society. People around, including the closest relatives and friends, do not understand a representative of such a high anthropological type. Moreover, exactly as in the ancient village community that I described above, they would see in a "superfluous man" a stranger, a rebel, a pilgrim, or a madman⁷³, and will try to prevent any attempts toward understanding his notions or ideas. The "pilgrim theory" in Russian literature was developed by Nikolay Berdyaev, who said:

A Russian easily overcomes with his great spirit any "bourgeoisness", he goes away from any everyday routines, and from everything which normalizes his life. The type of a pilgrim is so characteristic for Russia, and is also considered to be beautiful. A pilgrim is the most free man on earth. He walks on earth, but he has an elementary aerial nature, because he is not rooted in the ground, he does not squat. A pilgrim is free from this "world" and the whole burden of the earth and the whole life on earth is reduced for him to a small knapsack on his shoulders. Stories about him can be found in the great Russian literature. These pilgrims can be found in Pushkin and Lermontov, then, and in Tolstoy's and Dostoyevsky's works, spiritual pilgrims are found in the characters of Raskolnikov, Myshkin, Stavrogin, Versilov, Prince Andrei, and Pierre Bezukhov. Pilgrims do not have their own city of God, they are looking for it.⁷⁴

⁷³ in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* prince Myshkin is accepted by society as a madman. See F. Dostoyevsky, *Complete works*, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1981.

⁷⁴ N. Berdyaev, *The Fate of Russia*. Moscow: ACT, 2004. pp. 11 - 12.

Dostoyevsky confirmed this idea, saying that "These homeless Russian pilgrims continue their vagrancy, and do not seem to disappear for a long time."⁷⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that in the best works of classical Russian literature "superfluous people" were rejected by society and often punished: Chatsky expelled from Moscow, Onegin leaving Petersburg, Pechorin and Bazarov dying in the novels' end.

This rejection of society, so sadly shown in the above mentioned works, captures the essence of the confrontation between the individual and collective will, which I have discussed throughout this essay, and that I think is the essence of the confrontation between the individual and the idea and transformation of the collective in Russian history. This dichotomy or dualism is reflected in the Russian literature of the entire XIX century, through the constantly repeated attempts by different authors to depict an individual and his reaction to major social disturbances and transformations of the past into the present and the future. All of Russian literature of the XIX century is based on some idea of individuality. Examples include Chatsky, Onegin, Pechorin, Bazarov, Rachmetov⁷⁶, Dolochov⁷⁷, Volokhov⁷⁸, and Von Koren⁷⁹. All the pathos of Russian literature in XIX century claims that an idea of an overman is a false one, because it can lead to false values and even to the loss of human life. Dostoevsky tried to convey this idea especially clearly. His *Crime and Punishment* debunks Raskolnikov's dualism.⁸⁰ And it is debunked not by philosophical explanations but by a purely moral choice: Raskolnikov is morally crushed by his "perfect murder". The tragedy of Raskolnikov is

⁷⁵ F.M. Dostoevsky, *The dream of a queer fellow, and The Pushkin speech*. London: G. Allen & Unwin; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1961.

⁷⁶ Protagonist, radical revolutionary from *What Is to Be Done?* by Nikolai Chernyshevsky.

⁷⁷ one of the characters in *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy.

⁷⁸ Protagonist, nihilist from *The Precipice* by Ivan Goncharov.

⁷⁹ one of the characters in *The Duel* by Anton Chekhov, a positivist with his own interpretation of Herbert Spencer's theory about the universality of natural selection based on the intention to kill useless people.

⁸⁰ Raskolnikov's dualism is proclaimed in his famous words: "Whether I am a trembling creature or whether I have the *right...*" F. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, Part V, Chapter IV, See F. Dostoevsky, *Complete works*, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1981.

that on the one hand, with the help of his philosophy, he persistently assures himself that the murder of the old greedy woman is not a crime but a "natural" action made by an extraordinary man. On the other hand, the moral force of his soul convincingly and clearly proves to Raskolnikov that murder is a crime, that is, a religious sin for which a man must repent, because the divine-human nature of the soul cannot recognize sin as something natural and logical, and therefore cannot justify it as an action of a regular human life.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky illustrates another aspect of the dialectic between individualism and collectivism in Russian society. This novel is a kind of prophecy about the future of Russia, where the brothers Karamazov represent those dark⁸¹ evil forces, that will bring about the death of Russia. The Karamazov family is like a miniature Russia: it is totally devoid of family ties. There is hate between the father of the family, Fyodor Pavlovich, and his sons. Dostoevsky implements his prophetic view that modern society is infected with the illness of denying all spiritual shrines: "I hate the whole Russia," admits Smerdyakov. In Karamazov's world, all connections between people are destroyed, and the will for domination at the expense of others is shown as a criminal nature. The novel asks the question: who among the sons is a murderer of the father? Ivan did not kill, but he was the first who formulated the idea of the possibility of killing for a just cause. Dmitry also did not kill, but in his hate towards his father he almost did. Smerdyakov killed his father, but the question is, did he only bring the idea abandoned by Ivan and passionately experienced by Dmitry, to its logical conclusion? Dostoevsky shows that all participants in this drama share responsibility for what happened. He shows the strength of separation between people. "Everyone wants to

⁸¹ In the name Karamazov, prefix "kara" means "dark" in Turkic languages.

separate himself from others, wants to experience the fullness of life, and yet it comes out of all of his efforts that instead of the fullness of life he sees the suicide⁸², monk Zosima proclaims. As for Zosima, he does not seek total isolation behind the monastery walls. On the contrary, his kindness and humanity is based on the belief in the divine origin of every human being. "There is no sin, and can not be in all the land, which the Lord will not forgive to the truly repentant"⁸³, he says.

This novel depicts four types of human personality which, according to Dostoevsky, are typical for Russian society: an individual who lives through passion as Dmitri; an individual who lives wisely as Ivan whose protest has an ethical nature: he does not agree to justify this particular God for the suffering of mankind; and an individual who a priori accepts God as Alyosha does; and an individual who chooses the life of a servant and lackey as Pavel Smerdyakov, the bastard son.

Dostoevsky almost writes a detective story, making it clear that under the assassination of a father he understands the murder of Russia. Holiness, intelligence, and passion could equally commit the crime, but the murder was committed by servility. The problem of servility is the central theme of the novel. Through Ivan's philosophy, Dostoyevsky tries to rationally explain the world. Falling into the trap of Western rational thinking is referred to by Dostoevsky as *casuistic* thinking. In the legend of *The Grand Inquisitor* in which Ivan's story shows the instrumentalization of faith, that is, an attempt of its rational management in the service of a godless state. The Grand Inquisitor, as a rational individual, builds a fence around faith from a variety of intermediaries and does not allow people to come close to the true faith, and by doing this he turns the Church

⁸² F. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Volumes 14 - 15, Complete works, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1981. p. 344.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 346.

into a state institution. These attempts of rationalization of a non-rational matter, are, according to Dostoevsky, signs of servility, as the servility of mind which is devoid of spiritual love. This is seen as exactly the power of rationality that will kill Russia.⁸⁴

When Slavophiles, in their philosophical writings, focused on the demands to create and promote a new individual, a new man, Dostoevsky examined individuals, showing an individual in his duality and polarity, the heaven and hell of his soul, his capacity for good and evil. For Dostoevsky, it was important to explore the boundaries of the divine-human possibilities of human soul in different individual and collective forms. Dostoevsky combined the concept of a responsible religious individual with his resistance to the notion of the surrounding world, saying that "Christianity in its recognition of the pressure of surroundings that proclaims mercy to a sinner, puts however, the moral duty for a man in the struggle against those surroundings and puts a limit to a point, where surroundings end and obligation begins. In creating a man responsible, Christianity recognizes his freedom."⁸⁵ Through the concept of responsibility towards one's own guilt, Dostoevsky indicates the way the relationship between an individual and society must be formed, and by putting words into the mouth of Zosima he says: "But when he knows that he is not only worse than all those in the world, but is also guilty before all people, on behalf of all and for all, for all human sins, the world's and each person's, only then will the goal of our unity be achieved."⁸⁶ In Zosima's sermons, one can see the same ideas, proclaimed by the Slavophiles, as attempts to bring people to their happiness through the best features of the Russian

⁸⁴ Dostoyevsky's choice between rationality and faith can be seen in these his words: "If somebody would tell me that Jesus is outside of truth and the reality would be that the truth is outside of Jesus, I would prefer to stay with Jesus then to stay with the truth". From the letter to N. Fonvisina on February 20th, 1854. See F. Dostoyevsky, *Complete works*, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1981. Volume 27, p. 188.

⁸⁵ F. Dostoyevsky, *Complete works*, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1981. Volume 21, p. 16.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 350.

mentality. But I see here a significant difference. Dostoevsky creates the image of Zosima and reveals the moral essence of his spiritual sermons as an opposition to the passions of the Brothers Karamazov. In fact, Dostoyevsky tries to show an ideal religious man⁸⁷. This is shown in the chapter about the teachings of Zosima which is placed immediately after the confession of Ivan Karamazov. Dostoyevsky uses Zosima as an ideological contraposition to brother Ivan. Their main difference lies in relation to the world. Ivan rebels against the reality of the suffering and the tears and blood of the children, while Zosima expresses love, acceptance and resignation to the world. In contrast to the Slavophiles, who tried to unite people around certain Christian ideals and preached a specific Christian collectivism, Zosima teaches personal union with God and independent search for the joy of life. From this point of view, the position of Zosima is in contradiction to the ideas of the Slavophiles, even though both parties proclaim the same religious motivations. Slavophiles use the religious component of Russian mentality as a tool for creation of a communal social ideal, while Zosima proclaims religious commitment as an opportunity for self-expression and an individual emotional approach to the divine ideal.

Moving my thinking about the individual and collective from Dostoevsky's novel to more modern works of Russian literature, I will concentrate on a very complex work, which for many readers may seem much clearer and easier than it really is. I am referring to Boris Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago*. I chose this novel from a variety of others, as in my opinion, he best reveals the paradox of confrontation between an

⁸⁷ By sending the next parts of his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* to an editor for printing, Dostoevsky wrote about Zosima: "When it is possible, I will do a good thing: I will make a reader to admit that a pure perfect Christian is not an abstract but he is real and possible and that Christianity is the only one refuge for the Russian Land from all its evils". From a letter to N.A. Lubimov, F. Dostoyevsky, *Complete works*, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1981. Volume 24. pp. 344 - 345.

individual and large social groups in times of social disruptions and revolution. I use the term *large social groups* or *masses*, because I believe that during revolutions, such significant change in social formations take place that all socio-economical stratification of the past loses its relevance. For example, during the Russian Revolution of 1917, *soslovie* (see footnote 63) completely disappeared. In my opinion, in the time of revolution, society is in a situation where the centripetal forces of individual notions towards one's own well-being and security are in particular contradiction with the centrifugal forces for social union where each individual seeks his or her position in new society and the hierarchical structure of such newly formed social formations is still not completely built. It seems to me, that in his novel, Pasternak brilliantly completed the main task for a Russian writer, who tries to illuminate revolution as formulated by Trotsky; namely, "to explain the Revolution by figuring out how the various pieces of the existential and ideological puzzle ought to fit together."⁸⁸ At the same time, this novel has a significant aesthetic value in defending poetry as a way of life, a way of a permanent connection to an individual and spiritual life. From this point of view, Pasternak is an interesting figure, who was not immune to the Western view of the world with its rationality; at the same time he made attempts to perceive the world through the Eastern poetic way. In *Doctor Zhivago*, Paternak showed in the poem *Hamlet* the feelings an individual may experience in trying to determine what is happening in the surrounding, raging and hostile to him, world:

The rumbling has grown quiet. I walk out on the stage.
Leaning against a door jamb,

⁸⁸ Boris Wolfson, *Prose of Revolution, The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. p. 59.

I try to catch in a distant echo
What will happen in my lifetime.

At me is aimed the murkiness of night;
I'm pinned by a thousand opera glasses.
If only it is possible, Abba, Father,
May this cup be carried past me.

I cherish your stubborn design
And am agreed to play this role.
But now a different drama is underway;
This time, release me.

But the order of the acts has been determined,
And the ending of the journey cannot be averted.
I am alone; all drowns in Pharisaism.
To live life is not to cross a field.⁸⁹

The principal difference in Russian literature between works of the XIX and of the XX century is that many Russian writers of the XX century abandoned the interest in the individual and proclaimed that the age of large social groups was upon them and now the entire responsibility for the development of society lay only on those few who either have the force to oppose the masses or the courage and ability to lead them. I see here a paradox in the fact that the writers of the XX century compromised the idea of a "superfluous man" as an overman, but at the same time, took the same idea to the next level of the relationship between an individual and society. Already, in *Demons* Dostoevsky shows the possible impact of new types of individuals who are active

⁸⁹ Translated by Eleanor Rowe. See Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*. Chapter 17.

revolutionaries, citing their proclamations: "We are not afraid, if we would see that for the overthrow of the regime we would have to shed three times more blood as the Jacobins did in the 90th."⁹⁰

At the beginning of 20th century, Russia was devastated by the First World War, Revolution and Bolshevik terror. In such a dramatic atmosphere, not only ordinary people but Russian intellectuals as well began to form new views, principles, and movements. Pursuing the major existential goal of surviving, Russians had to reject the values of the past and absorb the demands of a new time, which were based on priority of the interests of masses over the interests of an individual. Especially Russian intellectuals, who first welcomed change hoping that it will lead to democratic reforms in Russia, then noticed that instead of a better social order, new reforms bring only lawless terror and ideological domination of the party and the bureaucracy. Even Dostoevsky pointed out that the construction of artificial happiness for the majority at the cost of the minority is impossible. In his Pushkin speech, he asked: "And can you admit even for a moment the idea that the people, for whom you built this building, would agree to take it from you knowing that the foundation of it has included suffering, say, of a vile creature but cruelly and unjustly tortured and after taking it happily would to stay happy forever?"⁹¹

Boris Pasternak in *Doctor Zhivago*⁹² shows an individual who was not able to predict such a movement of large social groups and who could not realize the rapid whirlpool of political events, and failed to adapt to the changing environment. Remaining

⁹⁰ From the speech of student P. Znaichevsky in "The Bell". See K. Loshin, *Collection of Historical Documents in 12 Volumes*. Moscow: Akademija Nauk SSSR, 1974. p. 155.

⁹¹ F. Dostoyevsky, *Complete works*, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1981. Volume 10.

⁹² The name Zhivago can in Russian be separated into "жив", from Russian "life", and "аро", as the part of "агония" (agony), and together can be interpreted as "agony of life".

an independent individual, he eventually could not find his place in the changing society and, ultimately, lost his family and himself. Pasternak portrays Yuri Zhivago as a foreign element in the storm social whirlpool caused by revolution and post-revolution reorganizations. His journey, his spiritual quest, and his physical suffering, sometimes reminiscent of Jesus' sufferings, are all an example of the results, an individual may expect if he is not able to adapt to demands of the society. Life in Russia at the beginning of 20th century is shown through the eyes of an ordinary man, who is not of bourgeois origin but a man endowed with a conscious analytical thinking and already formed moral principles. But during the revolt of the people and civil war such a person is not able to be a warrior: he is too sensitive, too decent and intelligent. It is obvious that he is trying to survive, but in his attempts to adapt to new social circumstances, he cannot accept the violence and hate that the new era of large social groups demands from him.

Boris Pasternak shows that the shock and horror of revolution can be understood by reasoning but cannot be accepted by the soul, as the model of an ideal society, which the Russian intelligentsia dreamed of for the last 200 years. The ideal society was in fact being transformed into a well-adjusted ideological machine of repression, meaning that old ideals of the Russian intelligentsia were being destroyed and new ideals of artificially created happiness were created. Boris Pasternak pointed out these new ideals by putting in the words of doctor Zhivago that "an unfree man always idealizes his slavery."⁹³ In my opinion, the main idea of this novel is a demonstration of the relationship between an individual who is not ready to give up his moral principles and the society as a collective force which exposes new radical moral changes.

⁹³ Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, Chapter 15, New York: Pantheon Books, 2010.

Pasternak tries to explore the diverse manifestations of individualism in such circumstances, showing changes in world view philosophies, refusal or preservation of religious beliefs, moral stoicism or existential conformism. He even repeats Dostoyevsky's famous formula regarding the fact that if there is no God, then everything is permitted⁹⁴, saying that during the Russian Revolution "the roof was blown off from all over Russia, and we all found ourselves in the open. And there is nobody to look after us. That is freedom!"⁹⁵

Dmitry Bykov argues that Boris Pasternak tried to reveal himself in this book.⁹⁶ Indeed, the author was also disappointed in life, as was the novel's protagonist, when he has not received well deserved recognition.⁹⁷

After rereading *Doctor Zhivago*, I asked myself, is there in modern Russian literature a novel, which would reflect the relationship of the individual and society in contemporary Russia? Mark Lipovetsky in his essay *Post-Soviet Literature between Realism and Postmodernism*⁹⁸ names many extraordinary modern Russian authors, such as Venedikt Erofeev, Anatolii Rybakov or Sergei Dovlatov. But another book, that comes to mind was *Abode* by Zahar Prilepin because I was curious to explore how modern Russian literature describes major social events in Russia. It was interesting to find a young author who is not burdened by the ossified Soviet education or past Soviet ideological requirements for writers to create their literary works within the canvas of socialist realism. I believe that neither Erofeev nor Rybakov or Dovlatov could escape it. At the same time it was important for me to find a work of literature in which a young

⁹⁴ see footnote 91.

⁹⁵ Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, Chapter 7, New York: Pantheon Books, 2010.

⁹⁶ D. Bykov, *Boris Pasternak. Biography in two books*. Sankt-Petersburg: Vita Nova, 2011. p. 200.

⁹⁷ Boris Pasternak was forced by communist propaganda to decline the Nobel Prize in literature (1958) as well as doctor Zhivago declined his doctor position. In the book, Doctor Zhivago writes poems, as well as Boris Pasternak himself wrote poems.

⁹⁸ Mark Lipovetsky, *Post-Soviet Literature between Realism and Postmodernism: The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 175 - 193.

author expresses a critical attitude towards the changes in modern society and in which he/she shows characteristics of a modern Russian individual.

From this point of view, Artem Goryainov, a protagonist of this recently published novel, represents all modern ideas on individualism and collectivism in Russian society, and yet it is clearly not a copy of Dr. Zhivago. He simply is serving his sentence in a labor camp for political prisoners in the Stalin era of the USSR. Paradoxically, this labor camp is organized almost as an attempt at realization of the utopian idea of a fair life. In this horrible prison, there is a library, a theater, and a sports school. The labor camp is portrayed as some sort of a camouflaged hell, not quite the hell formulated by Solzhenitsyn, but rather the one formulated by Dostoevsky: that is, not imposed externally, but created with one's own hands. As in Dostoevsky's novels, Prilepin writes about a place of spiritual murders, murders of God with the prisoners' own hands each time they try to justify the lawlessness through the priority of higher social goals.⁹⁹

Prilepin tries to show the history of Russia and its Solovki labor camp in the present shown as a miniature Russia, a kind of miniature model of the country. This camp with its tough self-organization is proof that Russia cannot be seen as a typical European country consisting of individuals when individuals obsessed with the idea of common salvation very soon lose their personalities and become merged into a single collective group. The novel does not specify whether this is good or bad, but this fact is clearly shown as the fate of Russia. The novel *Abode* indicates that everyone in the labor camp, prison guards and inmates, are products of Russian culture and history. From the time of the formation of the Russian state and communal village culture that I

⁹⁹ "If you destroy in mankind the belief in one's own immortality, instantly not only love but every living force to keep the world alive will dry up. More than that, nothing would be immoral and everything would be allowed... ." F. Dostoyevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, Book 2, Chapter 6, See F. Dostoyevsky, *Complete works*, 30 vols., Leningrad: Nauka, 1981.

illustrated earlier, through absorbing the ideas of salvation and later the idea of conciliar building of an ideal state - all these ideas are embodied in modern Russian society. According to Prilepin everyone in society, executioners as well as victims, have a constant relationship, not because of the fact that all are slaves, but because of the fact that all are willing to compromise their own individuality and liberty for the sake of a consolidated community. Both executioners and prisoners consider the place they are in as a separated closed community, almost an independent state. The superior manager of the camp, Eichmanis, says about his camp that "This is not a prison but a whole household."¹⁰⁰ Even the unofficial slogan of the camp that everyone repeatedly cites says "Here is not a Soviet regime but a Solovki regime."¹⁰¹

And what about the main character of the book? Is he an exception to this rule of communal unity? Artem is a young man, strong and intelligent, but neither at the beginning nor at the end of the novel does he show any individual aspirations or even dreams of freedom. He takes the life around him as it is without analyzing it and without any criticism, but rather as a reality of multiple events that must be accepted in order to survive. His motto is simple: "You were created for a long life. If you do not make mistakes, everything will be all right."¹⁰² However, Prilepin shows those paradoxes typical of the Russian national character: a sensitive mind and at the same time the willingness to serve authorities; courage and at the same time the ability to bully weak people; a sense of decency instead of Christian compassion for others; dominant passion instead of an equal love. The protagonist simply lives in reality without attempting to change it, and that is why he does not experience any psychological

¹⁰⁰ Z. Prilepin, *Abode*, Moscow: ACT, 2014. p. 23.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 344.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 50.

changes throughout the narrative: in spite of all his misadventures, he simply drives himself deeper into his inner world. At the same time, he is still obsessed with such Dostoyevsky's ponderings as: "What is happiness for me?" and "Is there a God"? Despite the many dialogues the main character has with different people - prison guards, clergymen, nobility, and simple peasants - there is no answer to these questions. The novel does not show any moral paths nor author's love or hate, but what the book does have is a permanent emphasis on the importance of consent to anything that happens, which means the author sees the way out in personal conformism.

The history of liberal ideas in Russia is extremely interesting. Thanks to such objective factors as the vast territories and unstable climate, relatively widespread population and long distances between cities, existence far away from the center of world civilization, unconscious naivety in acceptance of religious dogmas and heavy state enslavement of the absolute majority of Russian population, its own developing patterns were established, which cannot be contrast to the development of the patterns of civilization in most European countries. But despite all these factors, the spirit of individual self-expression was constantly present in Russian society, which is what I have tried to show in this essay. It was the Westerizers who first proclaimed the idea of an individual approach, and such ideas, discussed, developed, and modified throughout Russian history, even with specific religious and secular tones, were used and are still present in Russian cultural and political life.

The domination of society over an individual, the principle reasons which I tried to show in this essay, left in the mentality of Russian people still indelible traces: I mean

here the refusal to accept personal responsibility, the lack of long-term thinking¹⁰³, decreased interest in everyday life conditions and harmony with their limitations, a limited attempt to satisfy elementary basic instincts for autonomy and liberty. Authorities on both local and national levels, both now and many centuries ago, are seen as a force independent of human influences, the effects of which should be avoided for the sake of one's safety. The Russian naïveté, mentioned already by Pushkin, played an important role. Pushkin said that "We still consider a printed word for a sacred one. We all think: How can it be foolish or unjust, when it is printed."¹⁰⁴ I associate this typical Russian naïveté with the continuous, uncritical idealization of history of the Russian society in the past. I have already mentioned that there were only two kinds of literature in medieval Russia: chronicles and theological literature. Both of these do not provide a critical analysis of past events, but see history as the unfolding of fate and destiny of a people. Thus, throughout history, Russian society developed an attitude towards its own literature as something that provides indisputable, always correct facts without the possibility for reviewing or questioning. This attitude helped to create faith in the printed word, which D. Lichachev named as "extreme naivety" and "misfortune of Russians."¹⁰⁵

The collapse of the totalitarian communist state in the late '80s opened to the people unlimited possibilities in economic, political and civic life. However, most of Russian society was not able to overcome the effects of a long oppression. I see the reason for that in the lack of critique, by which I mean the lack of political vision and leadership for the realization of this vision, as well as the lack of ideas and concepts for

¹⁰³ There is an expression in Russian "to live for today".

¹⁰⁴ A. S. Pushkin, *The experience of dismissing some non-literature accusation*, Complete works, 11 vols., Moscow: Slovo, 2013. Volume 9, pp. 366-374.

¹⁰⁵ D. Likhachov, *Letters about the Good*. Moscow: Nauka, 2006. p. 72.

practical actions, such as were created by *raznochinet*s intellectuals or enlightened aristocrats of old Russia mentioned above.

At the end of 20h century, such formations of groups with a progressive change-oriented mentality did not exist in Russia. That is why the older generation of the Russian people, which was formed under forced collectivist circumstances, was not able to overcome this communalistic mentality. This older generation is still in delusion of a former "organized stable life". However, for young people, thanks to open borders and the Internet, the force of strict organized community is no longer a dominant one and they actively deny it in trying to lead their own lives and to create a better future for themselves.

The question of today is whether the most progressive part of the young people in Russia will be able to gradually master the experience of individual civic responsibility. Volunteer movements, free expression of political position in the Internet communities, participation in public protests despite threats and intimidation by authorities in contemporary Russia may be the first steps towards a free democratic society. One can hope that a new iron curtain will not be built by the political elite, still existing in their world of old collectivist mentality currently intensively proclaimed by government controlled mass media as the ideology of "Russian brotherhood" with a new slogan "New Russian World", and, under pressure of civic education and civilization enlightenment, the domination of collectivism will begin to erode in the younger and socially aware cohorts of Russian society. The political consequences of these shifts may lead to dramatic political changes in the direction of democracy and political freedom in Russian society. I do not want to come to the conclusion that westernizing is

the only answer and that there is no historical exceptionality to the Russian historical memory or culture. But I would limit this exceptionality only to cultural aspects, where Russia truly has deep experience and numerous creative works. However, the cultural background can have a negative value when it comes to the political development of the society, where it is much more logical to adopt other experience already approved by other societies for the sake of time and energy. All these changes may depend on generations and collective memory of wars, education and the force-field of institutions that are still molded in the tradition of authoritarian collectivism.

At the beginning of my reflection and research on the causes and roots of Russian individualism and collectivism, I paid more attention to historical aspects, trying to find in the history of the Russian people some of the reasons for its obvious commitment to the collective cohabitation. However, during my research on this subject, I realized that it is much deeper and involves many cultural and spiritual aspects, which are also important and cannot be overlooked. I do not wish to say that the mentality of Russian people is in any way exceptional, but it is interesting to explore for the purpose of understanding many social and cultural reactions in modern Russian society. In this sense, I am grateful to the GLS Program for an opportunity to structurally and conceptually prepare my research. The GLS Program gave me some of the tools to maintain a varied picture of the object of my study.

The problem of the relationship between individualism and collectivism, even limited to only one country, yet is so vast and diverse that it is rather difficult to stay on the upright path of the narrative as on the trunk of a tree, and not to let small spikes of

facts and suggestions to grow further and to become new big trees. Perhaps I missed some aspects in this study; perhaps many aspects were just touched on without much deeper review. But the picture that I am proposing in the end of my research motivates me to undertake further, new research, which I intend to do in the future.

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Spiritual Exercises through Art: Understanding Reverse Perspective in Old Russian Iconography.

Preamble

This second essay is an extended version of a paper that I wrote in one of my GLS courses: *Spiritual Exercises through Art*. The extension referred to here consists of three parts as follows: the concept of personality in Russian Orthodoxy, the concept of symbols, and fresco paintings and architecture in Russian Church. Having researched various materials on the history of Russian iconography, I come to the realization that the discussion of Russian icons is impossible without considering Russian fresco paintings, which were known in Medieval Russia even before icons and without the Russian Church architecture, which plays an important role in the realization of religious spiritual exercises. A Russian Orthodox church as a building in itself has a complete original form, bearing not only architectural and aesthetic value but also a deep religious and mystical significance. Hence, I am adding additional material to my original essay: on the importance of church architecture and fresco painting for spiritual exercises.

As well, in reflecting on the nature of the icon, not as an object of worship in itself and not as a physical image of God, but as a kind of symbol a believer refers to in order to achieve a metaphysical connection with the divine, I pondered on the following question: if an icon is considered as a symbol and not an image, then what is the symbolic essence of this type of art? How does the symbolism in art support our metaphysical perception? And what is the difference between the religious and the metaphysical in Russian iconography?

Additionally, in reflecting on the importance of reverse perspective in Russian iconography and suggesting that, in a way, the purpose of reverse perspective in iconography is to influence the entire human personality, I further asked myself: how does the personality itself correlate with strict dogmatic rules of religion, and how does the Russian Orthodoxy interpret the concept of personality? I try to find some answers to these questions in the section about spiritual exercises in Russian Orthodoxy as the method of perception and perfection of a personality.

This essay attempts to probe the meaning and function of spiritual exercises from the perspective of art, and in particular, in the content of ancient Russian icons. Because of my Russian background, I had been familiar with many examples of Russian iconography since childhood. My father, an amateur artist, had a large collection of icons, and I always asked myself the question, why do icons play such an important role in the religious practice of the Russian Orthodox Church? Later I came upon a term known as the "reverse perspective" which, with the exception of some rare cases, does not apply to images created by the rules of modern Western art painting. However, the "reverse perspective" has constantly been used in Russian Orthodox Church iconography with certain spiritual goals, which I will try to investigate in this essay.

Before I begin talking about icons, however, I must clarify that not only Russian icons but also art in general has been a part of the spiritual life of every society since ancient times. The art of literature was used to present the results of theological doctrines and spiritual exercises (Bible, Bhagavat Gita, Zen stories), the art of music was used to accompany the ritual and meditation aid (monastic chants, church organ music), the art of architecture helped create places of worship, for influencing the imagination of people

(churches, monasteries), and so on. Thus, in this sense, there is nothing extraordinary in the fact that paintings as well have been used for religious or spiritual purposes.

Religious images appeared many thousands of years ago. Everyone is familiar with the frescoes in ancient Egyptian pharaoh tombs or bas-reliefs of the ancient Sumerian kingdom. I do not wish to discuss the historical or aesthetic aspects; rather, I would like to concentrate on their spiritual purposes. In prehistoric societies people painted or carved scenes of hunting or images of obese animals on cave walls (Fig.1: Paleolithic cave paintings in Lascaux Caves) for specific ritual purposes. During their spiritual practices they portrayed an object that had been a focus of their spiritual practice - for example, the wish to catch a big prey in hunting or the celebration after a winning battle in a war. It appears, then, the purpose of an image in the time of petroglyphs is an objective concept.

Egyptian murals (Fig. 2) show numerous figures of men and gods. The rule was that gods were painted much larger in size than priests, and priests were painted larger than regular people; hence, the size of an object emphasized its importance. An ancient Egyptian fresco do not simply picture objects but rather give information or provide context to some spiritual process. Thus objects in images correspond to some specific spiritual contexts. As we see in the ancient world, pictures were made according to some special canons, required to perform certain ritual metaphysical actions.

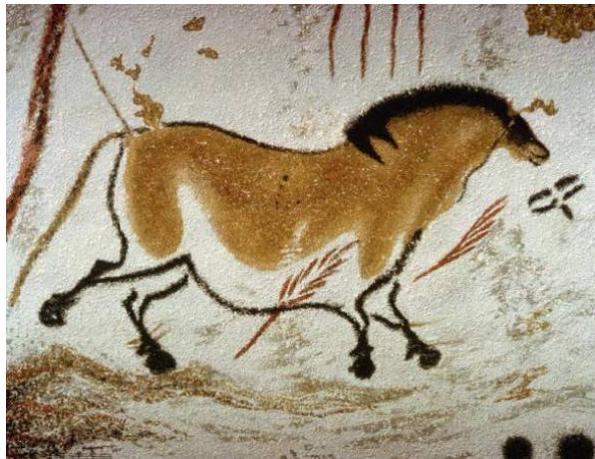


Fig.1

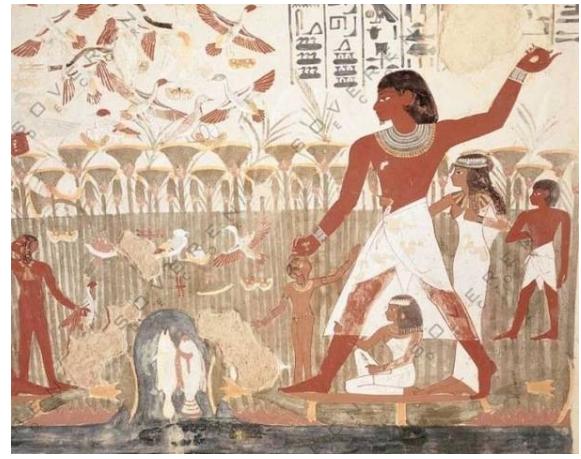


Fig.2

Nowadays pictorial art is considered as a set of two constants: material (painted object) and space (the space in which the object is represented). As W. Thomas Mitchell argues: "nothing ... seems more intuitively obvious that the claim that literature is an art of time, painting an art of space."¹ First and foremost, the original condition in which the act of pictorial art nowadays is possible is the Euclidean understanding of space. A piece of pictorial art is performed in compliance with the rules of a *linear perspective*. Linear perspective stems from the fact that everything around us exists in three-dimensional space, which is projected through our eyes in our brain. The fact that we are able to draw a 3D object on a 2D plane canvas close enough to the original is subject to certain rules: objects visualized on a plane canvas should be placed in a three-dimensional coordinate system, objects that are farther away from the viewer are portrayed smaller while objects that are closer to the viewer should be drawn larger, and any picture drawn according to the rules of linear perspective has a vanishing point, which is usually located on the horizon line of the picture.

¹ W.J. Thomas Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. p. 95.

An example of a picture created in accordance with linear perspective is late 15th-century mural painting by Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan (Fig 3).

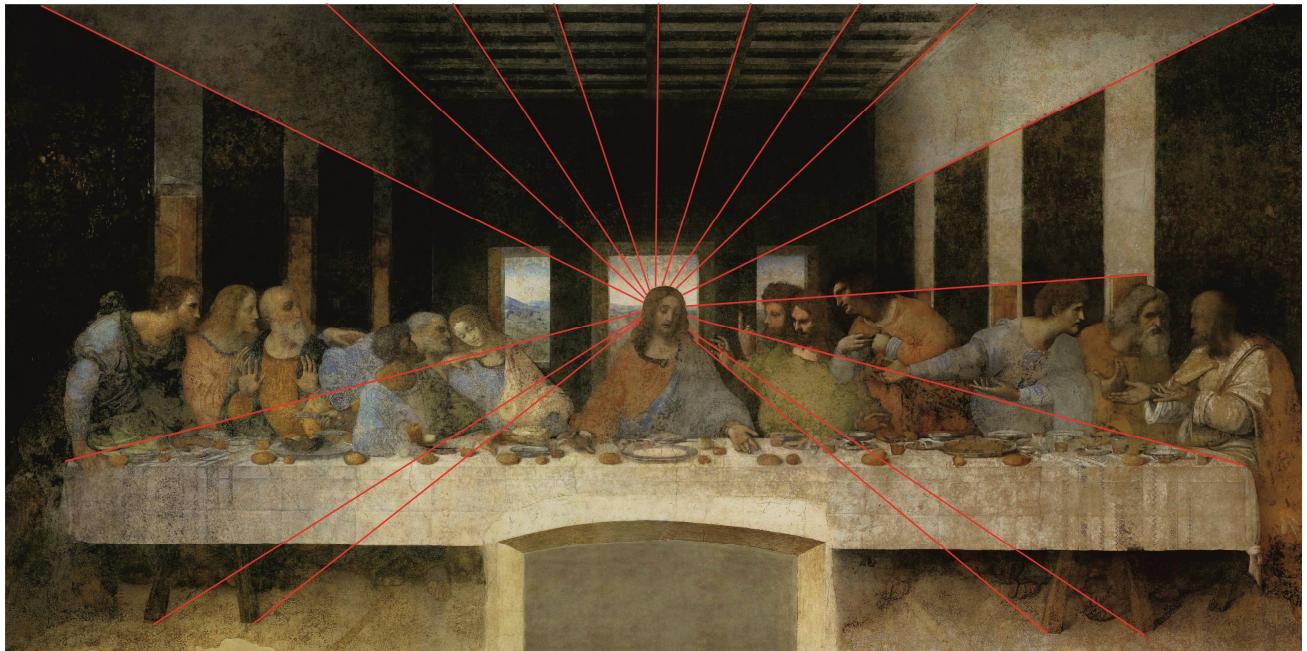


Fig. 3

(Drawings on pictures by Dmitri Dergatchev)

In this picture we can see how the weld lines of walls and ceiling as well as the upper lines of windows and the side faces of the table all converge at an imaginary point located behind Christ's head.

An example of a picture created in accordance with reverse perspective is the Russian Orthodox icon *Matthew the Apostle* by an unknown artist. (Fig. 4)

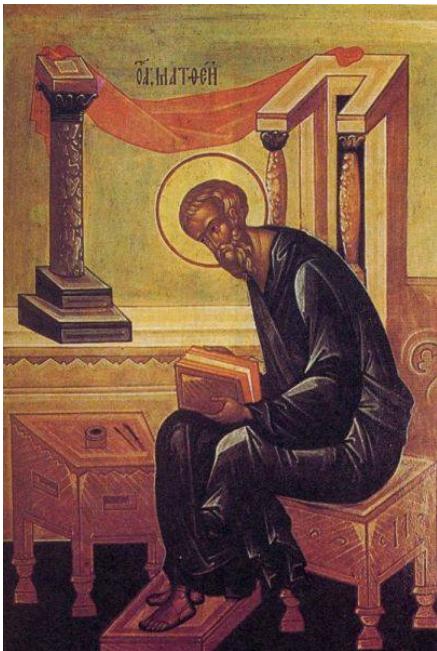


Fig. 4

In this icon we can see how the lateral edges of objects (table, chair, column pedestal and architectural structure in the background) coincide at an imaginary point not in the background but rather in front and are actually directed at the viewer. Additionally, I point out that the icon does not have only one single vanishing point but rather many of them.

Some Russian Orthodox theologians, such as Russian philosopher Pavel Florensky doubt that the forms of objects depicted on a plane canvas in linear perspective are in fact exact projections of real objects; they argue that linear perspective is as subjective as reverse perspective. Pavel Florensky created the term "one eye", saying that "a single, exclusive, so to speak, monarchial point of particular value, its defining feature being that this point is occupied by the artist himself or more precisely, by his right eye – the optical center of his right eye. This position is declared to be the center of the world."²

² Pavel Florensky, *Reverse Perspective*. Moscow: Azbuka Klassika, 2009. p. 7.

The above-mentioned ancient Egyptian images do not show either linear or reverse perspectives. They are the most functional, focused on a context; however, because of compliance with the proportions of the body, showing energy and expression, these images have a certain aesthetic value. Later, in the early Middle Ages, artists also refused the rules of linear perspective and concentrated on characters and scenes. Typically, objects were painted as single subjects without any perspective. This can be seen in ancient engravings of the V - X centuries: non proportional sizes, plane figures, no effects of light and shade. In the early Middle Ages there was no understanding of space in painting art, which means, there was no understanding of Euclidean geometry or a Kantian worldview. The Kantian worldview understands the world as a substance subordinated to the scientific thinking: that is, it can be the subject of analysis and synthesis, where the human being is at the center of this understanding of the world.

The history of modern art, as well as the history of modern science, begins with the Renaissance. Kant's understanding of the world through the efforts of the free mind is taken as a core condition for understanding of art. The epoch of the Renaissance refused to transfer reality as symbols and began to construct the likeness or illusion of reality. The basis for this illusion of visualization was *linear perspective*. It is obvious that the main purpose for art creation according to linear perspective was not an aesthetic need, but rather a very practical purpose - the purpose of decorating an image. Decoration in itself, as a visual fraud or an illusion, is something, that does not actually exist. For example, the scenery on the theater stage creates an illusion of surrounding 3D space only to help actors play their roles and viewers to enjoy the play. At the same time, the illusory nature of

theater implicates a passive or an observational approach to the world, that is, a viewer or an enlightened man is watching or observing or even exploring the world around.

As an example of an original use of linear perspective we can take Giotto di Bondone's *Annunciation to St. Anne*. (Fig. 5)



Fig. 5

Giotto borrowed the principle of linear perspective from a rather vernacular art - the design of theater scene, just as Petrarch and Dante used for their poetry language of simple people. So what do we see in the picture? The first thing that catches your eye is a large house. The house with its heavy roof and open front facade occupies a central point in the picture. The house is drawn in a realistic manner, so that when we look at it we have the impression of being present at some kind of a theatrical performance and a theater stage in front of us. Next that catches the eye is St. Anna kneeling in the center of the room. We notice it before we notice a maid who is in the next room, only because St. Anna is in the center of the picture. And at the last moment, we see the figure of an angel, hanging out of

the window. The figure is small and not immediately noticeable. Only half of the angel is visible, exactly like the puppet figures on the hands of the puppeteers, who performed in the markets of Medieval Europe. The figure of an angel appears as a figure of a real person, meaning that it has all the properties of a human body: it seems to be supported by the lower window board, showing it needed a window to enter the room (although obviously the question can be raised: why would an angel need a window to enter the room?). The question that arises for me is: why did Giotto paint such a realistic picture? Why has he painted everything in full depth, trying to create such stereoscopic or 3D effect? My answer would be, he made it in order to show the audience the realism of a purely metaphysical event. He seems to be saying: "Look, this is happening here and right now! This is going on around us!" That is why the picture clearly indicates the moment; external surroundings also point to a one-time and short-term momentum.

Thus, in the church related scenes, we see that Giotto's pictures actually have a secular purpose. Giotto was the first who outlined the first steps of the humanitarian culture of the Renaissance as understanding is not a heavenly happiness but an earthly happiness, which is possible through the progress of mankind. Giotto's pictures demonstrate not spiritual or religious but rather earthly objective attitudes. Giotto, not yet a naturalist, "tested the first breeze of naturalism and thus became its harbinger."³

Giotto was the first who showed the remarkable illusion of linear perspective and he was followed by other artists. After Giotto, Giovanni da Milano and especially Leonardo da Vinci were engaged in paintings of geometric constructions. All these works formed the basis of the theoretical system of linear perspective. Since the beginning of the 15th century numerous scientific papers on linear perspective were published, such as those by

³ Pavel Florensky, *Reverse Perspective*. Moscow: Azbuka Klassika, 2009. p. 12.

Filippo Brunelleschi (1377 - 1449), Paolo Uccello (1397 - 1475) and Piero della Francesca (1420 - 1492). A major role in the study of the principles of linear perspective was played by Albrecht Dürer. In his *Four Books on Measurement* (1528) he focuses on lineal geometry and already mentioned the foundations of the Euclidean geometry. Thus Dürer in his purely scientific works departed from the aesthetic purpose of painting art, striving instead to its practical geometry. Considering this, I am asking whether, in the Renaissance era, painting art was a transition from the esthetical purpose of art, such as spiritual inspiration or aesthetic pleasure, to very practical mathematical goals - an objective representation of reality?

In answering the question of the purpose of linear perspective, and why a new European worldview, starting in the 14th century, was marked by a positive acceptance of linear perspective, I can argue that linear perspective began to express the nature of things, and it has been regarded as an absolute prerequisite for artistic truthfulness. It is the very scheme of the painting art, which corresponds to the scientific or objective perception of the world. This indicates the difference between the medieval worldview and the worldview of the Renaissance epoch.

The scientific understanding of the world is most clearly represented in the works of Immanuel Kant. It is a humanitarian and naturalistic understanding of the world, where the human is in the center of the world and the universe with the power to comprehend all elements around him or her. The essence of human comprehension of all things lies in the free will of his pure reason. Everything around us exists only due to the natural objective state of things, which are comprehensible through science because of their objectivity. Because they can be comprehended through science, it means that everything around us

can be comprehended by man and this is the major principle of rationalist humanism. Thus, human is in equal position with nature. This view is reflected in painting art. A viewer of a picture is equal in his/her position to the position of the artist, who painted the picture. Both the viewer and the artist have equal rights: the artist has the right to display; the viewer has the right to comprehend. Considering this fact, the idealistic content of a picture is definitely replaced by a practical materialistic content.

It would be pertinent to ask the question whether a painting just duplicates the reality or whether it demonstrates an artist's sensuous attitude towards the depicted object? Or, as Florensky asked, is a painting "an open window into reality?"⁴ It is amazing that many or almost all great artists adopt laws of linear perspective, and yet they have violated these laws in order to achieve something more than just a regular representation of reality. That means they made mistakes on purpose for some esthetic or even spiritual purposes and paradoxically enough those mistakes made them great artists. A typical example of non-compliance with laws of linear perspective can be the best known work by Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino *The School of Athens*. (Fig. 6)

⁴ Pavel Florensky, *Reverse Perspective*. Moscow: Azbuka Klassika, 2009. p. 22.

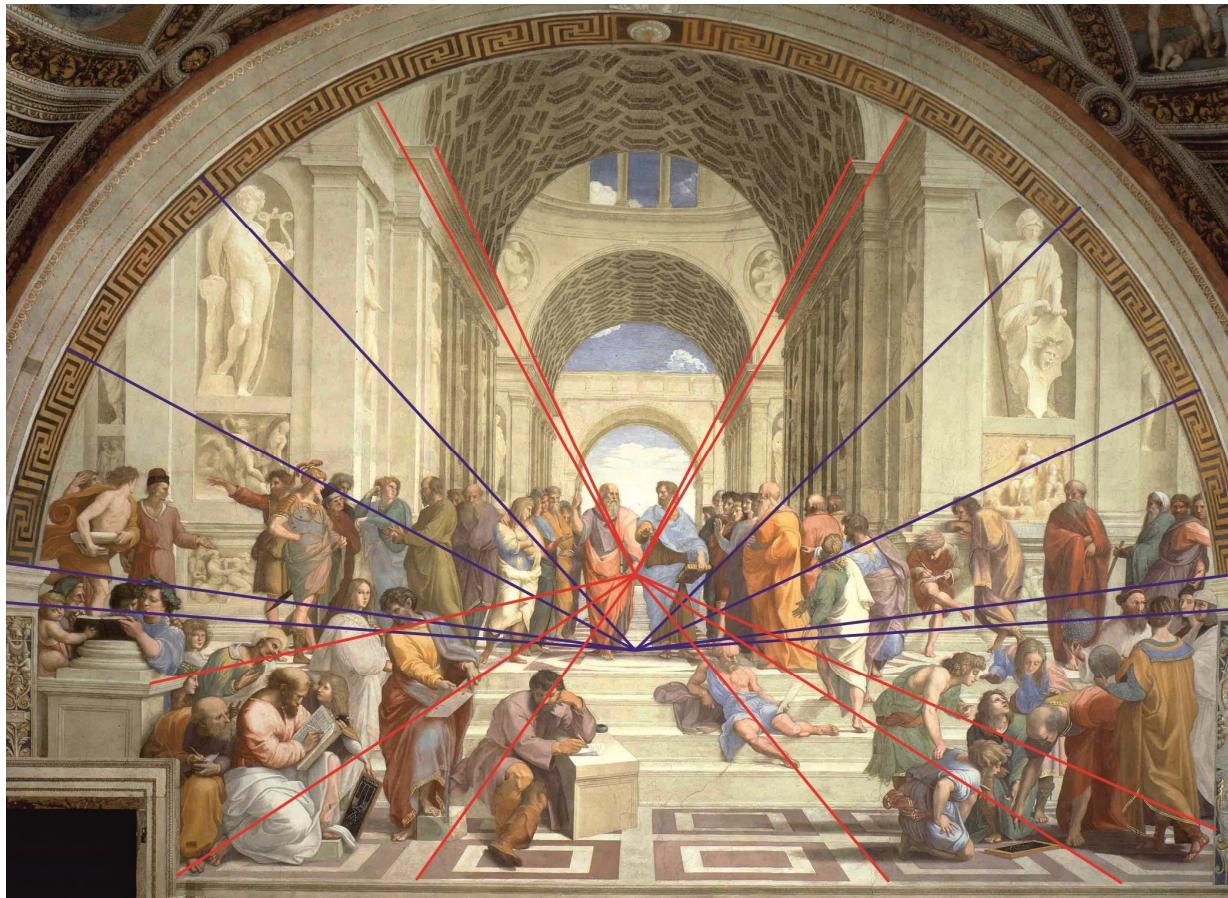


Fig.6

(Drawings on pictures by Dmitri Dergatchev)

In this picture, Raffaello chose to create two vanishing points which strain in two different horizons. From the top vanishing point, the floor and the entire group of individuals were painted; from the bottom vanishing point, Raffaello had drawn the arches and the entire upper part of the picture. Had Raffaello used only one vanishing point, the people in the depths of the picture would have dropped lower and would be obscured by people standing in front. Raffaello must have known that, so he chose to break the law. Who would blame him for that?

There are many examples of linear perspective violation in classical painting art. Artists purposely employed visual tricks and distortions in order to enhance the aesthetics of their pictures or even to elevate spiritual significance of their paintings. As Sir Joshua

Reynolds says, the painter "must depart from nature for a greater (plastic) advantage."⁵ An example of an extreme disregard of the rules of linear perspective is the painting by Paolo Veronese (1528 - 1588) *The Wedding at Cana*, where experts happen to find seven vanishing points and five horizons!⁶

A close examination of Russian Orthodox icons painted according to the rules of reverse perspective shows noticeable details created clearly against the rules of linear perspective. Thus icons can demonstrate the parts of objects that can not be directly seen from a single point of view, such as a building with the facade turned towards a viewer and at the same time, both sides of same building visible. For small items, such as tables, chairs, and especially the Gospel book, one can sometimes see all four sides facing the viewer at once. When people are pictured, the folds of their clothes are too brightly highlighted, as if clothes were crumpled on purpose. Heads may be visible with both ears, although turned sideways. The main feature of reverse perspective is that the image's lines, instead of converging in one imaginary point on the horizon, on the contrary diverge towards a viewer. One of the signs of reverse perspective is multicentricity of the whole icon, so the viewer needs to constantly change his/her point of view and feel a certain tension trying to synthesize the whole from many pieces. These distortions, if we give preference to linear perspective, are immediately visible, but throughout human history they have never been revised or even censured. Moreover, upon closer viewing of an icon, one can note that all of these distortions were made intentionally in order to achieve something desirable and necessary. But what is it? The first conclusion that can be made is that any old Russian Orthodox icon is lacking in optical illusion. However, we may recall that the

⁵ Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses*, New York: Penguin, 1992. p. 364.

⁶ Friedrich Schilling, *Über die Anwendungen der darstellenden Geometrie*. Leipzig: Tuebner, 1904.

function of an image is a naturalistic representation of reality. That means icon artists deliberately avoided a naturalistic representation of reality in their paintings.

In order to understand the meaning of reverse perspective for religious paintings of the Russian Orthodox Church, it is necessary to refer to Plato's view of painting art as a visualization of pseudoreality. Plato pointed out that "since that for which an image has come to be is not at all intrinsic to the image, which is invariably borne along to picture something else, it stands to reason that the image should therefore come to be in something else, somehow clinging to being, or else be nothing at all."⁷ According to Plato, it is not an object that is being drawn, but only the idea of an absolute ideal object, that is, the drawing is just a drawing of "shadow's shadow". Following this Platonic definition, if an icon demonstrates a table, then what we see is not a geometrically true visualization of a table, but its idea. If one looks at a table, one sees only its two front legs; it would be a lie for an icon to picture a table with two legs, while in real life a table is possible only with four legs, as long as a table can hold its vertical position only on four legs. Thus, reverse perspective is not an inverted concept of linear perspective. It is not just about the lines and vanishing points but rather about the overall concept of visualization of objects outside their geometric arrangement on the plane. "Reverse perspective is the simultaneous representation of different planes of the same image on the picture."⁸

The Russian Orthodox Church, as the successor of the Byzantine Church, adapted this philosophy of Plato for its own spiritual needs. Between the 7th and the 8th centuries in Byzantium, there was a philosophical rethinking of the essence of icons, their purpose and their content, so the idea of an icon survived the First (726 - 787) and the Second (814 -

⁷ Plato, *Timaeus*. Chapters 52C and 52D.

⁸ Pavel Florensky, *Reverse Perspective*. Moscow: Azbuka Klassika, 2009. p. 27.

843) Iconoclastic periods. The fact that the Iconophile party won meant that within the philosophy of Eastern Orthodoxy, the icon will play a special spiritual role in the church life. Thus, not only the West, but also the East as well "have received the problems, the themes, the symbols for the most part in the form that was given to them either by Hellenistic thought, or by the adaptation of this thought to the Roman world, or by the encounter between Hellenism and Christianity."⁹

We have already seen that the visualization of space in an icon does not follow the laws of Euclidean geometry: there is no single or central point of view but many different perspectives represent different aspects of objects as well as their importance in the total picture and its temporal extent. Florensky argued that "this is the unmoving monumentality and ontological massiveness of the world, activated by the cognizing spirit."¹⁰ Many vanishing points provide a dynamic to the sight and endow objects with metaphysical qualities necessary for the understanding of an icon. What is impossible in linear perspective, such as a building facing the viewer both with a facade and side walls, is quite common in reverse perspective. An icon compels us take many aspects of each subject into account at the same time; that is, it encourages us to start a mental process of synthesis, later used in Cubism, while the linear perspective, showing only one side, one quality of a depicted object, forces a viewer to analyze what he/she sees. Thus, if linear perspective is an implicit condition for the visualization of the material or the objective world, reverse perspective is an attempt to picture the subjective, hence metaphysical or spiritual comprehension of the world.

⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Titres et travaux de Pierre Hadot*, Collège de France, p. 9.

¹⁰ Pavel Florensky, *Reverse Perspective*. Moscow: Azbuka Klassika, 2009. p. 8.

According to some Russian religious scholars, linear perspective excludes the spiritual application and turns viewing of a picture into an "external mechanical process."¹¹ Following this conception, a viewing of an image is not a process of consciousness but just a process of factual observing of some objective data placed in two-dimensional space. It is quite ironic that even Kant did not include the notions of time and space in categories that are possible as a result of thought, but only considered them as a result of our perception of the world. He pointed however out that they are "a priori forms of perception."¹²

Where literature is used for exposing time, visual art exposes space; and both of them have the same goals of aesthetic awareness. The question then becomes, how is time represented in visual art? In Western culture, only the present period of time is valuable as it is impossible to change past or future. This philosophy came to us from the Stoics: "Blot out all imaginations. Stop the brutal impulses of the passions. Circumscribe the present time."¹³ And this philosophy was further established by Goethe's Faust:

"Now the spirit looks not forward, nor behind

Only the present -

Helen: is our happiness"¹⁴.

It was Pavel Florensky who developed the theory of the icon's "reverse time". He derived a formula for the so-called *vremia obrashchennoe*¹⁵. If reverse time is possible in a dream, it is possible for reproduction in other illusions including in visual arts. Florensky even put forward the idea that an illusion is able to change the duration of time. Indeed, it is

¹¹ Pavel Florensky, *Reverse Perspective*. Moscow: Azbuka Klassika, 2009. p. 20.

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Transcendental Aesthetics: Critique of Pure Reason*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. p. 33

¹³ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, Book 7.

¹⁴ Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, Lines 9411 - 9418.

¹⁵ *time, which has been reversed* (translation is mine - I.M). See Pavel Florensky, *Iconostas* Moscow: ACT, 2005. p. 12.

possible that a dream can harbor a minute, a year or even a century of time. Many writers have tried to experiment with time in their works, for example *The Time Machine* by Herbert Wells, trying to answer the question of whether it is logical to reverse time.

According to Pavel Florensky, the concepts of *reverse time* and *reverse perspective* are instrumentarium for understanding the spiritual or liturgical purpose of icons. An icon is frozen in time or existing outside of time metaphysical reality. The essence of an icon as an atemporal object gives it its spiritual value. Christian philosophy of atemporal existence of such spiritual objects as God is covered in detail in *Confessions* by St. Augustine, where he writes that ". . . nothing then of Thy Word doth give place or replace, because It is truly immortal and eternal."¹⁶ An icon is an attempt to reflect this Christian philosophy of timelessness in painting art. Evgeny Trubetskoy defines the icon as the "real contact between the two worlds of being, the levels of being - the heavenly one of calm and the earthly one, sinful, chaotic but striving towards repose in God existence."¹⁷ In terms of time, an icon is something that is "spiritually permanent", immutable and not a subject of public influence. Clemena Antonova argues that "Reverse perspective is an important aspect of an art form which has been around for more than a thousand years, has deeply influenced the whole of European medieval art and has endured in the face of Renaissance perspective to become a symbol of Eastern Orthodox spirituality."¹⁸

If we take a spiritual exercise as an essential process of collection and exchange of information (although in this case, by information I mean primarily the information or stimuli which leads to the emergence of specific religious feelings), then naturally the question

¹⁶ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Chapter VII.

¹⁷ Evgeny Trubetskoy, *A Contemplation in Colour: Three Essays on the Russian Icon*. Paris: Ymca Press, 1965. p. 63.

¹⁸ Clemena Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon, Seeing the World with the Eyes of God*, Sofia: ASHGATE, 2010. p. 29.

may arise, who is the collector of information and who (or what) is the source of information.

A collector of information continues to be a praying person, but during his spiritual meditations he tries to perceive not all physical (or, in church terminology, *created*) world, but first to catch or to perceive the metaphysical existence of a higher principle solvent all over the world. The physical world is considered only as a secondary substance, created by the divine. Thus, the process of an Orthodox religious spiritual exercise can be understood as a kind of dialogue between two wills, which are not in equal positions but striving for mutual understanding and a peculiar metaphysical merger.

The paradox here is that despite all subjective interpretations that attempt to perceive the world, it can be a stretch to call the process of religious spiritual exercises an objective process. If we consider that such a dialogue between two relatively equal wills takes place, then in this case it is necessary to surmise that a dialogue is possible only between two individuals who are in possession of free will. This paradox intrigues me and I will try to find the answer in this section.

Already in practical linguistics, the terms of the ratio between objects and subjects are represented and expressed by personal pronouns. To express the personality of God or a man, the grammatical category of animation is used. So, in using the pronoun "who" we make a reference to a person, and with the pronoun "what" to a natural object. Using personal pronouns "he" and "she", we not only indicate the gender but also give some suggestions of animativeness, that are not present when we talk about things using the personal pronoun "it". That means, that by using personal pronouns "he" or "she", we talk about personalities.

The theological understanding of human personality lies in the anthropological concept of the metaphysical connection of mind and body, that are combined to form a composite nature that is inseparable as long as a human is alive. However, according to Christian dogma, after death the body and soul are divided: the body rots in the ground, and the soul, after departing from the body, goes either to Kingdom of Heaven or to Hell.

While the theological understanding of human personality lies in the anthropological concept, the question then becomes; what is the theological concept of the divine personality? Vladimir Lossky considers all the properties of the divine personality as a set of divine energy, outgoing personally and free from God the Father, and personally and freely accepted by God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ However, a metaphysical dialogue in religious practice is possible only between anthropologically perceptible personalities. Obviously, there is no equal dialogue possible between a human and an transempirical concept, which is God the Father. That is why such a dialogue is possible only at the level of an individual and the Son of God, that is, Jesus Christ. Christian religion considers Jesus Christ as both a true God and a true human, endowed with all natural human qualities.²⁰ Because of this Christian theology, it is possible for a human to have a dialogue with the divine.

From the standpoint of the Christian church, the existence of Jesus Christ gives to human an opportunity to exercise his physical existence in accordance with the personal image of the divine embodied in Christ, and this is considered to be the personal goal of anyone who fulfills religious spiritual exercises. The difference between human and Christ is that in a human, the soul and the body are connected according to the necessity of

¹⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *The vision of God*, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983. p. 56.

²⁰ Concilium universale Chalcedonense anno 451 // Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum. Vol. 2.1.2. Berlin, 1933, p. 129. L . 23 – p. 130. L . 3 in Russian translation Volume 4, SPB, 1996, p. 48.

nature, while the merging of divinity and humanity in Christ is of a personally free nature and doesn't obey any natural laws. In short, a human being is always a part of the physical world, while God is beyond it.²¹

It is obvious that the personal values of a human being and God are not equal. An important factor limiting the anthropological analogy between human and God is the fact that the human body exists passively, which means it does not have its own activity or own energy and is just an object of the soul in its actions.²² At this point, I ask myself, does the pain of the body or the defective functioning of the human brain impact the human personality? The answer to this question is the Christian concept of the irreducibility of the human personality to its physical nature, which actually is of great ethical significance. It is personhood, which is expressed in the image of God, that is a defining feature of a human. This concept states that any physical or psychological flaws of the human body cannot be a reason for not considering the individual as a human being, and not to treat him as a personality. That is, even an individual with mental defects or one who is unconscious, or an unborn child in a womb are considered to be humans. The theological justification for the prohibition of abortion and the practice of infant baptism are based on this concept despite the fact that those rules are not declared in the Bible.

In accordance with this ethical norm, a human being as a personality has the right to freely determine his or her way of life; however, this personal freedom is understood as the ontological primacy of an individual in relation to nature and is carried out beyond any natural necessity, which means paradoxically giving up one's own will as this will mean a function of nature, and hence the function secondary to personality. That is why in

²¹ The signs by which the soul and the body can be considered as a composite nature were described by Leontius of Jerusalem (c. 485 – c. 543), Justinian the Great (483–565), Maximus the Confessor (580–662), John of Damascus (c. 675 or 676 – 749).

²² "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" *New Testament*, 1 Corinthians 15:42 - 15:44.

Christianity, there is a practice of obedience²³ or of an ascetic monastic isolation from society in order to avoid vices and sins. This isolation is considered as an intentional cut off of the sinful natural human will.

The freedom of personality lies in the creative character of a person, which is also manifested in communication with other people or in communion with God. And human personality as a unique concept cannot be explored by any passive analytical methods but only through communication, meaning a dialogue. Thus, Christian spiritual exercises are aimed as a process of knowing by and of both individuals involved in the dialogue. The creative nature of human as a personality is expressed in the creation of pieces of art, which relates to the creative nature of God who created the world.

There is a major difference between the Western Christian and the Eastern Orthodox ideologies in relation to the individualization of personality. Two aspects regarding personality were formed in Western Christianity by the end of the 6th century. The first one was very clearly formulated by Boethius, who called the person "an individual substance of a rational nature."²⁴ The second one was formulated by Saint Augustine as accepting consciousness and self-consciousness as inseparable parts of personality.²⁵ In Eastern Orthodox theology, the freedom of man is not seen in terms of its individualized nature, which is very limited because of human creaturehood, but in terms of personality, capable of communicating with God and with others to set a personal, unlimited free way of being in nature and resembling God. Thus, Eastern Orthodoxy understands the freedom of a person in his attempt to perceive himself as a god²⁶ who creates his own world, and is

²³ "And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." New Testament. Matthew 18:17

²⁴ Boethius, *Liber de Persona et Duabus Naturis*, Ch. III.

²⁵ "...and Thou, who gavest him Thy servant to speak these things, give to me also to understand them" Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Ch III, line 189.

²⁶ Saint Iustin Popović (1894 - 1979) called man as "a little god in mud" (*Dogmatics of the Orthodox Church*, Vol. III, 1980).

therefore responsible for it. This theological identification of personality is widely used in Russian Orthodoxy in the solutions to a range of theological issues including the theological justification of icons.²⁷ Orthodox Christians venerate an icon not as an object of worship but as a symbolic embodiment of a physically invisible God. Thus, the paradox of God's image on an icon is that on the one hand, we see a physical image of a person and at the same time, on the other hand, we see a symbolic image of something that is impossible to see. Therefore, considering the metaphysical purpose of icons, it is impossible to avoid the problem of symbols, which I will illustrate later.

Considering that an icon is a necessary object for the implementation of spiritual exercises in the Russian Orthodox Church, we may ask the question, what is its spiritual and liturgical functionality? Or in other words, what turns a picture into an icon? It is definitely not linear perspective, because an icon is always painted against the rules of linear perspective and because of that can be considered from the Western point of view as a "distorted" image. However, we know that this "distortion" is used on purpose.

²⁷ See Christoph Schönborn. *Die Christus-Ikone. Eine theologische Hinführung*. Schaffhausen: Novalis. 1984.

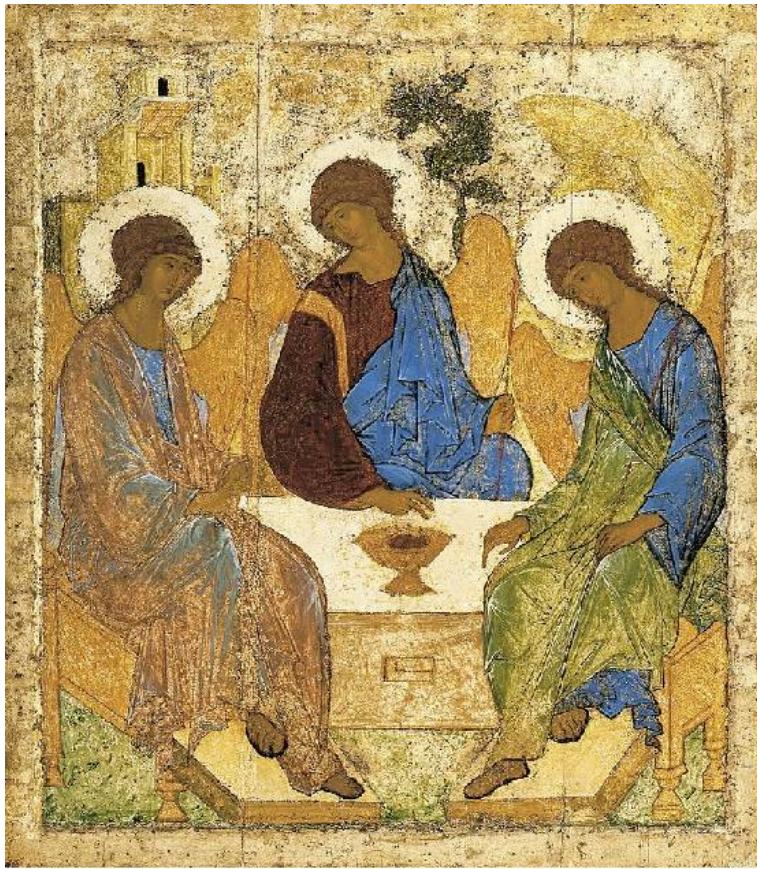


Fig.7

Reverse perspective has a certain advantage regarding spiritual or metaphysical properties of an image: in reverse perspective it is possible to achieve an effect, where an object located close to a viewer does not visually move away, but rather moves closer to him/her. In reverse perspective of an icon, all objects in fact "move" towards a viewer, while in linear perspective, they "move" away from a viewer to the horizon, or to a certain vanishing point. If we look long enough at Jesus in the center of the picture by Leonardo da Vinci *The Last Supper* (Fig 3), sooner or later we can possibly see the effect of this movement by Jesus away from us towards the vanishing point. Conversely, if we look at the image of angels on the icon *Trinity* by Rublev (Fig. 7), we can see the figures of angels, especially on the right and on the left, moving towards us.

During Renaissance, linear perspective was a necessity due to the growing need for an empirical worldview, which demanded truthful images in accordance with the scientific model of the world. The difficulty, however, is that an icon can not be considered a result of the visualization of the objective world. An icon portrays a different religious objectivity. A viewer of an icon has to apply not a realistic but a metaphysical approach in order to understand the icon's meaning. To quote Archimandrite Sophrony: "Intelligence, focusing on metaphysical problems may lose perception of time and real space: how to go beyond them. This is where my mind I saw the light."²⁸ In terms of time, an icon cannot be temporally embedded; on the contrary, from a religious point of view, images on an icon are eternal, as they are located outside the paradigm of present time. An icon clearly distinguishes the boundary between the temporal and the eternal, where the temporal is the existence of only now, in the present tense, without the past (which cannot be changed anymore) and the future (which cannot be changed yet), and where the eternal is a timeless being in another metaphysical world full of spiritual but not reasonable meanings.

If we look at an ancient Egyptian image, it seems that the artist was trying to put himself in the image itself, and "draw all the world as if it is located around him."²⁹ A painter of an icon is also trying to influence viewers. There is nothing distorted on an icon; simply the form chosen for visualization involves the viewer in active synthetic work. Philo of Alexandria considered attention as a part of spiritual exercise.³⁰ It is a crucial part of iconography as well as the essence of spiritual exercises in the Russian Orthodox Church. A transcendental nature of icons is being interpreted here as spiritual design, that engages the attention of the viewer to make him/her feel (experience) a peculiar form of the spiritual

²⁸ Archimandrite Sophrony, *His Life is Mine*. Moscow: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977. p. 31.

²⁹ Boris Uspensky, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon*. Moscow: Wyshaya Shkola, 1971. p. 23.

³⁰ Philo Judaeus, *Who is the heir of Devine Things*. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854. p. 253.

togetherness with God, or as Clemena Antonova called it "divine vision."³¹ Schubert (1780 - 1860) puts forward his thesis that ". . . the ability to reach the invisible and the world beyond is the natural, physical and spiritual condition of man as an element in the hierarchy of beings."³² Immanuel Kant agrees with that view when he says: "We perceive God not by visualizing Him, but through our love for him."³³

Visualization of metaphysical concepts plays a central role in prayers (meditations) in the Russian Orthodox Church in particular and in Christianity in general. Icons are an essential accessory in any Orthodox church, as are the hymns and liturgical rituals, as all that is necessary to achieve sublime concentration during spiritual exercises. As Hadot argues, "Like philosophical meditation, Christian meditation flourished by using all available means of rhetoric and oratorical amplification, and by mobilizing all possible recourses of the imagination."³⁴

The Eastern Orthodox position on images is based on the belief that there is a sort of presence of the prototype in the image. In particular, there is an ontological identity between Christ and the image of Christ. For the contemporary audience for whom art is normally an aesthetic object, it may be confusing. But according to Kierkegaard, "Christianity is deeply and inherently paradoxical and it should be understood and accepted as such - the coexistence of contradictory aspects, impossible to harmonize according to the strict law of reason."³⁵ In Eastern Orthodox tradition, an iconographic image is considered to be a paradoxical unity of the transcendental and the immanent: "when we

³¹ Clemena Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon, Seeing the World with the Eyes of God*. Sofia: ASHGATE. 2010. p. 2.

³² G.H. Schubert, *The Symbolism of Dreams*. 1814.

³³ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009. p. 27.

³⁴ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 1995. p. 133.

³⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 56.

venerate images, it is not veneration offered to matter, but to those portrayed through matter in the images. Any honor given to an icon is transferred to its prototype."³⁶

The acheiropoital (from Greek: *archeiroponetoī* - not made by human hands) principle of an icon encourages a viewer to see a message not made by an artist. An artist seems to dissolve in his own work and is not visible or a piece of art absorbs him. In contrast to this approach, in the Western tradition of painting art there is an established system of hints (e.g. irony, sarcasm, the author's attitude to what is happening), that a viewer tries to decode in observing a picture. An artist would become the author of the message; hence he has the right to edit as he pleases. A viewer, on the contrary, is a recipient of this message that he must decipher. Thus, the positions of both an author and a viewer are defined: a painter autocratically dictates his own message, and a viewer has the right to accept or reject it.

In the case of using an icon for spiritual exercises, a person treats an icon not as an object of visual art, but as a tool to connect his own inner "Me" with some higher divine power. According to Archimandrite Safonov, the person trying to reach "..... a radical change in our approach to all intelligent life, the transition from the old worldview to the vision of a "reverse" iconographic perspective: through humility rise to the Almighty."³⁷

Trinity by Rublev (see Fig 7), where the location of three figures and their same size clearly contradicts with the rules of isocephaly, is an excellent example not of an image of a "real" trinitarian existence of God, but as a symbol of such metaphysical phenomena. Pictorial representation by Rublev is fully consistent with the literary description mentioned by Hadot:

³⁶ St. John Damascus, *On the Divine Image*. New York: Crestwood, 1980. p. 89.

³⁷ Archimandrite Sophrony, *His Life is Mine* Moscow: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. 1977. p. 42.

In his *On Trinity*, Augustine presents a series of psychological images of the Trinity which do not form a coherent system, and which have consequently been the source of a great deal of trouble for his commentators. In fact, however, Augustine is not trying to present a systematic theory of trinitarian analogies. Rather, by making the soul turn inward upon itself, he wants to make in *experience* the fact that it is an image of the Trinity These trinities occur within us and *are* within us, when we recall, look at, and wish for such things.³⁸

The symbol in art may be one of the most controversial concepts. In our everyday life we often use the word *symbol*, meaning *sign*. Quite often we confuse the term *symbol* with another term, such as *character*, *emblem*, *type*, etc. Probably only in mathematics, the term *symbol* has a unique value. In painting, the concept of symbolism arose by the end of the 19th century, when certain individual artists called themselves *Symbolists*. This concept in art understood the symbol as the result of perception of the world and arising through this idea.



Fig. 8 *The Knight At The Crossroads* by Viktor Vasnetsov³⁹

³⁸ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 1995. p. 107. See: St. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Chapters 10, 15, and 16.

³⁹ Viktor Vasnetsov was a representative of the Russian Symbolism by the end of XIX century. His *The Knight at the Crossroads* is considered to be a symbol of Russia as a powerful knight who is not able to make a decision on which way to go at a crossroad.

René Ghil created quite an elegant formula of symbolism, saying that "symbolism is imagination, which creates analogies or coincidences and transmits them through images."⁴⁰ And while the secular Russian Symbolists declared creative imagination as the main condition for expression in their specific art, from the point of view of the Orthodox Church, imagination, though an inevitable attribute of human perception, is rather undesirable or even harmful for spiritual practice.⁴¹ Icons do not show the physical image of God, as it is impossible to depict God, or in the words of John of Damascus, "It cannot be painted, what is not available for vision."⁴² That is, the icon performs the role of a symbol where the symbol is not a direct entity of reality, but its *generative principle* or *supposition*.⁴³ And because a symbol is not a direct expression of an object or a phenomenon, it is logical to assume that in any symbol, including icons, there is some kind of *mystery*⁴⁴ that still needs to be solved through creative mental efforts.

As any symbol that contains much more in itself than the object or phenomenon it represents, icons contain a lot more than the actual image of a saint or a biblical story. That is, on the one hand, we see on an icon something that happens at a given moment, at the moment of our viewing it; on the other hand, the essence of what is happening is outside contemporary space and time, which means it loses its physical properties of turning into a form of metaphysical energy.

An aesthetic paradox in icons lies in the fact that the icon possesses both religious and metaphysical contents. What is the difference between these two contents? The answer is that the religious content of an icon is the subject of the Church Tradition that is

⁴⁰ René Ghil, *Studies about French books*, Apollo, Vol 6, 1910.

⁴¹ St. Theophan the Recluse referred to imagination as "incoherent and arbitrary brains movements", See *The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned To It*, Moscow: Sestren Monastery, 2008.

⁴² John of Damascus, *Three words in defense of iconodulism. Second letter*. Moscow: Klassika. 2001. p. 34.

⁴³ A. Losev. *The problem of symbol and realistic art*, Moscow: Iskusstvo. 1992. p. 19.

⁴⁴ "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people" *New Testament*, Colossians 1:26.

part of a universal religious consciousness and the completeness of the apostolicity of the Church, which has the immediate certainty of revealed divine truth. The Church Tradition must be distinguished from the Scriptures: the first consists of written or oral testimonies that are attached to the Scriptures. In Russian Orthodoxy, the Church Tradition precedes and is more important than the Scriptures, as it is logical to assume that Jesus and the apostles preached first, and their sermons were later written down in the canon of the New Testament. According to V. Lossky, "the Church could probably do without the Scriptures, but could never exist without Tradition."⁴⁵ Thus, in the context of the Church Tradition, icons are part of a sacrament or a certain knowledge or the gnosis of God, which must be obtained through certain spiritual exercises and practices.

However, we still see an image on an icon. The question is whether this image can be perceived as a simple image or as a symbol? To answer this question, we must first ask another one: is a symbol of an object simply an image of that object? Obviously every symbol is to some extent an image. But why can we not call every image a symbol? The answer may be simply in the fact that the difference between a symbol and an image of an object is that the symbol bears some generalizing ideas, laws, or dogmas for a variety of substantially similar objects. Thus, each image on an icon is endowed with an original iconic idea specific to this type of icon that has the function of the symbol that is duplicated in other similar icons. This explains the similarity of themes and appearances of the Russian Orthodox icons. Those ignorant of this understanding may call it lack of artistic imagination. In fact, icons embody explicit dogma that, like all laws, is characterized by a certain order or canon.

⁴⁵ V. Losski, *The sense of icons*, Moscow: EKSMO, 2014. p. 9.

If a symbol of an object can be understood as a set of reflections of the external characteristics and at the same time of some intrinsic qualities of that object, the essence of icons as symbols is understood as an external artistic expression (aesthetic beauty, coloristic, harmony) and their internal fullness, or some kind of *inner life*. At the same time, as is the case of any symbol, it is not necessarily the case that the external side of a symbol is depicted too brightly or expressively. Usually a symbol is always depicted slightly schematically, but it must necessarily be substantial and show more than just the shape and appearance of a represented object. This is, to emphasize that the external is not only external, but also internal and essential, and that the external may even be very deep, but also substantial.

The next interesting question that requires an answer is: does the external characteristic of a symbol always reflect the internal essence of an object? Or in the case of icons, does the image on an icon always identify its inner life? The answer is actually not as simple as it seems. In order to really distinguish the symbolic nature of an icon from the simple image on it, it is necessary to understand the symbolic essence of an icon as something purely independent of the image.

Even in typical visual arts, a symbol indicates something significant, something that transcends the narrowness of everyday life. But since according to William H. McNeill, Byzantine and later Russian icons "definitely abandoned the Hellenistic ideal of naturalistic representation"⁴⁶, the internal essence of the icon is its meaning, and thus differs from an image of artistic paintings, where a symbolic interpretation only supports the main meaning of the painting - a naturalistic representation. An icon, as I mentioned above, is considered in Russian Orthodoxy as a part of Church Tradition, as are the words used in liturgy. It is

⁴⁶ William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West*, University of Chicago Press, 1963, p. 450.

similar in the way to a word: in a general sense, the word is not only an external sign that is used to denote a particular concept, but is, above all, a content that reasonably defines itself and is expressed in the form of writing or speaking or in other forms of external manifestation, for example in sign language as a specific set of gestures, perceived not through writing, but visually. And exactly here, as a visual embodiment of specific metaphysical language, icons find their place.

In view of the above, the essence of an icon does not narrow to an object of worship, as icons still remain pieces of art. In this case, a legitimate question would be, what is the artistic value of icons as pieces of artwork for spiritual practices? Aristotle wrote that artistic creativity is above the historian's work because it reflects a universal being, but a story only describes the particular manifestations of life. He argued: "The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose . . . The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular."⁴⁷ This means that in order to be able to clearly describe what "might happen," an artist, according to Aristotle, must understand the universal laws of probability and necessity in the world. Thus, an artist has the power for some type of prophecy, or the ability to open to people some kind of potentially higher knowledge. Then it turns out that art is an alternative instrument for perception of reality, a tool that opens new intuitively perceived phenomena that are not yet phenomena of reality, or will never be able to become a reality and will remain metaphysical objects of our consciousness. It is practically impossible to combine this imitative world with the real one. It is a natural impossibility of reproduction which distinguishes a piece of art from an ordinary natural object. Jean-François Lyotard defines

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, Part IX.

modern art as "an ability to visually show something that you cannot see but just imagine, what does not lie outside but hidden inside,"⁴⁸ and creates his concept of *the sublime*. According to this concept in art, there is something that you cannot physically see and that can only be comprehended through abstract thinking. Kazimir Malevich in his *Manifesto of Suprematism* confirmed such understanding of his work. Goethe in his *Faust* brilliantly shows the problem of understanding a symbol, in the scene where Faust is trying to translate into German the Gospel of John:

'Tis writ, "In the beginning was the Word!"
I pause, perplex'd! Who now will help afford?
I cannot the mere Word so highly prize;
I must translate it otherwise,
If by the spirit guided as I read.
"In the beginning was the Sense!" Take heed,
The import of this primal sentence weigh,
Lest thy too hasty pen be led astray!
Is force creative then of Sense the dower?
"In the beginning was the Power!"
Thus should it stand: yet, while the line I trace.
A something warns me, once more to efface.
The spirit aids! from anxious scruples freed,
I write, "In the beginning was the Deed!"⁴⁹

And yet, despite the fact that it is almost impossible to combine the world of art with the real world, it is apparently very important and useful from a moral or aesthetic point of view for humanity to open a window into this artistic world. Probably because this is the

⁴⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics, 1994, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *Faust*. New York: Poetry in Translation. 2015.

world in which man's soul rests, gains new force and receives, according to Aristotle, "proper purgation of emotions."⁵⁰ Thus, after viewing a piece of art, a person may experience, a new metaphysical situation and realize its broader universal paradigm, purge through a catharsis of artistically induced emotions, learn to better to control these emotions in the future, and become more prepared to lead a righteous life. Art, in spite of its metaphysical nature, is an instrument of perception of life, and a desire to create a piece of art belongs to a human desire to learn and improve one's life.

In any spiritual practice, the surrounding space plays a vital role. Before starting meditation, a person makes sure to pay attention to where he or she is, and uses the opportunity to choose the most suitable room for meditation. During the formation of the Christian faith, the concept of the church as the home of God became of special significance for believers. And while, according to the testimony of the Gospel, preaching among the first Christians took place in the fresh air and did not require special facilities, over time, the space for worship began to play a central role in the formation of the first religious groups. According to Max Dvorak, "Space was thus transformed from a physical phenomenon into a metaphysical concept and therefore, at the same time, from an interpretative to a constitutive element of pictorial invention."⁵¹ The metaphysical concept of Christianity is based on the teachings of the universe as a common space created by God for a specific purpose, as expressed in connection with the divine human nature. The connection of the human with the divine occurs through "disembodied consciousness, when the thought of a man standing in prayer in the church leaves his corporeal shell, passes through the temple where people pray, and carries into outer space, and from

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, Part VI.

⁵¹ Max Dvorak, *The History of Art as the History of Ideas*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1984. p. 13.

there, to God.⁵² Thus the semantics of an Orthodox church begins from the top of a cupola as an understanding of the celestial dome. From there, from the top, a strict sequence of the evangelical story in the form of frescoes begins inviting a viewer to a circular movement in the interior of a church.⁵³ A metaphysical movement toward God is symbolized by filling a church with icons and frescoes as, according to the philosophical dogma of the Church, the movement is where the emptiness is filled, and the unfilled emptiness represent permanent static. Therefore, there is no Russian Orthodox church without frescoes, icons and other religious objects.

A location for the church building was always of great sacred significance in Russia. Prior to the adoption of Christianity, ancient Slavs considered the graves of their princes in the form of high manmade hills as sacred places on which different ceremonies took place. Since Christianity was introduced to the Russians by administrative, meaning violent, methods, the authority initially began struggling with the ancient pagan beliefs of Proto-Slavs. They also attempted to replace the pagan beliefs through Christian dogma. In terms of the location of the first church buildings, the first churches were built on areas where previously pagan temples were. An ancient chronicle describes how the Russian prince Vladimir destroyed pagan idols on one of the hills in Kiev and built a Christian temple on the same place.⁵⁴ Another chronicle *Description of the City Beleezere* gives a picturesque legend about the construction of a Christian church on the same location where a pagan temple was, and since pagans worshiped a large birch tree and a large stone, with the first

⁵² M. Alexeyev, *Poetics and Stylistics of Russian literature*. Leningrad: Nauka. 1971. p. 72.

⁵³ V. Lazarev, "Frescos of Cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod." *Medieval Russian Art*. Ed. V.N. Lasarev and O.I. Podobedova. Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1968. p.28.

⁵⁴ *The Sermon on Law and Grace* (11th century) by the Kievan Metropolitan Hillarion. See A. Kartashev, *History of the Russian Church*, Moscow: Terra, 1997, p. 44 and p. 126.

worship in the newly built church a lightning struck the birch tree, and the stone fell into the river and sunk.⁵⁵

Despite the fact that Christianity spread rather quickly in Russia, the Slavs continued to believe in their pagan gods for a long time; that is, they were both Christians and pagans at the same time.⁵⁶ The church used these sacred feelings, while building the first churches on the site of pagan ritual temples. Since temples were generally not in the middle of settlements, but were placed away from residential areas in oak groves or in woods, to this day, churches (and cemeteries) in small Russian villages are usually not situated in the middle of a village, which impacts the development of certain practices of going to the church, that is, achieving a distant sacred place. It is believed that this long way to the church helps the person rest and spend their energy on internal concentration for communication with God. In Russian language, there is an expression *the way to the temple*, in the sense of a spiritual path one wants to take for achievement of the revealed truth.

A church building played an aesthetic role in Russian Christian culture as well. Usually churches were built on high hills, to be visible from a distance, and monasteries were removed from populated areas, to be part of the natural landscape and emphasize the connection with nature and native land.

⁵⁵ V. Kluchevsky, *History of Russia*, Moscow: Alfa-Kniga, 2011. Lecture XVII. pp. 306 - 307.

⁵⁶ The *Word of the Pagans and their Idols* (X century), says about the Slavs: "During the holy baptism they renounced Perun, and accepted Christ, but now secretly they pray to him, cursed god Perun". See: B. Grekov, *Culture of Kiev Rus*. Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1944. p. 53.



Fig.9 Church of the Intercession on the Nerl (XII century)

The same connection with nature in everyday life did not allow ancient architects to transform church buildings into frozen, mathematically well-thought-out structures. Russian church architecture often does not correspond to the rules of symmetry: domes on a church can be distributed apparently randomly, the main entrance can be off-center of a facade, frescoes and icons in the church are not located symmetrically and without respecting the coloristic or light expediency. However, all these apparent inconsistencies just highlight individuality and are filled with a sense of Christian dogmatic style of the Russian Church. This unique architectural style was unknown in Western Europe or in Byzantium, from which Russians received Christianity. Only in Russia there are churches built with 13 domes. This is a purely Russian phenomenon, later transferred from wooden

to stone architecture. The Church of the Tithes had 25 domes, and the still-existing Church of the Transfiguration in Kizhi has 22 domes.



Fig. 10 The Church of the Transfiguration, Kizhi (XVIII century)

Churches were often rebuilt and expanded: new windows were cut through or walled up. A church building was always adjusted to the needs of a community.⁵⁷ Over time, the church was transformed into a symbol of cultural and political life of a city: churches were used for crowning of princes, for celebrations of victory, for meetings with foreign ambassadors, and even for keeping the city treasury and valuable books.⁵⁸ Thus, in addition to such religious purposes as the performance of official routines, satisfying a loving desire for God, carrying out of appreciation obligations to God, and the realization of selfish interest or the implementation of an ethical necessity, the church received a new

⁵⁷ G. Stender, "Architecture of Medieval Novgorod". *Medieval Russian Art*. Ed. V.N. Lasarev and O.I. Podobedova. Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1968. p. 347.

⁵⁸ V. Lazarev, "Frescoes of Cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod." *Medieval Russian Art*. Ed. V.N. Lasarev and O.I. Podobedova. Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1968. p.12.

political purpose: it became, in the community, a symbol of stability and immutability of public authorities.

The sacredness of the church building, meaning a deep inner conviction of the importance of the place for communion with God, was especially important for the Russian Christians. For example, in Russia, the leadership of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was always inextricably linked with the building of Hagia Sophia. That is why, after the capture of Constantinople by the Turks and the transformation of Hagia Sophia in a mosque, Russia saw the fall of the Greek Church as a leading institution, ceased to recognize the primacy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople for themselves (although the institution of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was not destroyed by the Turks), and recognized the Jerusalem Church (with the temple of the Resurrection in Jerusalem) as a head of all Orthodox Churches.⁵⁹

The interior design of a Russian Orthodox church building is also distinguished by its individuality. By the XI century, paintings on the walls, initially borrowed from Byzantium, developed into a complex system of images about the visible natural and invisible divine world. A Russian church building is in itself a complete organic contextual structure: according to Dmitry Likhachev, a sort of *microcosm*⁶⁰ that reflects all features of symbolic Christian theological structure of the world.

Mural painting came to Russia from Byzantium, but over time evolved and gained its original style. Thus, for a long time, there were two types of frescos in Russia: a more austere style came from Byzantium, and the other, more free, was developed in Russia.⁶¹ The free style of frescoes is visible in small details: unusual hairstyle of saints, which was

⁵⁹ Dmitry Likhachov, *Great Heritage*. Moscow: Sovremennik, 1975. p. 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

⁶¹ V. Lazarev. "Frescoes of Cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod." *Medieval Russian Art*. Ed. V.N. Lasarev and O.I. Podobedova. Moscow: Akademiya Nauk SSSR, 1968. p. 27.

not required by the official iconographic canon of the time,⁶² the portraits of apostles as northern Russian people with serious stern faces:⁶³ even St. Nicholas, who was Greek, transformed on Russian frescoes into a Russian old man on Russian frescoes.

Since murals were often painted by several artists at the same time, sometimes one can discern the individual style of individual artists. For example, on frescos in the Cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod (XII century), at least three styles of three different artists can be recognized. The first artist is apparently firmly linked to the traditions of the 11th century: he avoids the use of small strokes, and he likes calm monumental planes. The second artist paints in a more vigorous manner: he likes the expression. The third artist seems to enjoy the greatest freedom: he likes to paint light faces and prefers thin light lines.⁶⁴

In spite of the dogmatic canons for Orthodox iconography, artists resorted to various (albeit not significant) changes, using new and sometimes unexpected methods of depicting on the plane of complex metaphysical phenomena. An example is the mural *Flaming Sword* in the Novgorod Church of the Transfiguration on Neredit Hill (built in 1198). The mural is located on the south wall next to the window and is a vertical rectangle, completely blacked out, except for an inscription in the middle of a light yellow shadow figure in a nimbus. The fresco was supposed to portray the Cherubim guarding the entrance to Heaven after the expulsion of Adam and Eve.⁶⁵ But why did the artist paint over the fresco in black? There is only one conceivable explanation. The artist decided to paint

⁶² N. Porfirov. "About two pieces of Novgorod panel painting of XII century." *Medieval Russian Art*. Ed. V.N. Lasarev and O.I. Podobedova. Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1968. p. 143.

⁶³ W. Laurina. "Holy doors in Novgorod churches" *Medieval Russian Art*. Ed. V.N. Lasarev and O.I. Podobedova. Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1968. p. 170.

⁶⁴ V. Lazarev. "Frescos of Cathedral of St. Sophia in Novgorod." *Medieval Russian Art*. Ed. V.N. Lasarev and O.I. Podobedova. Moscow: Akademia Nauk SSSR, 1968. pp. 53-54.

⁶⁵ "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life". *Old Testament, Genesis 3:24*.

the shine of the fiery sword, but he painted not the shine but the dazzling result. If we look at lightning and then close our eyes, we see a long fading dark zigzag. Similarly, looking at the sun and then closing our eyes, we see a black disc. It is likely that in trying to portray a bright light, the artist chose black instead of a bright paint, showing the result of blindness.⁶⁶

The origin of mural paintings came from the catacombs of early Christians. According to Max Dvorak, "Judged chronologically, they are the beginning of Christian art; the earliest in fact are said to be contemporary with a generation that had actually known the apostles."⁶⁷ Like an image of an icon, an image on Christian murals has its own laws, devoid of any color or design frills, and presents external simplicity and profound metaphysical sense. The figures of saints do not represent actual figures of people, but are subject to a certain dream-like projection in a realm of transcendental being, emphasizing the idea of a relationship with God and eternity of the divine essence. Max Dvorak argues that "The figures which we see in the catacombs are not objective, fetish-like portraits or the expression of some religious, philosophical or artistic cult of nature and, therefore, do not exhibit any of naturalistic qualities associated with such cults; rather, they are symbols of enlightenment conceived by a spirit set free from the limitations of earthly existence."⁶⁸

Conclusion

In this essay, I tried to systematize the main features of the Russian Orthodox iconographic art in terms of the need for religious spiritual exercises in the Russian Church. I do not think that the phenomenon of "reverse perspective" is a substitutional one⁶⁹, but rather a supportive or bridging phenomenon for the spiritual believer. Russian Orthodox

⁶⁶ Michael Alexeyev, *Poetics and Stylistics of Russian literature*. Leningrad: Nauka. 1971. pp. 25 - 28.

⁶⁷ Max Dvorak, *The History of Art as the History of Ideas*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1984. p. 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁹ as we mentioned during our discussions in the course

icons are different from all other forms of fine art because they do not bear a strictly aesthetic value (though they have it), but serve as a necessary tool to attempt reunification of human aspirations and metaphysical substances during ritual religious meditations. Thus, the image of the icon should not be criticized from the point of view of an incorrect execution, as the image itself is not a picture of reality, but only a symbol.

In my understanding, art should be formed under the influence of reason and should have practical thought and sense. Behind a piece of art there should always remain a concept, or at least an idea of the message that the author wants to convey to viewers. And the essence of this message is to help people to know themselves, and thus to improve their own lives, and through that, the whole world. But it is the talent of an artist that creates something more than this thought or concept, something multidimensional and deep, where the original meaning and intent suddenly appear lost in even deeper inexpressible meanings. A piece of art differs from a regular image or object by the fact that reason alone is impervious for its understanding and therefore another means are needed for its perception, such as feelings, suggestions, intuition and the subconscious. That is, creative efforts must be made not only while creating a piece of art but also while perceiving it as well.

Studying in the GLS program, reading the works of Plato, Aristotle and other great philosophers, familiarizing myself with the concept of spiritual exercises, all this helped me to understand that for the perception of the world, for the understanding of its physical and metaphysical components, that is, for a mental transition of quantitative information to quality, an understanding and analysis of higher universal truths is necessary. This is possible only using a passive (cumulative, analytical) as well as an active (developmental,

synthetic) mind, which must be scrupulously cumulated, and which forms an actual true and deep human culture. This active mind cannot be described in terms of a passive mind, that is, in the style of "now we have realized that it is necessary to do . . . ". This active mind is a feature that allows a person to be human. And it is an invisible pilot, leading us to righteousness and perfection in the real world and allowing us to enjoy the world and ourselves.

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