

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

At a time when there is unexampled interest in the Eastern presentation of Christianity, when, in particular, Russian religious thought is being closely examined and the works of such contemporary writers as Nicholas Berdyaev and Sergius Bulgakov translated into English, it is surprising that the life and writings of Vladimir Solovyev should be so little known in this country. Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, and, in a measure, Khomyakov are well known: Solovyev was their peer and, in the words of Professor Fedotov, "All the exponents of modern Russian theology and Christian philosophy have been brought up on him."

Vladimir was born in 1853, son of the historian Sergius Mikhailovich Solovyev and a kinsman of the philosopher Skovoroda. He read Büchner's *Force and Matter* and abandoned Christianity at the age of fourteen, came back to the Orthodox Church before he was twenty, and when he was twenty-one became a junior professor in the University of Moscow. From the opening words

of his first lecture—"In every sphere of his activity, and above all else, man dreams of freedom"—he became suspect and a marked man in the eyes of the authorities. The Slavophil party, all-powerful at the time, viewed with growing alarm and displeasure Solovyev's western sympathies and (as yet unconscious) Catholic tendencies. A pretext was needed to dismiss him and after seven years he furnished it himself by a lecture given in Petersburg at the time of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II by the nihilists. The censor carefully suppressed the text of this lecture, so we only know its general outline and that in it Solovyev, true to his principles, appealed to the new tsar to show an example of Christian clemency by reducing the death-sentence on criminals to a penalty allowing of their moral regeneration and conversion. His words aroused great indignation in government circles and for ever closed the doors of the universities to Solovyev. The rest of his life was passed in travel, study and writing, often under difficulties from the government censor. His principal works were *The Philosophical Principles of an Integral Science* and *The Justification of the Good*, in which he set out his metaphysical and moral principles respectively, *Lectures upon the Divine Humanity*, *Criticism of Abstract Principles*, *The Great Conflict* [between East and West] and *Christian*

Politics, the unfinished *History and Future of Theocracy*, and *La Russie et l'Église Universelle*, which was written in French and published in Paris in 1889. In 1896 Solovyev was received into the communion of the Roman Catholic Church by a priest of the Byzantine rite, Father Nicholas Tolstoy, at Moscow. He died four years later, on July 31, 1900, at the age of forty-seven. He never married and always remained a layman.

Even were the present writer competent to try, any attempt to summarize Solovyev's teaching in a brief preface would be useless: what he set before himself was no less than "a free enquiry into the foundations of human knowledge, life and activity." His works which have appeared hitherto in English are *The Justification of the Good*, an essay on *Plato*, and three "discussions" entitled *War, Progress and Human History*, while in 1918 there was published an English version of Mgr. Michael d'Herbigny's *Vladimir Soloviev: un Newman Russe*—I venture to suggest in passing that "a Russian Friedrich von Hügel" would be even more apt.

Religioznaya Osnovy Zhisni ("The Spiritual Foundations of Life") here called *God, Man and the Church*, was written in 1882-84 and is the clearest and most convenient account of Solovyev's principles and teaching. But it is not of simply academic interest as displaying the religious thought of one man:

it is a penetrating objective examination of Christianity and one which is peculiarly apposite to-day. Our age has been corrupted to the core by materialism ; Solovyev's own Russia in the grip of Marxian communism is an outstanding example, but materialism is *no less* withering the souls of men in Germany and Italy (" totalitarian " states under another form), in bourgeois France, in industrial-capitalist England and America : Christendom must return to its spiritual foundations, or perish.

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D.A.