

The Call for 'Christian Politics' in the *Publitsistika* of Vladimir Solov'yev: The Examples of the Question of Church Union and the National Question

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In 1884 the Russian philosopher and *publitsist* Vladimir Solov'yev (1853–1900) wrote an article entitled 'O narodnosti i narodnykh delakh Rossii' ('On the Nationality and the National Affairs in Russia') in the journal *Izvestiya Sankt-Peterburgskogo Slavyanskogo Blagotvoritel'nogo Obshchestva* which evoked a strong reaction among the latter's Slavophile readers. In particular, his qualification of both the calling of the Varangians and the reforms of Tsar Peter the Great as 'great deeds of true patriotism' and acts of 'renunciation of national exclusivism and isolation' met with profound critique and disapproval (Solov'yev, 1883–88a, pp. 31–38).¹ In reaction to Solov'yev's sharp critique of nationalism and his call for a third act of national renunciation (for the spiritual regeneration of Russia), the editor of the Slavophile journal *Rus'*, Ivan Aksakov, wondered how Russia could, on the one hand, fulfil its religious mission – in common with the Slavophiles, Solov'yev believed that Russia had such a mission – while, on the other hand, renouncing itself as it was supposed to do (Aksakov, 1884). Aksakov considered that there was an irreconcilable contradiction between Solov'yev's call for renunciation and his sharp criticism of Russian nationalism on the one hand and his faith in Russia as a chosen nation on the other, while Solov'yev, as we shall see, regarded these as aspects of the same idea. In this article I argue that the reasoning behind Solov'yev's *publitsistika*, or social criticism,² the most significant specimens of which deal with nationalism and the question of church union, lies in the idea of 'Christian politics' (*khristsianskaya politika*), which he developed at the beginning of the 1880s and to which he remained faithful until the end of his life. I am of the opinion that the key to understanding Solov'yev's discourse on Christian politics is to conceive of it as a call for a religious 'basic attitude' (*Grundhaltung*) based on love which is characterised by openness and solidarity and expressed in free, conscious and autonomous commitment and service.

According to this definition, Christian politics is first and foremost a specific attitude, rather than a political programme, a social utopia, or a theoretical position as other students of Solov'yev have argued. Furthermore, this working definition, which I shall employ in this paper, encompasses the various definitions and statements made about Christian politics by Solov'yev, which, as I shall argue, all presuppose or hint at a religious 'basic attitude'. In the course of this article it will become clear that despite the fact that Solov'yev shared with the Slavophiles both the ideal of a society based on Christian principles and a deeply rooted belief in Russia's mission in universal history,

while, at the same time, his critical engagement with nationalism and his sympathy toward some aspects of liberal thought brought him closer to the liberals associated with the journal *Vestnik Yevropy*, his idea of Christian politics is borrowed neither from the Slavophiles nor from the liberals, but clearly stands out on its own.

The Realism of Christian Politics

Solov'yev defined Christian politics as 'applying the principles of true religion to all social and international relations and resolving all existing problems of social and political life *in a Christian way*' (Solov'yev, 1888–91b, p. 157).³ This is Solov'yev's answer to the question *Chto delat?* (What is to be done?) earlier posed by Nikolai Chernyshevsky in his novel of the same name published in 1863. For this reason it deserves to be included in studies and anthologies of Russian intellectual history; however, with the exception of Leon Blair's *Essays on Russian Intellectual History* (1971) such studies largely overlook it.⁴ Solov'yev is of course included in the numerous histories of Russian (religious) thought, but here his *publitsistika* usually receives minor attention.⁵ The reason for this is that he was, and is, usually pictured as a great mystic and utopian thinker, and not as a contributor to the public debate. In secondary literature on Solov'yev, Christian politics is usually discussed in connection with the period during which Solov'yev advocated a church union between Rome and the East. This period, which began in the early 1880s and lasted until the beginning of the 1890s, is usually referred to as the 'theocratic' or 'utopian' period.⁶ However, to believe that Christian politics can be confined to religious or church questions, or restricted to a certain period of Solov'yev's life, is to adopt a misguided approach since, as both Hans Gleixner and Gregory Gaut have shown, it forms one of the key concepts throughout Solov'yev's life and underlies all of his publicistic writing.⁷

The main purpose of this paper is to show how realistic Solov'yev's idea of Christian politics actually was, understood both in terms of its groundedness in reality and of its applicability or practicality. In spite of Solov'yev's clear remark⁸ on this point, most authors – both then and now – have argued that Christian politics is utopian. Three important objections can be raised against this allegation of utopianism. First of all, Christian politics does not promise happiness for all, nor does it give any guarantees in the context of a theodicy. It sustains a belief that things can and ought to be changed; it supports a belief in progress, in the possibility of personal change, and in the regeneration and transformation of the existing social order, though not in the definitive elimination of evil (at least not in this world). Secondly, Christian politics does not depict the Kingdom of God as something that can be realised by man alone, but rather as something that will be attained only in cooperation with God. According to Solov'yev's idea of 'godmanhood' (*bogochelovechestvo*), God has empowered humanity in Christ and has thus obliged man to grow and to develop the divine features of his humanity; at the same time, however, Solov'yev does not deny that in the end everything depends upon God's will. A third objection against the allegation of utopianism consists in pointing out the fact that the realisation of the Kingdom of God does not take place in a vacuum, nor does it presuppose a radical break with the past (as professed by many social utopias). On the contrary, Christian politics proceeds from reality in the sense that it takes as its starting point the existing socio-political order and an acknowledgment of secular entities such as law, nation and state. To this end, the Kingdom of God is pictured as something that 'moves' and 'approaches' in a process, and is not be conceived of as a sudden *Deus ex machina* (Solov'yev, 1891a, pp. 331–34).

This sense of reality is also reflected in Solov'yev's contribution to the discussion of the question of East-West church union. He attempted to make Russian Orthodox believers realise that evil lurked not only in others (read: Catholics), but also in themselves. The strong emphasis that he placed on the history of the dogmatic development of the church in the debate on the question of church union was to make Russian Orthodox believers – and in particular the clergy – aware of the fact that they, too, through their Church Fathers, had shared in this development and, in this sense, were not free from blame regarding the split condition of the visible church. Solov'yev wanted them to examine critically, in order to acknowledge and accept in repentance, their own particular dogmatic life histories, instead of pointing their finger at the sinful past of the Catholics.⁹ Here Solov'yev differed from another well-known Russian thinker, Petr Chaadayev, with whom he has often been compared. Solov'yev confronted Russia with its past whereas Chaadayev conceived of Russia as a *tabula rasa*. I believe that Solov'yev's eagerness to show Russia its past was prompted both by his positive conception of man and his understanding of Christianity as an active religion (*deyatel'naya religiya*). Unlike other nineteenth-century Russian thinkers Solov'yev did not merely study the past in order to understand the present and predict the future; he wanted to know the past because he believed that man was capable of transcending it. Through careful examination, he endeavoured to reveal the relative value of the past and come to terms with it in order to move on with the future. His faith in God allowed him to have great faith in the future and hold high expectations.

Solov'yev distinguished three main tasks of Christian politics, which will all be discussed in the course of this article: the establishment of church union; the creation of a well-structured Christian society composed of the people, the urban class and the nobility; and the realisation of a proper balance in the relationship between church, state and society (Solov'yev, 1882–84b, p. 413). In the second section I shall explore the concept of the Christian state by drawing a line from *Dukhovnyye osnovy zhizni* (*The Spiritual Foundations of Life*) (1884) to *Opravdaniye dobra* (*The Justification of the Good*) (1894–97). In so doing, I shall show that Solov'yev remained faithful to the Trinitarian model of the Christian state throughout his life. Furthermore, I shall show that it is the religious 'basic attitude' of the people that accounts for the proper balance of the Christian state. In the third section, I shall address the manner in which Christian politics was operative in Solov'yev's *publitsistika*. I shall pursue Solov'yev's qualification of the 'principle of obligation' upon which Christian politics is based as the sole 'clear', 'realistic' and 'complete' principle of politics. Drawing on Solov'yev's writings on the national question in the early 1890s and the question of church union in the early 1880s I shall show what exactly his call for Christian politics implied. Finally, in the concluding part of this article I shall return to my preliminary definition of Christian politics – as a 'basic attitude' – and, I hope, come within reach of a more accurate assessment of one of the core ideas of Solov'yev's thinking.

The Trinitarian Model of Solov'yev's Political Thought: the Christian State

While the final goal of Christian politics, the realisation of the Kingdom of God, is not of this world, the preparation for it – that is, the realisation of a 'Christian state' (*khristianskoye gosudarstvo*) or 'free theocracy' (*svobodnaya teokratiya*) in which the organs of church, state and society are freely united – most certainly is. In this context, the problem of the realisation of Christian politics is closely linked with the institutional question regarding relationships between the political domain of the state, the religious domain of the church, and the socioeconomic domain of society; it

is the task of Christian politics to place them in proper balance and position with respect to one another.

In articles on the development of a Christian state Solov'yev often employs the term 'Christian' in a contrastive relationship to 'pagan'. Although the state was a pagan invention that existed long before the rise of Christianity, Christian religion did not relate negatively to it, or 'abolish' it, but 'rose above' the state by 'giving it sense and meaning' (Solov'yev, 1882–84a, pp. 406, 411; Solov'yev, 1894–97b, p. 486). In *Dukhovnyye osnovy zhizni* we read:

The difference between a Christian and a pagan State consists in the latter thinking it had a purpose in itself, and it therefore turned out to be aimless and meaningless. A Christian state acknowledges over itself a higher goal, which is given by religion and is represented by the Church, and a Christian State finds its higher meaning and purpose in voluntary service to this goal, that is to say, the Kingdom of God.¹⁰ (Solov'yev, 1882–84a, p. 406; quoted from Wozniuk, 2000, pp. 23–24)

Solov'yev considered the Christian state to be 'an objective force in the world' conditional on the development of Christian society (Solov'yev, 1889, p. 148). With the coming of Jesus Christ and by his Grace, man was internally liberated; herewith, the creation of a Christian, that is, a true human society, became possible (Solov'yev, 1882–84a, pp. 411–12) – a society made up of free individuals 'in which every member was the goal of everything and never a mere means or instrument serving the common goal' (Solov'yev, 1891b, p. 344).¹¹ In the ancient, that is pagan, world there had never been a real society because man was not free. Solov'yev writes: 'While the state was everything, society was nothing. But as soon as the purpose of life was placed above the state, the living forces of society were liberated and ceased being slaves of the state.' In elevating religion above the state and creating the church, Christianity liberated society from absolute state power and thereby created 'the people' in the narrow sense of this term – that is, the lowest and most basic social class – while also creating the higher social class of free citizens. Thus, society in the ancient world obtained its freedom and mobility from Christianity (Solov'yev, 1882–84a, p. 411).

Although the pagan state certainly did not lack a moral foundation, in the eyes of Solov'yev it failed to make any real progress as it hardly, if at all, prepared humanity for the Kingdom of God. In contrast to the Christian state, its main focus was the conservative task of 'preserving the foundations of social life apart from which humanity could not exist', rather than the progressive task of 'improving the conditions of its existence by furthering the free development of all human powers which are to be an instrument of the future perfection, and apart from which the Kingdom of God could not be realised in humanity' (Solov'yev, 1894–97b, pp. 496, 500). The Christian state could and should 'adjust its institutions to the highest moral standards', 'raise the general moral level' and 'educate the masses' (Solov'yev 1891b, p. 349). In this function of the state Solov'yev ascribed an important task to the law, which he came to define as 'the conditional realisation of moral principles in a given social sphere' (Solov'yev, 1895, p. 330). In accordance with this definition and previous statements regarding the relationship between law and morality, Solov'yev came to define the state as 'collectively organised pity' (Solov'yev, 1894–97b, p. 488).

Although some authors¹² have observed a shift in Solov'yev's thinking, as moving away from the church to emphasis on the state, and have stressed the liberal side of Solov'yev's conception of the latter, the role of the state should not be over-

emphasised: Solov'yev considered the impact of the state on society to be limited and not always positive. He acknowledged the strong correlation between state and society which, on the one hand, prompted him to advocate the role model of the 'autocrat of conscience' of which he believed Tsar Alexander II to be the perfect embodiment, while, on the other hand, it made him strongly condemn "bad politics" as an impediment to the moral perfection of man. This is well illustrated by his critique of 'politics of cannibalism', that is, of the inhuman character of (inter)national politics.¹³ Solov'yev did not believe that the state could reform society, for two reasons. Firstly, he wrote, 'all authorities are first and foremost *conservative* and do not undertake of their own initiative any radical changes'. Secondly, 'a government is the progeny of society' and 'if society is predominantly pagan in character the state has no incentive to trouble about ordering public life in a Christian spirit' (Solov'yev, 1891c, p. 390).

When dealing with Solov'yev's theory of state, one should always bear in mind that it is part of a larger whole, the primacy of which lies with the church (Solov'yev, 1894–97b, p. 496). The main difference between the pagan state and the Christian state lies exactly in the proper place of the state and its internal relations (Solov'yev, 1895, p. 326). In the Christian state, 'normal' relations between the organs of church, state and society are trinitarian in the sense that they are based on the triple merit (*dostoinstvo*) of Jesus Christ. In the preface to *Dukhovnyye osnovy zhizni*, Solov'yev wrote:

... this union of natures accomplished in the 'spiritual man' Jesus Christ as an *individual personality* ought equally to be represented *collectively* in the mankind whom he has spiritualised: the state, the purely human element in social life, and the individual people, the natural element in that life, ought to be in close union and harmony with the divine element, that is with the Church. (Solov'yev, 1882–84b, p. 303; quoted from Attwater, 1937, p. xv)

Along the same line of thought, we read in 'Iz filosofii istorii' (1891):

... corresponding to Christ's three forms of service [*sluzheniye* – PS] and of power, the Christian world (or the universal Church in the broad sense of the term) develops as a threefold divinely human union. There is the sacred union in which the divine element predominates in a traditional, unchangeable form, constituting the church in the narrow sense ... There is the royal union in which the human element (relatively) predominates, forming the Christian state ... Finally, there is the prophetic union, not attained as yet, in which the divine and the human elements must fully interpenetrate each other, forming in their free and mutual combination the perfect human society.¹⁴ (Solov'yev, 1891b, pp. 357–58; quoted from Frank, 2001, p. 188)

Solov'yev argued that 'as long as God does not become all in all, as long as not every human being has become a "vessel" of Divinity, the divine rule of humanity needs specific organs and transmitters (*provodniki*) to affect mankind'. The religious sphere must therefore be headed by a priest who directs (*napravlyayet*), the political sphere by a tsar who governs (*upravlyayet*) and the social sphere (*sotsial'naya zhizn' naroda*) by a prophet who corrects (*ispravlyayet*) (Solov'yev, 1884, p. 161).¹⁵

As stated earlier, Solov'yev felt that one of the main tasks of Christian politics was to place church, state and society in their proper relationships with one another. Whereas 'confusion' (*smesheniye*) and 'separation' (*razobshcheniye/razlucheniye*) in

and among these domains should be avoided, ‘distinction’ (*razlicheniye*), ‘combination’ (*sochetaniye*) and ‘unity’ (*yedinstvo*) should be promoted (Solov’yev, 1889, p. 169; Solov’yev, 1894–97b, pp. 498, 501). In the eyes of Solov’yev, the schism (*raskol*) perfectly illustrated the consequences of the separation and alienation of the institutional church from state and society (Solov’yev, 1881, pp. 228–33).¹⁶ However, he also warned against church interference in worldly affairs and vice versa (Solov’yev, 1882–84a, p. 407; Solov’yev, 1894–97b, pp. 498–500). In *Opravdaniye dobra*, for example, he stated that ‘the church must have no coercive power, and the coercive power exercised by the state must have nothing to do with the domain of religion’ (Solov’yev, 1894–97b, p. 499). This prompts the question of how these spheres can exist as functionally differentiated, autonomous and free, while at the same time they should be combined and united. In other words, how are they related to each other? What is it that puts them into balance?

First of all, they all share the same higher goal, the preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of God, and in their commitment and service to this goal, a sense of solidarity develops among them.¹⁷ Closely related to this particular orientation, their freedom is to be understood neither as negative freedom (‘freedom from’), nor in the libertarian sense of ‘freedom to’, but in the Christian sense of ‘freedom for’, which is a qualified freedom in terms of its content.¹⁸ The more durable the commitment (love) proves to be, the more intensely this freedom is experienced and the more open and receptive mutual relations will be. Hence, Solov’yev writes that ‘the church would be embodied in the state only insofar as the state itself were inspired by Christian principles; the church would descend to worldly reality according to the degree to which the state ascended to the church ideal’ (Solov’yev, 1882–84a, p. 408). The freely chosen commitment to God’s cause on earth finds its expression in an open, respectful and just attitude, which the representatives of the Christian state – the king, the priest and the prophet – assume with respect to each other. In the following section, I explore more deeply the features of this attitude.

The Operationalisation of Christian Politics: the Call for a Religious ‘Basic Attitude’

Thus far, I have discussed Christian politics from an external point of view, as it operates at the institutional level of church, state and society. In the next part I shall demonstrate how Christian politics was operative in Solov’yev’s publicist writings by briefly delving into examples that deal with the national question and the matter of church union. Most authors have ascribed Solov’yev’s ecumenical activism to the pro-Catholic attitude he held at that time, his penchant for the authority of the papacy and his emphasis on an ‘acting church’, that is, one that does not remain aloof but is engaged with society and politics. To whatever extent this is true, I still maintain that Solov’yev’s concerns for the visible church, on the one hand, and for Russia’s universal mission, on the other, appear, in the broader light of his social activism, as operationalisations and positive statements of Christian politics that first of all ‘result from’ and are ‘guided by religious-moral incentives’ (Solov’yev, 1883a, p. 103).

In a letter to Ivan Aksakov, editor of the Slavophile journal *Rus’*, Solov’yev explained his commitment to the question of church union and solidarity with the Catholics as follows:

When you are struck by a nasty odour coming from forest insects or from carrion, you screw up your nose and walk on by. But when the nasty odour comes from festering wounds on the body of your brother, of course you

overcome your disgust, do not distance yourself from the illness, and attempt to help the ailing. It is not in my power to heal the divided church, but it is in my power and is my *duty* not to irritate their wounds with polemics, but to alleviate them with words of justice and reconciliation.¹⁹ (Radlov, 1908–23, IV, pp. 20–21)

The operative word here is 'duty' (*obyazannost'*). The obligatory spirit of Christian politics finds its expression in Solov'yev's call for Christian politics as a moral attitude. For example, in the debate about the question of church union between Moscow and Rome, he wanted to change the attitude held by Orthodox believers towards the Roman Catholic Church and, in particular, towards the Papacy, by making them critically aware of their own role in contributing to the problems of dogma and authority in the visible church.

If I am asked *what* in the first place must we *do* for the union of the churches, I will say that we must first of all reconsider once more all the main points of dispute between them, not for the sake of polemics or denunciation as hitherto, but with the sincere desire *fully to understand* the opposite side, to do it *full justice* and, in so far as we ought, *to agree* with it.²⁰ (Solov'yev, 1883a, pp. 111–12; quoted from Frank, 2001, pp. 100–101)

According to Solov'yev, the principle of 'Christian ecumenical politics' lies in changing one's particular truth into ecumenical truth and, in this way, resolving all supposedly existing dichotomies.

By entirely maintaining the truth of one's church, but at the same time acknowledging the truth of a foreign principle, we set our truth free from any mixture of even the most specious self-importance and egoism. Only in this way will we arrive at the religious-moral attitude, without which a true union of the churches is impossible. (Solov'yev, 1883a, pp. 111)

In order to attain reconciliation, Solov'yev preached an act of self-renunciation (*samootrecheniye*) that referred to the Gospel of Luke 9: 23–25, where Jesus calls for people to renounce themselves and follow him. According to Solov'yev 'no individual person and no people can reveal great powers or accomplish great deeds, if they do not forget about themselves or sacrifice themselves' (Solov'yev, 1883–88a, p. 29). As we saw at the beginning of this article, this type of discourse confused Ivan Aksakov who accused Solov'yev of lack of love for his country. For Solov'yev, however, self-renunciation logically followed from the Christian concept of love, which, in his eyes, signified setting oneself free from limited attachment to the direct object of love (family, fatherland). He insisted that one should not value the nation in itself, but only in connection with the higher universal idea of Christianity, thereby creating the opportunity to take on an open attitude towards other nations and acknowledge their rights as equal members of humankind.²¹ This universal love did not replace or cancel love of neighbour or love of one's own country, but absorbed them and made them subordinate to it. Solov'yev described this process as the 'spiritualisation' or 'moralisation' of natural love or solidarity, as a result of which an individual person or nation 'freely', 'consciously' and 'voluntarily' accepts the common cause (*obshcheye delo*) as its own cause and national and universal interests are no longer perceived as incompatible.

According to Solov'yev, the Christian principle of obligation, or moral service, is the only 'consistent' (*sostoyatel'ny*), the only 'certain' (*opredeleenny*) and the only 'complete' (*polny*) or 'perfect' (*sovershenny*) principle of political activity. It is consistent in the sense that it precludes any form of exclusiveness, whether individual or national, political or religious, and always calls for self-renunciation. Put differently, it spurs us to take on a basically open attitude to our fellow men, to God and to nature. Secondly, the principle of obligation is the only certain principle, as it always serves to point out to us how to act in any given case and thereby only demands from us that of which we are capable. Thirdly, this principle is the most complete as it comprises all the other founding principles of politics, such as self-interest and missionism (*missionizm* – the idea that every nation-state has a mission to fulfil), though in sublimated form (Solov'yev, 1883a, pp. 10–11). In a similar way to that in which the pagan state receives its proper place in subordination to the church, Solov'yev argues, these motives – once subordinated to the higher principle of moral obligation – receive their proper proportions. In the next paragraph, I shall inquire more deeply into the second qualification of the Christian principle of obligation, namely that of its certainty, and examine its impact on Christian politics as a religious moral attitude.

In the conclusion of *Dukhovnyye osnovy zhizni* Solov'yev states:

Before resolving on any deed that has significance for personal or public life, one has only to call forth in one's soul the moral image of Christ, to focus on him and to ask oneself: could He commit this act, or in other words – will He approve of it or not, bless me or not in its accomplishment? (Solov'yev, 1882–84a, p. 416; quoted from Wozniuk, 2000, p. 31)

Solov'yev strongly recommended this 'test of conscience' as a 'reliable method', one which is 'always close at hand' and works even in the most 'questionable cases' and, so Solov'yev guarantees, 'will not deceive you' (Solov'yev, 1882–84a, p. 416; quoted from Wozniuk, 2000, p. 31). However, in *Opravdaniye dobra* Solov'yev seems to take the opposite view. Here we read that, unlike law, moral demands are 'unlimited' (*neogranichennoye*), and the way in which they should be fulfilled is not 'definitely prescribed' (*obuslovlivayetsya nepremenno*). As a result, it remains unclear what exactly one should do: which actions to perform and from which to abstain (Solov'yev, 1894–97b, pp. 407, 489). Does this mean that Solov'yev, ten years later, no longer believed in the test of conscience, which he had so zealously recommended earlier, and now believed that law, which was, after all, more 'concrete' and 'realistically applicable', had replaced this? Judging from his statements in the article 'Znachenkiye gosudarstva', this is most certainly not the case. According to Solov'yev conscience is the 'new thing that is contributed by Christianity to the political sphere'. He reaffirms the clarity that personal conscience provides to Christians for dealing with complicated issues: 'The question of what corresponds to the spirit of Christ, what should be done in His interest in given conditions and circumstances, is with sufficient definition resolved for the Christian by his conscience' (Solov'yev, 1895, p. 330). True, conscience will never match the concreteness of law, which is achieved by the sheer application and practice of rules; however, it determines something much more fundamental, that is, a moral attitude.

Solov'yev called on the members of society (*obshchestvo*) to consult their consciences, but also to think for themselves critically. Together, personal conscience and critical thinking were thought to function as an internal 'check' against all kinds of subjective desires, material interests and false motivations as well as an external 'check' against

condescension by church and state authorities.²² He praised an attitude towards life that ensured a commitment on the part of people to serve a higher cause, but the faith from which this commitment and service was to evolve had to transcend the direct object of this faith. So, for example, in 'O narodnosti i narodnykh delakh Rossii' Solov'yev insisted that one should not value (*tsenit*) nationality in itself, as such (*samu po sebe*), but only in connection with the higher universal idea of Christianity (Solov'yev, 1883–88a, p. 27). More than once, Solov'yev referred to the organs of state and church as means leading to a higher goal, rather than as ends in themselves.²³ This critical attitude of Solov'yev led to a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding among contemporaries. It evoked a particularly strong reaction from the clergy and the Holy Synod because they believed Solov'yev was undermining the authority of the church.²⁴ On the other hand, if we accept Solov'yev's Christian worldview, the idea of personal conscience and critical thinking as a check against other than 'religious-moral incentives' once again serves to illustrate his sense of realism. It demonstrates just how much he was aware of the dangers and difficulties any earthly mediator (*posrednik*) of God – which we potentially all are – is exposed to. This explains his understanding of the ideal tsar as the 'autocrat of conscience'; his trust in Alexander II was based on the latter's achieving this status.

According to Solov'yev, every person (or nation) has a conscience and hence has the right and duty to act in conscience. Solov'yev conceives of man as a 'moral autocrat' who shares the same moral principles with his fellow men, but has the potential to apply them differently (Solov'yev, 1895, p. 330). Solov'yev makes a qualitative distinction between 'morally passive' and 'morally active' people, a distinction which he believes underlies the political division of people into classes, both with and without power, into 'the governors' and 'the governed' (Solov'yev, 1891b, p. 346). To the class of morally active people belong members of the nobility and *obshchestvo* in the narrow sense, and great historical figures such as Peter and Alexander the Great, as well as the king, the priest and the prophet, the representatives of the Trinitarian model which I discussed earlier. Their role is to guide the people, to take initiatives and to reform the social order in order to raise society to a higher level. According to Solov'yev, 'personal moral consciousness ... is necessarily expressed in social activism, in an attempt to bring the utmost benefit to one's close relations through the reform of humanistically or morally lacking social institutions and orders' (Solov'yev, 1891b, p. 346).

The above statement brings to the fore two significant and correlated aspects of Solov'yev's social-political thought. First, it makes clear that the separation between private and public spheres is apparent rather than real. According to Solov'yev's concept of man, man is a 'logical being' and therefore cannot 'bear a massive split between those rules that determine personal conduct and those that influence political action', as this contravenes his (sense of) personal dignity and his moral disposition (Solov'yev, 1883a, p. 10). The second aspect concerns the strong correlation between society and the individual. Solov'yev believes that personal improvement necessarily results in a better environment, or in social progress (Solov'yev, 1882–84b, p. 303; Solov'yev, 1891b, p. 346). Besides being a logical being, 'man is a social being', for whom 'the higher cause of his life, the final goal of his efforts does not lie in his personal destiny, but in the social fate of all mankind as a whole' (Solov'yev, 1891a, p. 332). Definitions, which Solov'yev employs in *Opravdaniye dobra*, of society as a 'completed or enlarged person' and of the person as a 'restricted or concentrated society', bring this intrinsic bond to expression. Thus, ideally, personal and societal interests are never opposed to each other, but are always complementary.

Now that we have discussed the clarity conveyed by Christian politics, in the sense that, according to Solov'yev, by consulting our conscience we know what to do both

privately and publicly, let us move on to the second aspect of Christian politics. Solov'yev contended that the principle of obligation provided Christian politics with a realistic character in the sense that the demand is made of us to do only those things of which we are capable. Diametrically opposed to this principle of obligation are the concepts of 'interest' and 'conceit': 'imaginary motives' that are 'limitless' and 'insatiable' (Solov'yev, 1883a, p. 11). The question about man's capabilities is a perplexing one upon which many theologians have long deliberated – and continue to do so. The central issues within these discussions concern the ability of fallen man to do good, as well as the origin of human activity. According to St Augustine, for example, we can only do that right which God gives us the power to do. For Augustine, the origin of human activity resides in God (Brinkman, 2003, pp. 125–26). In contrast, and in accordance with the tradition of Orthodox theology, which is characterised by a strong emphasis on active human cooperation with God (Brinkman, 2003, pp. 109–10), Solov'yev provides a different answer to this question. According to Solov'yev's idea of godmanhood, God has empowered man in Christ and, by making proper use of this empowerment, man is able to move closer to God and 'become his son'. The emphasis is on 'becoming' through acting rather than on 'being'. Hence, we read in *La Russie et l'Église universelle* that 'because [man] is only by right (*po pravu*), and not immediately in fact (*v deistvitel'nosti*), the son of God, he has also the privilege of making himself in reality what ideally he is already and of realising the principle of his being by his own act' (Solov'yev, 1889, p. 345; see also Solov'yev, 1894–97b, pp. 228–29, 231). Solov'yev believes that man experiences the presence of God not only externally, but also internally, and that this fact allows individual believers to interact closely with God.

Solov'yev called on society to assume an open attitude and, in this way, to practise a form of active receptivity. Only by 'imagining' Christ, 'turning' to Him and 'leaning' upon Him can we refrain from evil and 'become ... transmitters (*provodniki*) of His unquestionable Truth' (Solov'yev, 1882–84a, p. 416). Man's potential to develop himself freely and, in this way, to 'become himself' is perceived by Solov'yev as a gift that supports man in his future actions. Nevertheless he warns that this gift of self-development should not lead to arrogance and self-conceit, but that it should be regarded as a task; it obliges people to participate actively as well as to develop their individual talents for their own perfection and for the benefit of society. Solov'yev's critique of church and state must be understood from this perspective: he did not abandon them, but fulfilled his own (personal) task by pointing out their flaws, thereby helping them to perfect themselves. The fact that man is created in the image and likeness of God is believed to guard him against overconfidence (*samodovol'stvo/samoobozhaniye*), on the one hand, and indifference or fatalism, on the other (the latter resulting from a feeling of despair and powerlessness).²⁵ With his focus on human activity and his critique of conceit, Solov'yev warns us against both. According to Solov'yev it is only through meekness that we can achieve the proper attitude by which to establish the Kingdom of God in ourselves and in society.

This emphasis on the active receptivity of our religious attitude raises the question of human responsibility and participation. Although the notions of responsibility and accountability rarely emerge in Solov'yev's writings, these ideas are by no means absent. In fact, Solov'yev indicated more than once that man has the freedom to choose whether or not to do evil; social and political life is man's own proper sphere and field of action.²⁶ The fact that the content of this freedom is already qualified as the freedom to prepare for the coming of God's Kingdom on earth in no way changes this. Solov'yev himself took on this responsibility, in the sense that he was always open to discussion and consistently responded to others' reactions to his public statements. By putting into practice himself

the attitude he was emphatically recommending, he provided an example of Christian politics in action. Solov'yev placed strong emphasis on calling on society to assume the proper religious 'basic attitude': this attitude alone would make the operationalisation of Christian politics realistic.

Conclusion

In this article I have employed a preliminary definition of Christian politics as a religious 'basic attitude'. This definition has allowed us to account for the various ways in which the concept of Christian politics is deployed in Solov'yev's *publitsistika* as well as the divergent interpretations of the notion of Christian politics in the secondary literature on Solov'yev. It also helps us to sort out the misunderstandings and confusion that surrounded Solov'yev's call for Christian politics among his contemporaries.

I have shown that 'Christian politics' has various different meanings. It implies many values, among which are: critical thinking, solidarity, justice, personal commitment, public service, moral consciousness, freedom, autonomy, responsibility, love, openness and receptivity. In his writings Solov'yev alternately calls on the members of Russian society to show respect and understanding to each other and to the West, warns them not to be blinded by idols (such as the people, the church) and spurs everybody, though the 'best men' in particular, to take responsibility and to *do* something. In my view, Solov'yev is constantly urging action, and presupposes a certain attitude which is based on love, guided by conscience and rational thinking, characterised by openness and solidarity to one's fellow men and expressed in free, conscious, autonomous commitment to social-political problems and service to the higher goal of the Kingdom of God. According to Solov'yev, every man is able and moreover obliged to adopt this religious 'basic attitude', and this belief bears testimony to Solov'yev's unwavering belief in the God-given potential of man.

Christian politics has so far been interpreted from various perspectives, and different aspects have been highlighted. Contemporaries of Solov'yev (in my view, too narrowly) conceived of it as love, charity, humanism (*gumannost'*) or ecumenism.²⁷ Well-known Russian Solov'yev specialists (Yevgeni Trubetskoy, Konstantin Mochul'sky, Dmitri Strémoukhoff, Georges Florovsky and Nicolas Zernov) have all discussed Christian politics as part of Solov'yev's so-called 'theocratic' period of the 1880s and have hence stressed the utopian rather than the realistic character of Christian politics. More recently, Hans Gleixner and Gregory Gaut have paid special attention to the notion of Christian politics. Gleixner detects a theocratic, a liberal and an eschatological development within Christian politics. Like Gleixner, Gaut also focuses on the liberal period, drawing a comparison between Solov'yev's conception of Christian politics and the Protestant social gospel movement (Gleixner, 1978, pp. 34–53; Gaut, 1999, pp. 10–13). Although all the aforementioned interpretations bring to the fore interesting aspects of Christian politics, I believe they do not do full justice to the width and depth of the idea. By defining Christian politics as an attitude, I believe I have been able to reach a deeper, more comprehensive understanding, one which includes the abovementioned interpretations (for they are not wrong), but which at the same time points out something far more fundamental, continuous and structural.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this article, Aksakov saw Solov'yev's critique of the nationalist movement in Russia (about which Aksakov wondered who the representatives of this movement were) as simply another way for him to make his continued plea for the reunion between the eastern and western churches, the main critics of this anticipated reunification being the Slavophiles, among others.²⁸ Aksakov

added that Solov'yev's critical engagement with nationalism would bring him closer to the liberals – Solov'yev's 'coincidental coworkers', as another Slavophile, General Aleksandr Kireyev, called them (Kireyev, 1884, p. 19). Aksakov was right about Solov'yev's increasing proximity to the liberals. Many of his later articles on nationalism that were collected in the second edition of *Natsional'ny vopros v Rossii* first appeared in the liberal journal *Vestnik Yevropy*. However, with regard to Solov'yev's alleged intentions in embarking on the question of nationalism, that is, merely as a means to convey his ecumenical message, Aksakov was only partially correct: Solov'yev's commitment to combating Russian nationalism as a form of exclusivism was sincere. Seen against the background of the ultimate goal of Christian politics – the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth – Solov'yev's sharp criticism of Russian nationalism and the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as his call for a church union in which Russia would play a special role, are all perfectly reasonable and correlated to each other. They can be justifiably explained as indications of the free and conscious religious orientation which was required in order to achieve these ends.

The misunderstanding between Aksakov and Solov'yev is not the only such example: other contemporaries were confused as well. My definition of Christian politics as a religious 'basic attitude', to which all Solov'yev's statements regarding Christian politics can be traced back, has enabled me to untangle some of these allegedly contradictory aspects. I hope that I have thereby provided the reader with a tentative definition of one of the key concepts of Solov'yev's social and political thought.

Notes

- 1 According to Solov'yev, the first 'renunciation' created the Russian state and the second created the foundations of its civilisation.
- 2 The Brokgauz-Efron *Entsiklopedichesky slovar'* defines *publitsistika* as the practical discussion in the press of essential questions in social-political life. In Russia, as a consequence of a lack of other suitable organs, the press became the main medium of expression for private social-political initiatives. See the entry 'Publitsistika' by Ar. G. (Ar. G., 1858).
- 3 Italics according to the Brussels edition. In the version of his article 'O poddelkakh' as published in *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* Solov'yev defined 'Christian politics' as 'the realisation of Christian principles in the collective life of mankind and the transformation of all social institutions in the spirit of a higher truth' (Solov'yev, 1891a, p. 337).
- 4 I am thinking in particular of works by Marc Raeff (1966), Aileen Kelly (1998), Leonard Schapiro (1967), Isaiah Berlin (1978), Andrzej Walicki (1975), and most recently Randall A. Poole (2003). Studies on the Liberation Movement and the development of Christian Socialism in Russia pay scant attention to the notion of 'Christian politics' or simply do not mention Solov'yev at all: see N. Gordinenko and P. Kurochkin (1969) and V. Sidorov (1995). One exception is R. A. Gal'tseva (1989).
- 5 This is the case with (though certainly not limited to) the studies by Frederick Copleston (1986 and 1988), Wilhelm Goerdts (1984), Andrzej Walicki (1980), Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard Gustavson (1996), Valery Kuvakin (1994), Helmut Dahm and Assen Ignatow (1996), James Edie, James Scanlan and Mary-Barbara Zeldin (1965), Vasili Zen'kovsky ((1948) 1991), Paul Valliere (2000), Georges Florovsky (1937). A notable exception is Nikolaj Lossky (1952).
- 6 Yevgeni Trubetskoy was the first to divide Solov'yev's life into three phases: a preparatory period (1873–82), a utopian period (1882–94) and a positive period (1894–1900) (Trubetskoy, 1913, I, p. 87). This tripartite periodisation was roughly taken over by K. Mochul'sky (1951) and D. Stremoukhoff (1935). According to the latter, these periods

- corresponded with Solov'yev's interest in the fields of theosophy, theocracy and theurgy, as well as G. Florovsky (1937) and N. Zernov (1944).
- 7 Hans Gleixner and Gregory Gaut were the first to acknowledge the significance of the concept of 'Christian politics' in Solov'yev's thinking. Unlike the authors mentioned in note 6, Gleixner attempts to avoid a too rigid periodisation of Solov'yev's life and work, preferring to speak instead of a 'Wellenbewegung, die unterfangen ist vom Grundstrom einer großen Kontinuität' (Gleixner, 1978, p. 17). In the development of 'Christian politics' he distinguishes three main stages – a theocratic, a liberal and an eschatological stage – which cover Solov'yev's entire life starting from the 1880s (Gleixner, 1978, pp. 34–53). In his dissertation and later articles on Solov'yev, Gaut stresses the importance of 'Christian politics' as 'the unifying and motivating idea' behind all of Solov'yev's journalism from 1881 until his death in 1900 (Gaut, 1992, pp. 49, 114; Gaut, 1999, p. 10).
 - 8 In 'Vstupleniye: Pol'sha i vostochny vopros', published in *Rus'* in 1883, Solov'yev remarks: 'Such politics is not *utopian* in the derogatory sense of that term, that is, blind to bad reality and building up ideals in the void; on the contrary, Christian politics is primarily concerned with facts, and first and foremost is intended as a remedy against actual evil' (Solov'yev, 1883a, p. 4; Frank, 2001 (1950), p.191.)
 - 9 Compare Martien Brinkman, who explains the sense of realism maintained by Christians by pointing out the humanising effect of the doctrine of sin, that which keeps overconfidence, as well as despair, at bay (Brinkman, 2003, pp. 77–79).
 - 10 Solov'yev expresses a similar thought in *Opravdaniye dobra* (Solov'yev, 1894–97b, p. 497).
 - 11 A similar thought about man as an end in himself and not merely as a means towards the realisation of the common good was expressed earlier by Solov'yev in his doctoral thesis *Kritika otvlechenykh nachal* (Solov'yev, 1877–80, p. 168) and later repeated in his moral philosophy *Opravdaniye dobra* (Solov'yev, 1894–97b, pp. 296–300).
 - 12 Gregory Gaut states that Solov'yev abandoned theocracy and shifted his emphasis from church to state (Gaut, 1992, p. 129). Also according to Gaut, Solov'yev, in *Opravdaniye dobra*, turned away from the idea of the 'Christianization of politics', focusing instead on the strong state as the 'realizer' of the Kingdom of God (Gaut, 1999, p. 8). Ross Chambers highlights the liberal aspects of Solov'yev's theory of the state and detects a greater emphasis on the role of the state (law) and society (Chambers, 1992, pp. 60–69). Andrzej Walicki argues that the theocratic government was replaced by an impersonal system of legal rules (Walicki, 1992, p. 31).
 - 13 On cannibalism, see Solov'yev, 1883a, p. 10 as well as Solov'yev, 1891b, pp. 345–46.
 - 14 Almost identical in *La Russie et l'Église Universelle* (Solov'yev, 1889). See also *Opravdaniye dobra* (Solov'yev, 1894–97b, p. 498).
 - 15 In 'Slavyansky vopros' Solov'yev provides a similar justification for the trinitarian model of the Christian state (Solov'yev, 1883–88b, p. 63).
 - 16 On the consequences of the separation of church and state, see *Opravdaniye dobra* (Solov'yev, 1894–97b, pp. 498–99).
 - 17 'The true moral order or the Kingdom of God is both perfectly universal and perfectly individual. *Each* wants it for himself and for every one, and is only able to attain it together with *every one*' (Solov'yev, 1894–97b, p. 227; quoted from Attwater, 1937, p. 199. Italics according to Sob. Soch.). Therefore, Solov'yev argues, there can be no essential opposition between personal, national and universal interests.
 - 18 This is Brinkman's definition of the Christian conception of freedom as developed in his book (Brinkman, 2003).
 - 19 Italics in the version in Sob. Soch.
 - 20 Italics in the version in Sob. Soch.
 - 21 'Pervy samy vazhny i trudny shag sostoyal v peremene otnosheniya k drugim narodam, v priznanii ikh ravnopravnymi chlenami chelovechestva i pri tom operedivshimi nas v prosveshchenii.' 'Neskol'ko slov v zashchitu Petra Velikogo' (Solov'yev, 1888–91a, p. 179). (On the Polish question, see Solov'yev, 1883a, pp. 14–15).
 - 22 Brinkman on human autonomy (Brinkman, 2003, pp. 13–14).

- 23 Church and state are mediators (*posredniki*) of relative value, which do not suffice to realise the absolute goal; and once this is attained, they are no longer necessary (Solov'yev, 1891a, p. 329; Solov'yev, 1894–97b, p. 489).
- 24 See Lev Tikhomirov's article (1892) and especially Solov'yev's reaction thereto (Solov'yev, 1892).
- 25 'The expression "image of God" is an indication of both our smallness and our greatness, since the reference to a God who is constitutive for our human existence preserves us from overestimating as well as underestimating ourselves. (Psalm 8)' (Brinkman, 2003, p. 36).
- 26 Solov'yev distinguishes three spheres: knowing, making and doing. For a clarifying analysis of Solov'yev's first philosophical system see Kline, 1974, p. 164.
- 27 See Solov'yev's reaction to Konstantin Leont'yev: Solov'yev, 1883b.
- 28 Solov'yev had just finished writing a series of articles in *Rus'* under the title 'Veliki spor i khristianskaya politika' in which he addressed the question of a church union between the East and Rome.

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