

Introduction: Freedom, Faith, and Dogma

In prefatory comments appearing in a revised edition of one of his better known books, *Justification of the Good*, the idealist Russian religious philosopher Vladimir S. Soloviev (1853–1900) stressed the intrinsically close connection that existed between “true religion and sensible politics.”¹ Soloviev’s understanding of the relationship between religion and politics emerged organically from his reading of the New Testament, which he believed required that continuous progress be made toward perfection in all human affairs. The key to the eventual achievement of this goal of perfection could be found in the core Christian mission of moral reconciliation, which, as Soloviev himself observed, could be translated into philosophical language as *synthesis*—the Hegelian resolution of two opposing claims, or a contradiction, into a third, higher truth.² According to Soloviev, this Christian mission of reconciliation applied to all of reality, both past and present, and included the rationality of Greek philosophy as well as the elements of ancient pagan religion that seemed to him to be a necessary preparation for the future appearance of Christianity and subsequent human progress.³ He also proclaimed this mission of moral reconciliation to be a major part of Russia’s role in universal history, situated as it was both geographically and culturally between East and West.

Soloviev relentlessly critiqued all of European culture for its seemingly unremitting abandonment of Christian principles in favor of secularization, while he at the same time indicted all three major branches of Christianity for the failure to preserve and promote unity among believers in light of this circumstance. Yet Soloviev’s main focus remained his native Russia and Eastern Orthodoxy, not because there was less to find fault with in Western Europe but because he understood his own mission as directed first and foremost to his homeland. And yet, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Soloviev’s

writings have not only been reissued in Russia, but also have attracted a growing audience in a West that has become even more secularized and more riven by sectarianism than in Soloviev's day.

Ten of the eleven articles that I have selected for this, my fourth, volume of Soloviev's writings have not previously appeared in English translation, while one (the lengthy "The Jews and the Christian Question") was only rendered into English incompletely in the middle of the last century. All the essays included in this volume illuminate Soloviev's concerns about the obstacles that religious and political dogma present to the free pursuit of faith; they assist in deepening our understanding of Soloviev's complex views on the relationship of church and state in both East and West. Many of these pieces resonate with answers as to how and why Eastern Orthodoxy deviated from its mission to work toward the establishment of a truly Christian society—the Kingdom of God—first in Byzantium and then in Moscow. But at the same time they also remind the reader that Orthodoxy was by no means unique in this regard: Soloviev offers insights on how and why the Mosaic Law—the heart of ancient Judaism—eventually became subverted and trampled over by the kings of ancient Israel and Judah, and how and why Catholicism in Western Europe became co-opted and corrupted by the political milieu in which it grew during the Middle Ages. For Soloviev, the difficult but necessary path to Russia's fulfillment of its historical calling to "spiritual nationhood" required not just recalling, but also learning the hard lessons that history had taught since antiquity about the tendency of dogmatism to first shackle and then abuse faith.⁴

The seemingly intractable dispute and deep chasm that existed between Christianity and Judaism, out of which the former had organically arisen, constitutes a secondary issue that links a number of these endeavors as well. Soloviev championed full religious and civic rights for all minorities in the Russian Empire over the course of his career: several of the essays in this volume evidence Soloviev's steadfast and outspoken defense of Judaism and the Jews throughout the rest of Europe as well as in Russia.⁵ Unlike some of his contemporaries, Soloviev never lost sight of the fact that Jesus had lived his earthly life as an observant Jew, and that it was this *Jewish* teacher and prophet who subsequently became the Christ of Christianity. This significant, yet often neglected, consideration helps to explain Soloviev's special concern for the plight of the Jews, a concern that takes shape in different ways throughout his work, but appeared most adamantly in an 1890 denunciation of pogroms, a collective protest written by him and

signed by many Russian artistic and literary personalities (including Lev Tolstoy) and subsequently published in the *Times* of London.⁶

A problem that insinuates itself ubiquitously throughout this book is how to reconcile the commandment that Jesus gave to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's (Mt 22:21; Mk 12:17; Lk 20:25) with the gist of Romans 13, in which St. Paul counsels Christians to obey their rulers—that is, the State. Reconciling these two norms without doing damage to the intent of either can be seen as one of Soloviev's special purposes throughout his *oeuvre*. Soloviev never discussed church history for its own sake, nor did he engage in biblical exegesis simply to understand the moral values of ancient Israel and the Greco-Roman world, nor did he analyze political history in order just to clarify power relationships in the ancient and medieval worlds. Rather, he directed his efforts at explicating how and why such issues should matter to his contemporaries, and the lessons that these issues could teach about the relationship of church and state throughout Europe and the Russia of his day.⁷

The vast majority of the dozens of references to power that Soloviev makes in the essays that comprise this book appear in a context that is other than a purely spiritual one: he often highlights either political or ecclesiastical power, or at times discusses them both together, but rarely does he discuss spiritual power without referring to a social context. Reminiscent of a variety of Christian writers from Augustine to Thomas More, Soloviev's major concern here seems to be with the distorted power relationships that have developed in human society and the damage they have inflicted on the idea of community. Not unlike these Christian saints, he insisted that extant reality and normative ideals not only could be related in society, but that they in fact must be.⁸ In fundamental agreement with the church fathers of both East and West, Soloviev, the religious philosopher, believed that individual freedom, religious faith, and the common good could only be reconciled in community through a serious application of a noncoercive Christian ethic. Early in his career, Soloviev saw More's Utopianism as resembling a norm sooner than a fantasy, and he postulated that "utopias and utopians have always ruled humanity and so-called practical people have always been only their unconscious instruments."⁹ And later, he indirectly suggested that Augustine's *City of God* had provided some inspiration for his *Justification of the Good*.¹⁰

At the risk of oversimplification, I would suggest that three overarching and interrelated questions form the backdrop against which

Soloviev framed the discourses on freedom, faith, and dogma that are found in this book. And since these writings span much of his adult life, it can be suggested that these are the questions that persistently occupied Soloviev, sometimes even appearing in places where one might expect to find a more “spiritual” treatment of issues: What does “reconciliation and reunification” of the church actually mean and how might this be achieved? What is the proper relationship between clerical and secular authorities? How can the tendency of the powerful to exploit the powerless be curbed more effectively? These are questions that have continued to resonate in the corridors of power, in both East and West, since Soloviev’s day—it is left to the reader to decide what relevance his answers to them have for us today.

The first selection in this volume, “On Spiritual Authority in Russia” (1881), represents one of Soloviev’s earliest and harshest critiques of the Russian Orthodox church hierarchy, which in his view had lost its way and did not offer the Russian people very good role models. Soloviev implied that the church hierarchy was hypocritical in separating itself from the people on the one hand, while issuing grave warnings about the state of the nation’s spiritual health on the other. Whose fault was this lamentable situation? Soloviev traces the roots of the situation back to the seventeenth century and in so doing presents the officials of the institutional church with some unflattering assessments, including a strong suggestion that it had abandoned its basic mission to embody Christ’s love on earth.

He reasoned that a “calamitous illness” had befallen Russia because of this failure, and that the seventeenth-century schism had contributed heavily to the weakening of the hierarchy’s spiritual authority. Harsh treatment of schismatics and sectarians of all sorts, as well as people of other faiths, had undermined the spiritual and moral authority of the church hierarchy. Soloviev blamed the seventeenth-century Patriarch Nikon and his attempt to establish himself as a “great sovereign” side by side with the tsar for a significant portion of the church-state situation in Russia in his day. Interestingly, Nikon reappears in subsequent essays in this book almost as a kind of leitmotif or symbol of Russia’s deep-seated spiritual and political problems. Soloviev equated Nikon’s tendency to follow what he termed the medieval “Latin principle of religious coercion” with papal excesses, which represented the “fundamental error” that “spiritual authority is acknowledged in and of itself as a principle and goal,” while the only truly Christian goal must be the kingdom of God.

Soloviev boldly called for a Russian church council to convene for the immediate “abolition of all restrictive laws and measures against schismatics, sectarians, and those of other faiths,” as well as the renunciation of ecclesiastical censorship. In effect, this would constitute an abandonment of an illegitimate “police authority” by the hierarchy and would have the effect of restoring true moral authority to the church, which would then be more capable of influencing society in a positive way. Soloviev encapsulated the task of both such a re-energized church and state in a pithy, yet compelling, formula: to work together freely toward “one common goal—the building of true community on earth.”

Although the second essay, “On the Ecclesiastical Question Concerning the Old Catholics” (1883), seems less universal in scope than the others in this volume, it conforms to one of the key general attributes shared by all the writings in the book: it focuses on the tendencies of both politics in general and the State in particular to intrude into clerical affairs and matters of faith across Europe. In this short piece, Soloviev took issue with those in Russia who were eager to identify and take political advantage of potential schisms appearing in the West. Looking back at the results of the Vatican Council of 1870, Soloviev suggested that the initial dissent surrounding the papal claims established at this council hardly qualified as justifiable schisms, based as they were on dubious premises. The pretext for Soloviev’s essay was the action of the self-proclaimed “Old Catholics” who split with the Roman Catholic Church in Germany after the council. Soloviev pointed out that Otto von Bismarck’s support of this split was crudely motivated by raw political considerations. But there is a subtext in this essay as well: the Russian state was just as used to interfering with the Church in Russia—after all, they were essentially fused—which Soloviev repeatedly referred to as an unhealthy circumstance. In this essay, Soloviev displayed his writing talent with sparkling pun and double entendre, exploiting the image of the ecclesiastical “laying on of hands,” a tradition for installment of bishops going back to the foundations of the church, in order to point out what he understood to be the absurdities encountered when the interests of the State were interjected into disputes over faith issues and dogma.

The third selection presents a thumbnail sketch of a good deal of Soloviev’s future writing agenda about the relationship of religion to society and faith to dogma. “The Jews and the Christian Question” (1884) is one of Soloviev’s longer essays, and it covers much more ground than the title suggests. The inversion of the standard

understanding of ethnic relations in this early and vigorous defense of Judaism brilliantly turns the table on those who put any blame on Jews for their situation in Russia or elsewhere in Europe. This is one of Soloviev's earliest attempts to explain the principle of "spiritual corporeality" in Judaism and link it to the Divine plan to create a Kingdom of God on earth. In this piece, Soloviev began to develop the idea that Judaism will not only play an integral role in Christian eschatology—an idea harking back to St. Paul—but that somehow this will have a particularly powerful effect upon Russia itself as history draws to its perfected conclusion. Perhaps most significantly, this article represents Soloviev's opposition to any involuntary subordination of one element to the other in church-state relations, to any structural dependency of one on the other. Here we find as well an early exposition of the argument for "free theocracy," drawing on the distinction made in the Hebrew Bible (and reinterpreted in the New Testament) among the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. The idea of "free theocracy" became a central project for Soloviev in the 1880s, but it fell on deaf ears. One commentator even referred to it as "a fantastic utopia." Soloviev abandoned this project, which he called his "theocratic Leviathan" and which he later suggested that he had wasted his "best years" on; but this later resignation to the project's failure came in part because of his audience's inattention to refined points in his argument.¹¹

He worked to reform the sad state of affairs in Russia peacefully, taking the admonition of Romans 13 to heart, but neither sugar coating the ugly reality nor accepting or justifying the monarchic idea without careful qualification. "The Jews and the Christian Question" evidences these concerns, condensing various elements of medieval and early modern debates about whether the source and justification of secular power is other worldly (a question that harks back indirectly to the disquisitions of such thinkers as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, John of Salisbury, Dante, and Marsilio of Padua). Soloviev understood that church and state needed to remain separate and distinct, in part because each had different functions to perform independently toward the eventual goal of achieving a perfect society. Thus, while the "anointment" of the monarch by a priesthood "does not give the ecclesiastical hierarchy any rights in the realm of state power" in Soloviev's theocratic idea, the monarch is nevertheless obligated to faithfully serve the "Divine enterprise." Moreover, there is a clear statement in Soloviev's argument that divine sanction depends on the monarch being a "faithful servant," for "only under this condition does he have the significance of Christian emperor,

one of the formative organs of true theocracy." His chief example of the devastation caused by the theocratic idea when dogmatized is, of course, Byzantium, which he only comments on briefly in this 1884 piece, returning to it later in greater detail in two 1891 articles (see below). Russia had to act resolutely in order to avoid the fate of Byzantium, a point that Soloviev would continue to make throughout his writing in various ways. In order to escape this cataclysmic fate, the most important task was the emancipation of religion from the political authority to which it had been yoked for centuries. Harmful for both church and state, this situation in Russia required sweeping changes according to Soloviev. In order to give the state truly moral guidance, it was "necessary that the spiritual authority, personifying the religion element in society, *have full independence*" (italics added).

Soloviev went on in "The Jews and the Christian Question" to explain how Western Christianity had also failed to inaugurate a Kingdom of God on earth, adding some insightful comments on the subsequent schism within the western church itself. For Soloviev, all the problems of Christian societies stemmed from an unwillingness and inability to balance correctly the requirements of human freedom, spiritual faith, and religious dogma, that is, to apply the full meaning of the tripartite (priestly, prophetic, and monarchic) definition of a godly society that he posited early on. Soloviev's principal criticism of Protestantism, one which he held throughout his career, is lucidly presented here in capsule form. The fundamental problem with Protestantism, according to Soloviev, is that it gives so much preponderance to the prophetic role that it virtually eliminates the other two as effective counterbalances. This has the effect of:

reduc[ing] all religion to the single status of faith and thus cedes to every believer the absolute right to act as a self-appointed and peremptory arbitrator of religious matters.

Returning to the point of reconciliation as a prelude to any hope for beginning to realize a Kingdom of God on earth, Soloviev suggested that both the Jews and the Poles were key to any future reunification of the people of God. An early version of Soloviev's well-known triad of reconciliation emerges: Russia holds out hope as the potential staging ground for a reunification of God's people, East and West, because the Russian Empire contained a large number of Jews and (at that time) the Catholic nation of Poland. Soloviev's reasoning about the Jewish role in any future reconciliation and reunification drew directly upon the Apostle Paul's proclamation of a special place

the Jews would have in an eschatological theocracy, or the Kingdom of God. Moreover, Soloviev also posited the issue in terms of a triad upon which the future of Russia would depend: if Russians, Poles, and Jews did not work out their mutual relations, Russia's economic future and material well-being would be cast in doubt.

Soloviev's fascination with a particular community of Jews on the fringes of the Russian Empire in Kishinev, Moldova appears in the article "New Testament Israel" (1885). In this piece, he discussed the thought of Josef Rabinovich, who is generally recognized to have represented an early version of what has since become known as "Messianic Judaism." Through correspondence with Rabinovich, Soloviev became impressed with the way in which this community had apparently acquired faith in the Gospel message, pointing out that the minimal dogmatic content of the new community's free profession of faith resembled that of the New Testament community of the early (Jewish) Christian church in first century Jerusalem. Soloviev went back and forth from the New Testament to Rabinovich's own preaching in order to demonstrate what he understood to be the extensive and prominent resemblance. Soloviev characterized Rabinovich as remaining a Jew who rejected, however, the Talmudic tradition as diverging from the simple faith of the Gospel message, seeing at the same time the fulfillment of Torah in the person of Jesus as Messiah. It should be pointed out that Soloviev did not really subscribe to any of this Jewish Christian's own bleak characterizations of the centuries old problems of Talmudic Judaism in diaspora, as can be seen in a subsequent, more extensive, discussion of Talmudic literature (see below).

"The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" (1886) originally appeared as a foreword to the Russian edition of what was at that time the recently discovered Greek manuscript *Διδαχη των δωδεκα αποστολων* (*Didache ton dodeka apostolon*), about which there was a considerable amount of debate, particularly regarding its precise time of composition. Soloviev critiqued the predominant German scholarship of the time, which argued for a relatively late date of authorship for the "Didache," as it quickly became known. Stressing the importance of the principle of Apostolic succession throughout, Soloviev pointed out distinctive features of the text that he insisted indicated a first century, rather than a second century origin of the text. In this foreword to the Russian translation of the Didache, Soloviev displayed his wide-ranging knowledge of New Testament scholarship and ancient history, highlighting this text as a testimony to the universal unity of the early church regarding matters of basic doctrine. Soloviev postulated that the Didache could be reduced to seven basic points about the nature

of the early (first century) church, and that all have to do with the principles of a basic hierarchical structure and a minimum amount of fundamental dogmatic content regarding the nature of Christ. Soloviev pointed out that the *Didache* undermined two polar opposite views regarding the character of early Christianity: (a) “the view that wants to reduce Christian religion to a single teaching of morality without any dogmatic foundations and sacraments,” and (b) “the contrary view which maintains that all the forms and hierarchical and dogmatic definitions that exist today in the church, as well as the sacraments, also existed unchangingly from the very beginning *in the very same form and with the very same significance as now*” (italics in the original). According to Soloviev, both these views reject the idea of progressive development in the Universal Church, which is fundamental to the basic nature of the universe as one of “spiritual corporeality.” This principle encapsulates his teleology about the material and spiritual growth of humanity toward final union with God—what he termed *bogochelovechestvo*, usually rendered into English as God-manhood or Divine humanity.

“The Talmud and Recent Polemical Literature Concerning It in Austria and Germany” (1886) returns to a vigorous defense of Judaism as an integral part of Russia’s path to salvation and the special role it would play in an eschatological future. The lengthy article appeared in the Russian journal *Russkoe obozrenie* (Russian Survey), and should be considered not just as a searing indictment of anti-Semitism, but a painstaking analysis of its *psychology*. Soloviev first laid out the theological and historical situation of Judaism in the context of first the pagan and then the Christian world amidst which it developed. He carefully analyzed the differences among the three parties in New Testament times—the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes—in order to explain more clearly to those in his Russian audience unfamiliar with biblical history the several sources from which Christianity drew. After setting this background, Soloviev gave a largely standard explanation of the growth of Talmudic tradition as a function of first the Babylonian exile and later the Diaspora after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, proceeding then to his main purpose: to address the fabrications and distortions of European anti-Semites regarding what the Talmud teaches.

The result is a dazzling subversion of all German, Austrian and—by direct implication—Russian attempts to portray the Talmud’s teachings about the necessity of segregation and a different treatment of non-Jews as somehow evil:

It would be very surprising if the Jewish codex of the 16th century acknowledged an obligatory equality among Jews and Christians, when in the most enlightened Christian countries such equality was acknowledged only several dozen years ago, and in the country with the greatest amount of Jews, they do not have full citizen rights to this day.

In 1891, Soloviev twice publicly defended his orthodox Christian views by critiquing what he called “pseudo” and “false” Christians who failed to take their faith seriously, and even distorted it beyond recognition. The attacks on Soloviev’s Christianity never ceased over the course of his public evangelization of his faith; these attacks were not unlike those that Dostoevsky, Soloviev’s friend, had suffered earlier at the hands of his detractors in Russia. If the best defense is a good offense, as the saying goes, Soloviev’s piece “On Counterfeits” stands as perhaps his most finely honed offensive against such opponents. He based his argument on the overwhelming amount of data in the Gospels themselves about what Christ, as the “founder” of the religion, taught. Soloviev adduced over ninety direct references to “the *Gospel of the kingdom*—the good news about the Kingdom of God” in support of his claim that this is the fundamental Gospel message, which is not meant to be a passive, or quietist message, but one of action toward a positive fulfillment of love and justice within the framework of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom progressively being realized in bits and pieces imperfectly in the fallen world of humanity, only to arrive in fullness with the Second Coming of Christ.

“On the Decline of the Medieval Worldview,” the second of his public defenses of the meaning of Christian orthodoxy in 1891, was presented as a public lecture at the Moscow Psychological Society. The tone of the piece is somber, and it follows up the analysis of “pseudo” and “false” Christianity that appeared in “Counterfeits.” Here Soloviev reviewed the myriad reasons why Christianity failed to live up to its obligation to transform human relations and usher in the Kingdom of God. His criticism of the universal church does not only extend back to the Christianization of the Roman Empire by the Emperor Constantine in 310 AD, a more common Christian critique, but also to its failures almost immediately after Christ’s earthly life ended. Soloviev not only indicted Byzantium for preferring paganism to Christianity in its political and social culture, but also established an unbroken line of continuity of pagan values permeating the early church from the time of the Apostles up through modernity. According to him, the socially transformative power of the Christian faith

was lost in “the pagan midst” as the Christian society of the post-Constantinian era “assumed [paganism’s] character,” putting a de facto end to the possibility of the redemption of politics as the Gospel exhorts. Thus, “all public life” was now left to conservative secular and religious authorities who would not initiate “radical transformations,” inevitably eventuating in redemption being limited to the personal sphere. Pointing out that the situation was somewhat better in the West, Soloviev observed that “contrast between *the paganism of the city* and *the Christianity of the desert* was manifested especially acutely in the East.” Soloviev did not, for the most part, view asceticism very positively because it tended to relinquish the key Christian role to be played in a proactive establishment of the Kingdom of God.

At the very center of this “historical process” of establishing the Kingdom of God, which cannot make do without a human commitment to the divine purpose, there is the uniquely Christian (according to Soloviev) idea of progress. And yet Christians have been instrumental in stalling progress: does this mean that the Kingdom of God has been doomed to *not* being realized, or as Soloviev put it, has been “forsaken”? The answer to this question is no, because the social, moral, and intellectual progress of modernity contributes mightily to the realization of the Divine purpose. He observed that:

The majority of people who create and have created this progress do not acknowledge themselves as Christians. But if Christians in name have betrayed the purpose of Christ and nearly ruined it—if they only could have done so—then why can’t those who are *not Christians* in name, and who renounce Christ in word, serve the purpose of Christ?

Moreover, in abandoning nature and treating it as a mere “machine,” pseudo-Christians contributed as well to serious ecological problems, which appear as a direct response to abuse and cast further doubt on the Christian stewardship of nature; such treatment is tantamount to rejecting Christ “in the flesh.”

In 1896, Soloviev published a rather extensive review of a rather small book issued several years earlier in France and titled “When did the Hebrew Prophets Live?” (Ernest Havet, *La modernité des prophètes* [Paris, 1891]). Here we see two aspects of Soloviev as a professional writer that rarely appear anywhere else in his work: finely detailed historical analysis of Old Testament texts (primarily Isaiah and Kings) in the context of attested historical and archaeological records, and harsh castigation of a scholar who misused and abused texts not only

with the goal of validating his spurious theory, but also in order to deceive “readers unfamiliar with the Bible.” Soloviev drove the point home in different ways, concluding that “bias, and not logic, governs these pseudo-critical exercises.” The result is a tour de force, however, this ostensible book review served another, more veiled, purpose: Soloviev had long criticized the inadequate attention to increasingly sophisticated methods of biblical scholarship in Russia. The review offered him an opportunity to demonstrate to his Russian audience, which included clergy as well as the secular “intelligentsia,” how the reliability and authenticity of the biblical witness could pass any test that modern methods had devised. And so, it is not the treatment of biblical texts that recommends the piece, but rather the partially veiled critique in the last section: two “extremes” of traditional and modern “scholarly abstraction” have beset those who study the Bible, the former extreme constituting a “blind literalism” that appeared only in countries “wittingly alienated from knowledge”—an indirect broadside at Russian religious scholarship in general and the church hierarchs in particular, both of which Soloviev sharply criticized elsewhere as well.¹² According to Soloviev, both these extremes suffered from the “same *indifference* to the essence, to the intrinsic meaning of the Bible and prophetic writings in particular.” Soloviev’s purpose was to emphasize the key element in biblical history—the Hebrew nation and its special place in universal history. For scholars to ignore this aspect of the Bible was to approach it “falsely [and therefore] *unscientifically*,” and for clerics and laymen of the church to view it as “a fossilized and inviolable relic, means to demonstrate dead faith and to sin against the Holy Spirit, who has spoken through the prophets.” Harsh condemnations indeed for both “schools” of thought.

In 1896, Soloviev undertook as well an extensive examination of Russia’s relationship to Byzantium—how Byzantium influenced Russia for good and ill. He embarked on this project as he was at the same time also writing about the religious teachings of Muhammad, the founder of Islam. It seems clear that both topics were linked in his thinking. The article “Byzantinism and Russia”—one of the most powerful and somber that Soloviev ever wrote—begins by exploring the reasons why the “second Rome,” the eastern Christian capital of the Roman Empire established by Constantine in the fourth century, fell to the Ottomans, leaving Moscow as its apparent heir—a “third Rome.” He averred that empires “perish only from collective sins.” Following up on his indictment of Byzantium in the earlier essay, “On the Decline of the Medieval Worldview,” Soloviev now deepened his critique of Byzantine political-religious culture for utilizing dogma to

shackle true believers, helping to sustain an eastern despotic vision of societal relations at the expense of human freedom and dignity.

According to Soloviev, it was not Muslim military superiority, but rather an “intrinsic, spiritual reason” that ultimately explains the fall of Byzantium—and by extension, augured ill for Russia as well: a false application of the Christian idea, a collective sin of indifference to universal truth and progress, and a forgetfulness about its calling as a Christian kingdom, constituting

total and general indifference to the *historical advancement of the good*, to the providential Divine will in the collective life of the people . . .

Russia strove to be a Christian kingdom under Vladimir the Great, who was unlike his Greek “pseudo-Christian mentors” in that he valued this principle, as did certain of his successors. But the Mongol threat created a political environment in which “the idea of autocracy appeared for the entire nation as a banner of salvation.” Soloviev applied himself to explaining how the monarchic idea solidified and the Western idea of the State as a “balance of independent and equivalent elements” never got a chance to develop in Russia. A good portion of the blame goes to Ivan IV, the tsar who, just as the Byzantines before him, rejected faith in favor of dogma, truth in favor of power, and freedom in favor of despotism, nearly leading his nation to destruction. His reign represented

a vivid and distinctive repetition of the contradiction that ruined Byzantium—the contradiction between a verbal confession of truth and its denial in fact.

The irreconcilable duality of the dictates of Christian conscience on the one hand and the attractiveness of the pagan ideas of power on the other, according to Soloviev, led rulers to choose the latter and dispense completely with the former, and in Russia this meant “a reversion [. . .] to the ancient pagan deification of a limitless power engulfing everything.” At this point Soloviev, displaying a penchant for storytelling, related a legend about how the Byzantines received the tokens of imperial power that they themselves traced back to Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon, and then bequeathed to Russia.

One of Soloviev’s principal purposes in this article was to explain how ostensibly secular reforms instituted by Peter the Great, who understood the need for human progress, qualified as part of the

Divine plan to bridge the distance between East and West, a chasm that Soloviev blames upon Greek Byzantines and their loyal Muscovite successors. To those who claimed that it was the Emperor Peter who destroyed church independence in Russia, Soloviev responded by explaining how the ecclesiastical hierarchy's spiritual and moral failures made it quite logical for Peter to subsume the administration of the Russian Orthodox Church under the rubric of a government "department." This merely reflected the de facto reality that had developed over the course of several generations. Soloviev, while recognizing the many deficiencies of Peter, gave him high marks:

Through European enlightenment the Russian mind was opened to such concepts such as human merit, the right of the individual, freedom of conscience, etc., without which a worthy existence, true improvement, is impossible . . .

"Byzantinism," as Soloviev defined it, is an insistence on "particularism" over against universalism in both values and traditions. In this regard, as well as many others, Soloviev stood much closer to the West than to the East, seemingly supporting the position of Rome—although it too was not without sin—over against Byzantium regarding the East-West schism, whose origins can be traced back at least as far as the ninth century. Soloviev summarized the gist of the matter, combining all the petty dogmatic issues (except for the filioque), into one fundamental problem related to the despotic impulse on the part of the Greeks: the transformation of "*ecumenical* tradition into a tradition of *local antiquity*." Soloviev illustrated how all schisms flowed from this original Byzantine "movement toward particularism," including, most significantly, the Russian schism that occurred under Nikon.

The last, and briefest, composition included in this volume bears the intriguing title "The Secret of Progress," which has been added to the present collection as a kind of *coda* at the request of one of the project's initial reviewers. In it, Soloviev relates a fairy tale that he claims everybody—at least in Russia—knows in one variant or another: a lonely young hunter lost in a forest performs a good deed, albeit somewhat reluctantly, for a haggardly old woman, who then miraculously becomes transformed into a beautiful damsel and leads him to a paradise—a "happy-ever-aftering" ending of sorts. Soloviev analogizes the main characters in this tale to the attitude of a humanity that is lost in modernity, but that retains an ambiguous—if not outright hostile—predisposition toward antiquity. What is the lesson

here? The only way forward is to take full account of the past and to cherish it, by carrying the best legacies of humanity into an uncertain future for the purpose of building a more perfect society, not unlike the classical image Soloviev offers at the end: Aeneas embarking on his journey to Italy from the ruins of Troy.

Some general comments about translation matters are in order. First, the many biblical citations in these texts, which in some ways reflect their evangelical nature more than most other essays that Soloviev penned, come in different forms—often in contemporary Russian, but also regularly in older Slavonic forms when the subject of his thinking seems to require it. I have attempted to vary the translations of these biblical citations accordingly, moving from something akin to the King James to a closer approximation of the New Revised Standard Version when called for. Elsewhere, issues of precision and clarity dominated my choice of words, phrases, mood, and so forth, with stylistic considerations entering only secondarily into the calculus of the translation. I have attempted to convey some of the flavor of Soloviev the master stylist, striving (just as I have before) for justice in rendering the complexity, brilliance, and humanity of Soloviev, the Christian scholar. However, whenever and wherever conflict arose between style and substance, the latter prevailed.

In matters of transliteration, I have stayed close to the Library of Congress system, except where commonly used spelling of names (such as Dostoevsky) is preferred, and I have also omitted diacritical marks in the Greek and Hebrew passages Soloviev himself transliterated into Latin script.

All emphases are as they appear in the original, except for those places where Soloviev himself used an alphabet other than the Cyrillic; I have italicized these places to set them apart from the text that I have translated from the Russian. Ellipses are likewise as they appear in the original unless noted otherwise. Notations by the author appear for the most part as they do in the original, at the bottom of each page in footnote form or parenthetically in the text while my comments and clarifications for the most part appear at the end of the book in notes consecutively and separately numbered for each essay, except for the numerous biblical citations and casual references that Soloviev himself made without direct indication, or sometimes misidentified. In these places, I have added precise scriptural references, and in other places where I have had to add a word or two to the text for clarity's sake I have utilized square brackets to indicate my editorial interventions into Soloviev's text.