

THE RUSSIAN NEWMAN

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An intuition of complete universality was the fundamental philosophical instinct in his life.



LADMIR SOLOVIEV (1853-1900), foremost spiritual philosopher of Russia, is recognized and often spoken of as the "Russian Newman." Although there are an amazing number of striking similarities between the two men, Soloviev's conversion to Catholicism is the chief reason for calling him "The Russian Newman." The one ruling passion of his life was to familiarize Russia with the idea of a Universal Church, and consequently the thought uppermost in his mind was the task of "reunion" between Orthodox and Catholics. He thought of Catholicism for Russia and believed that if only Russia were Catholic it would mean the religious transformation of the whole world. Who would deny that Russia, if she were today a champion of Catholicism, would play a very great part in the unification of the Christian world?

Like Newman, too, he had an ardent love and zeal for the study of Holy Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, and Church History and was vitally interested in the development of Religion, Philosophy, natural science, and languages, many of which he spoke fluently. At the age of twenty-one he began his teaching career as professor of philosophy at the University of Moscow where he united with his ardent religious enthusiasm wonderful intellectual gifts and extraordinary learning with which he labored zealously to realize his ideal, both by means of writing and lecturing, but not without persecution and rebuke from a strong opposition. Nevertheless, Soloviev's convictions permeated his entire being so that he was willing to undergo any suffering, if only a reconciliation could be effected between the two objects of his love—his country and the Universal Church.

Yet, with all the opposition which he endured he enthusiastically hoped to see a Universal Church someday realized by an agreement between the East and the West, and to bring about this union became

the uppermost ideal of his life. "To pave the way for a reunion between the Eastern and Western Churches, Soloviev begged each member of both to consent to do two things—that is, to render his own union with Jesus Christ more sure and close, and to revere in his neighbour's soul the active life of the Holy Ghost. Development of grace cannot take place without an increase of charity, and supernatural charity in souls leads to mutual understanding, and so effects a *union of spirit*, based on no artificial compromise, but on the truth of Christ, who is indivisible."¹

Unlike Newman, Soloviev never became a priest, but he deemed that he could best follow his calling by remaining celibate. Both men experienced anguish of mind before their profession of faith in joining the Catholic Church, but both, also, with fervent prayer implored God that they might see the "light." For both expressed in verse the loneliness of their religious life, and the expression of their anguish before joining the Catholic faith is almost identical. On the one hand, Newman's fervent search for "Truth" was strikingly rendered in his *The Pillar of the Cloud*.

Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home—
Lead Thou me on!²

On the other hand, one of Soloviev's poems contains a parallel passage which may be rendered thus:

"Beneath the morning mists I went with trembling footsteps
towards the enchanted land—shores full of mystery.
The crimson of the dawn put out the stars; my dreams still
hovered round me, and my soul, still wrapped in them, prayed
to the Unknown God.

In the white freshness of the day I walk, always alone, through
an undiscovered country. The mists disperse.
Mine eyes see clear ahead—how steep the mountain path is, and
how far away everything still seems—everything that I have
dreamed!

Until nightfall will I go; marching with unwearied stride to the

¹ D'herbigny, Michel, *Vladimir Soloviev: A Russian Newman* (translated by A. M. Buchanan, M.A.) (R. & T. Washbourne, London, 1918). p. 154.

² Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions* (Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1918). p. 156.

long-desired shore, where, under the light of the early stars and in the blaze of triumphal fires, glows on the mountain top the temple that was promised me—the home that shall be mine.”³ “My God, Christ Jesus,” Soloviev pleaded, “show me Thy work on earth, show me Thy Church . . . where is Thy Church?” When at length the mist dispersed, the promised temple was revealed—it was the Catholic Church in the glory of her universality.

Soloviev’s profession of faith was as complete as Newman’s; however in joining the Catholic faith he made it quite clear that he was not joining the Latin rite, but ever stood for the privileges of the Eastern rites. Fifty years later the encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Orientalis Ecclesiae* bears out that he, as Supreme Pontiff, does in a very special way make his own all the teaching of recent popes concerning “the proper respect for those traditions which are the special heritage of the peoples of the East, whether these be concerned with the sacred liturgy and the hierarchial Orders or with other observances of the Christian life, so long as they are in keeping with the true faith and with the moral law.”⁴

Undoubtedly with true jubilation of heart Soloviev proudly made his profession as a Catholic: “As a member of the real and venerable Orthodox Eastern or Greek-Russian Church which speaks neither by an anti-canonical synod nor by the servants of the secular power . . . I acknowledge as supreme judge in matters of religion . . . the Apostle Peter who lives in his successors, and has not heard in vain the words of the Saviour: Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church—confirm thy brethren—feed My sheep, feed My Lambs.”⁵ Soloviev spoke these words in the chapel of Notre Dame de Lourdes at Moscow on February 18, 1896. A few days later the priest, M. Nicholas Tolstoi, who received him into the Catholic Church was in Rome to report the conversion to Pope Leo XIII. Like Newman, Soloviev’s former prejudice against the Papacy was transformed into undying loyalty.

From Soloviev’s works it is quite evident that he was ever conscious that God, who governs the universe, willed to establish through His Son, Jesus Christ, a Church with no limitations of time and space—a Universal Church. A Universal or Catholic Church must

³ From an article on Vladimir Soloviev, *Catholic World*, by Fr. Thomas J. Garrard, June, 1917.

⁴ The encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Orientalis Ecclesiae*, the translation of which appeared in the *Eastern Churches Quarterly*, January—March, 1945.

⁵ Garrard, *op. cit.*

have a universal or international priesthood unified in the person of one Father, common to all nations, a common Father—the Supreme Pontiff. Our Lord prayed that all His followers might be one, and this can be realized in the Church whose priesthood derives its formality from Christ. For God, as Soloviev used to say, gives us Himself through Christ, and gives us Christ through the Church whose members form *one body, one sole Church*. Christ is the one principle capable of establishing *the union* of all men professing the *one, same creed*; and the Catholic, truly Christian tendency is towards *union*. And this is what Vladimir Soloviev wished for Russia—a Russia that would increase the Mystical Body of Christ and that would glorify the holy Church of Jesus Christ. He longed and wished for a Russia more Christian—a Russia worthy to be called *Holy Russia*.

Soloviev once stated, "I hope that Russia will be great, because she acts as the apostle of the world, and, by preaching the universality of Jesus Christ, she increases His Mystical Body and glorifies His one Holy Church—the Catholic Church—which by the accession of Russia will become more perfectly and visibly Catholic."⁶ All his works show plainly that his aim was to promote in the world the designs of Jesus Christ so that all men may be joined *in one universal faith* under him who succeeds Peter, under him who shares in the unbroken chain of papal succession. "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church." (*Matt. XVI, 18*)

As mentioned before Soloviev was subject to constant criticism and opposition. Both the officials of the State and of the Orthodox Church were filled with united hostility to Rome, for Soloviev's principles led only to one conclusion—the Roman Catholic Church. At one time he proposed nine leading questions which were intended for the whole Russian hierarchy, but they reached much farther; they were made the subject of a conference in Rome by Cardinal Mazzella. At this time, active communications were set up between Soloviev and certain representative Catholics. He began correspondence with Bishop Strossmayer and with Msgr. (afterwards Cardinal) Vanutelli. After this the opposition was so insistent that he felt it was a waste of time to write any further in Russian for the Russians, because of the strict censorship, so he began a new work in French, *Russia and the Universal Church*. It is quite evident that the idea of "religious universality" occupied all his thoughts.

It was not until after his death in 1900 that his influence began

⁶ D'herbigny, *op. cit.* p. 95.

to produce evident effects, for then, the Russian authorities removed the ban from his works, and from then until the Communist regime the voice of the apostle of the Universal Church became more and more audible. Soloviev's works have had a powerful influence upon philosophical and religious thought in Russia, and as in the West we have Newman Societies, so in the East there are Soloviev Societies formed for the study and propagation of his ideals. We can assuredly hope that with the downfall of those who strive to kill the faith of the Russians, who are fundamentally Christian, Soloviev Societies will energetically regenerate and strive to produce what was the "ruling passion" of Soloviev's life. For to the last days of his life he toiled to develop in Orthodox Russia the necessity of realizing the dire need of union with the true Church founded by Jesus Christ and entrusted to Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and through him to his successors. And some day we can hope that the Christian spirit with which Soloviev was animated will lead to Christian reunion, for who knows what the influence of the Russian Newman may effect among his brethren?

The tremendous influence of Soloviev's works has been strongly felt in the hearts and minds of men living outside of Russia, for there are many striving energetically, working zealously, praying fervently for the better understanding of the problems that hinder Christian reunion. "To unite," said Pope Pius XI, "we must above all know one another." The movement that the Russian Newman initiated has now come to be called the "Eirenic Movement" (stemming from the Greek words "peace," "conciliation"), for it is the direct application and development of his ideas and principles. "Eirenicism is a habit, an attitude of mind; through conciliatory methods it achieves a rapprochement between the Catholics and the Orthodox and realizes an inward reunion which precedes the future complete union of the Churches and is based on a sacramental life in Christ."⁷ It is a movement that tries to avoid, by all means, *antagonism and belligerence*.

There are, and have been during the last decades important manifestations of the Eirenic spirit: The fundamental, dogmatic differences between the East and the West are being dealt with by both Catholic and Orthodox scholars, and as a result of their research in the theological, historical, and liturgical field further steps in this all important work of rapprochement have been taken. There has

⁷ Father Bede Winslow, *The Eastern Churches Quarterly*, April—June, 1945.

been all over the world the sponsoring of various periodicals and study centers devoted to the rapprochement of the Churches. The doctrinal intransigence of the Roman Catholic Church can in no way, of course, be compromised. False and imprudent Eirenicism has been reprobated by the Holy Father in his encyclical *Humani Generis*. The Pope condemns those who maintain that the dissident and erring can be brought back to the fold of the Church if "the whole truth found in the Church is not sincerely taught to all without corruption or diminution." The Roman Catholic will seek to understand his separated brethren, but he must never dilute or in any way debilitate the magnificent vigor of Sacred Truth.

Although it is not the objective of the present article to describe the evident accomplishments in the fields of Eirenicism, it is interesting to note that two of the more prominent figures in the movement are members of the Dominican Order. There is Père Congar, the French Dominican, whose book *Chrétiens Désunis* has become the model of Eirenic thought. There is also the work of the Very Rev. Christopher Dumont, O.P., Director of the Dominican Center "Istina" in Paris which publishes the review *Russie et Chretiente*.

Let us hope, let us pray that the spirit with which this Russian Newman was animated will continue to influence the minds and hearts of men. There are millions of souls living within the boundaries of Russia and many more who follow her steps.

"And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." (*John X*, 16) "*Ut omnes unum sint.*" (*ibid.* *XVII*, 21)